

# Religious Factors in Pre-Modern; State Apparatus in Manipur

Dr. Heisnam Nilkant Singh

The contemporary socio-political and economic needs to govern the Kingdom of Manipur were highly dependent on the wisdom of the king since he was the sole authority and head of the state. Hence, he was responsible for adopting various devices from time to time according to time and situation. In such a way, the art of statecraft came to develop. No doubt, religion was used as one of the important devices adopted by the rulers of Manipur to draw the loyalty of the subjects. The pre-vaishnavite Meitei kings initiated to launch various religious programs and like a priest, they would popularize traditional religion to promote divinity status. Even after declaring Hinduism as a state religion, the rulers of Manipur upheld Hinduism directly.

“The state develops theology to support its authority system giving it a legitimacy that is omnipotent and supernatural” (Henery J.M Classen and Pater Skalnik, 1978, 4). Both myth and religion were effective means adopted by the king to govern the state smoothly. It is believed that Sidaba Mapu, the creator of the Meitei universe as well as the supreme god of the Meitei was the father of Nongba Lairen Pakhangba. Sidaba chose his younger son Pakhangba as a king to govern the newly created divine kingdom. Thus, Pakhangba was regarded as the divinity king while Sanamahi the eldest brother of Pakhangba emerged as an important household god of the Meitei. Probably the claim as a son of Sidaba Mapu would cause him to thrive up a scared divine status of Meitei King. Such a situation brought to inspire the common people struck of wonder and respect and it would help to exaggerate the idea of being matchless with other human beings.

The Meitei Kingdom was governed with a symbolic king. The Meitei King was in a position to set up the legitimacy of his right over the throne of Kangla. By assuming the role of religious preacher, the king effected to establish social control for welfare, vitality and life force in the nation. On the other hand, it would help to strengthen his political position. Later on, King Pakhangba was worshipped by the people on account of his political venture and divinity status. However, the future successors of the Meitei kings would make themselves the descendants of the godly King Pakhangba to protect their legitimacy over the Throne of Kangla. The sense of loyalty gathered the idea of awe, wonder and respect for the divinity possessed by the rulers of the Meitei. Such a phenomenon was responsible to think that the general people that only the divinity blood of Nongda Leiren Pakhangba was eligible for the throne of Kangla. Anyone could not violate such a rule.

‘Loiyamba Shingen’ a royal edict was issued by Meidingu Loiyumba. A part of the decree of Loiyamba also deals with the assignment of duties to priests and priestesses (Maibas and Maibis) and the assignment of the work maintenance of the abode of deities (Umangoai) to selected families. Under this decree, as many as 101 families of Maiba and Maibis were assigned to perform various duties of healing the sick, rites, sacrifices, birth and death of Lai Haraoba (Mary-making of deities). Besides, forty-five families of the kingdom were assigned to care for forty-five abodes of deities that were found to be scattered all over the state. The edict further writes the names of the forty deities worshipped by the Meiteis. It is clear to mention that during the reign of Meidingu Loiyamba ancestor worship was fully developed. The distribution of assignments of rites and rituals and ceremonial functions to the Maibas and Maibis strengthened the state’s control over religious matters and tremendously enhanced the divine values of the ruler. No doubt, the king became the controller of the religion of the kingdom. Thus, King Loiyamba glorified himself by demonstrating his ability. (Kabul reproduced, 1991, 127-128).

Khagemba Langjei a literary text mentions the supremacy of Sanamahi as the Universal God of the Meiteis. It further tells that the belief in him would thrive prosperity to King and the Kingdom. It was assumed that Sanahal son of King Khagemba was an incarnate of God Sanamahi. The learned scholars namely Apoimacha, Konok thengra, Salam Sana, Yumnam Timba and Langol Lukhoi adorned his court. King Khagemba got valuable advice from these aforementioned scholars regarding of religion and theology. They were highly respected by the people for their deep knowledge of god, those scholars were tremendously inspired in their search for knowledge of god and spiritualism King Khagemba himself deeply believed in the traditional Sanamahi religion. He was remarkably a great patron of traditional religion. However, his deeply concern to religious works, his association with great philosophers of the Meitei in search of god, the construction of

temple Nongshaba and his adoption of the title of Lainingthou (godly King) asserted to make magnificent of the divine status of the Meitei King. No doubt, his religious works easily draw the allegiance from his subjects.

However, the socio-cultural events architected by the pre-Hinduised Meitei King would help to integrate the kingdom of Manipur. It is mentioned that during the coronation ceremony of the Meitei King, the use of Naga dresses both by Rajah and Ranees and the Yim-Chao (big house), the royal residence of the Meitei King made in Naga fashion were customary. Similarities in the preservation of some common costumes, their superstition-preserved relics and the stories of their ancestors proved the close relationship between the Meitei and the Nagas. (Reproduced Singh 2009, 46).

There is a tradition that Kanglei Lai Haraoba is not complete without the character of Tangkhul. Such a traditional worship of deities and celebration glorify the policy of inclusion. Thus, the culture factories were pervaded through traditional socio-religious institutions like Maiba, Loishang, Maibi Loishang, and Pena Loishang and these increased the divine values of the Meitei King.

Mera Mei Tongba is a state ceremonial festival introduced by Haonuhal the queen of King Ningomba in the Month of Mera (October) the seventh lunar month of the Meiteis (Singh, Imphal 1966, 8). Later it was changed as the Mera Shantuba festival initiated by the king. It is a great ceremonial festival attended by hill and plain people. This festival would promote to produce a sense of unity among the populace of the Kingdom of Manipur. Thus, the Pre-Hinduised Meitei King symbolized himself as a real upholder of his subject through these ceremonial functions.

With the declaration of Hinduism as a state religion of the kingdom of Manipur, a large number of the people were forcibly converted to Hinduism by King Garibaniwaj. In order to popularize Hinduism, the king himself sponsored many stern actions to wipe out traditional religion. The forceful steps taken by King Garibaniwaj plunged the kingdom into a hue and cry and became a serious contradiction between the ruled and the ruler. Such a paradox brought to decline of traditional value systems and civic standards in the near future. However, the unusual phenomenon led to an increase in the mistrust of the king. Though King Garibaniwaj was a vigorous military conqueror, he was not successful in playing the news as a ploy of the state apparatus because of his destructive efforts. In fact, the adoption of the new Hindu title of Maharaj by Garibaniwaj and the assimilations of the Meitei ruling family with the Kshetriya clan of Hindus could also foster the divinity status of the Meitei king (Singh, Imphal, 2009, 61-68). Being a good promoter of Hinduism Garibaniwaj readily accepted Brahmin Preachers named Santadas as advisors. Nevertheless, the Hindu religious system would not impose strict rules on royal marriage as well as royal succession. Such circumstances would have seen the seed of confusion in the house of Maharaj of Manipur. Share loyalty and fractional fight among the royal princes did not ever produce good statecraft decayed. Apart from these, the new religion would prefer to perform the 'Sati' system amongst the royal and nobility families. Since Hinduism was declared as the state religion. The command of Meitei queens in the battles was no more reported. The masculine nature of Meitei women that helped to strengthen the state apparatus came to decline. During the reign of Maharaj Bhaigyachandra was initiated to propagate the Bengal school of Vaisnavism. He paid more attention to promoting Hinduism. Probably, the King performed priestly functions. Maharaj Bhaigyachandra initiated making the images of Shri Govindaji, Shri Bijoyanath, Shri Avaita and Shri Gopinath out of the jackfruit tree. These images of Lord Krishna were worshipped in different places in the kingdom of Manipur. When Vashnavism was pervaded successfully to the valley Rajarshi Bhaigyachandra composed three ras forms like Maharas, Kunjaras and Basantaras that were dedicated to Lord Govindajee (Kabui reproduced, New Delhi, 1991, 270). The entire Kingdom of Manipur was echoed by cycle of festivals. King Bhaigyachandra's pious idea and his successful effort to transform of martial skill into cultural activity deeply affected to kingdom's militarization policy. It was the finest-ever device of statecraft followed by the Kings of all states of the world during the pre-modern world.

Bhaigyachandra's reigning period was one of the critical in South-East Asian civilizational discourse due to emerge of Kunbuang power in Burma. The establishment of the Kunbuang dynasty under the stalwart leader Alungpaya brought regional imbalance. The new Burmese power was well-equipped with modern weapons, strong nationalism and fearless highly threatened the pious Manipur civilization. Alungpaya like a master juggalar put the South-East Asian Chess Board on his own palm to play any war game whatever he likes. Whereas in Manipur Maharaj Bhaigyachandra did not try to renew the Anglo-Manipur Treaty of 1762 that was standoff even after he acceded to the throne of Manipur. This was on account of busy of internal tension amongst the royal member and of his intensive sankritization programme. Maharaj Bhaigyachandra moved heaven and earth about 18 (eighteen) years to save his position from the Burmese onslaught. When

he was restored to the throne of Manipur, he paid more attention to promote Hinduism. King himself was abdicated from the throne in 1762 when one Brahmin Brahmachari was killed by a servant and in 1798 when a young Brahmin named Kokpei was murdered. The King had twin duties of protecting the cow and the Brahmin since he was a staunch Vaisnavite follower. Because of his devotion to religion could earn the title of 'Rajarshi' and made him an ideal Kshatriya King. As a Hinduised Meitei King Maharaj Bhigyachandra was always conscious to provide to provide more protection to a particular community.

In 1819 King Marjit was defeated by the Burmese under the command of General Maha Bandula. The Manipuri King was forced to flee to the Cachar and he brought the image of Govinda and presented it to his elder brother Chourjit. Probably the Manipuri kings would be no longer recognised as the real kings of Manipur without the possession of Shree Govindajee rather than his subjects. Though the Hinduised kings of Manipur got success in strengthening their divinity status by employing the Hindu religion. They were not able to crop up the strong confidence of the general people. Hinduism in Manipur probably disturbed the system of militarism, traditional value system, law of succession, social order etc. In common parlance, Hinduism was not supposed to create a new idea of nationalism.

Besides, Hinduism also largely affected the discourse of the Meitei civilization. The kingdom had two categories of population like non-Hindu hill people and Hindu valley people. However, the fruitful indoctrination of the masses through a chain of cultural functions like Wari Liba (tale the story of Ramayana and Mahabharata), Lairik Thiba-Haiba (recitation and interpretation), Ras Leela (Women's religious dance, the scripture of Ramayana and Mahabharata), Sanskritan (singing the devotional song Hindu god Krishna and Rama) etc. had made Hinduism so popular in Manipur. The remaining hill population was untouched by any form of indoctrination brought by the Sanskritization process. It further developed an opposite ideology of pure and impure between the Hindu and non-Hindu populations. Hence the indoctrination process of Hinduism would not promote a necessary step of integration amongst the people of the kingdom. The circumstances would also lose ideological control over the non-Hindu population in which the Hinduised king could not properly employ religion as a device to draw massive loyalty of his subject.

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