



Hinduisation of Manipuri (Meitei): A contemporary re-interpretation

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Abstract

Manipuri are the people of one of the branches of the Indo-Mongoloids. These Kuki-Chin speaking people had their own religious belief and cultural tradition. Some of the experts are of the opinion that they were taken into the mainstream of Indian culture by Indianization or Hinduisation. Whatever, it may mean by the migration of Brahmins or adoption of Hinduism, but only after 12th century. Indian scholars who are interested in eastern Indian history made it very clear that Manipur and Manipuri had a connection with Indian culture from Vedic age. However, sources from local text and other various means does not support this theory. Migration of Indians may start very early for various purposes but not for Hinduisation of Manipuri (Meitei). It was only after the 12th century with permission and acknowledgement of Royal family of Manipur, Hinduism was beginning to bloom at very fast pace.

Keywords: Culture, Tradition. Hinduism, Manipur, Meitei, Brahmin.

Introduction

The dawn of the 18th century was a very important turning point in Manipuri society in terms of culture and religion. These North-eastern of India's mongoloid community has a very rich cultural heritage from early times. The indigenous civilization of Manipuri society lies in its culture and traditional aspects. But, from the early 18th century, present form of Manipuri society has begun to shape. The Hindu culture from other parts of India began influencing at a great pace. At the beginning of Hinduism in Manipur, the Royale king of Manipur enforced unto the unwilling people by power and violence. Burning of Sacred scriptures, demolition of traditional temples and changes the pattern of traditional worshipping into Hinduism became a symbolic for ideological and national reconstruction with the support of the Royale family. Slowly and steadily, with the generation passes, Hinduism became the state religion of Manipur and began the assimilation process of Hinduism with indigenous Manipuri culture. These leads to profound impact on social, political and cultural history of Manipur as well as in Manipuri community.

Manipuri and its Origin

The history of Manipuri (Meitei) had run a long course of almost two thousand years (in written records), and it is evident from old Manipuri manuscripts and Royal Chronicles. The present Manipuri is formed by seven clans- they are: Khaba, Chenglei, Luwang, Khuman, Moirang, Angom and Ningthouja. Among the seven clans the Ningthouja was the most powerful and reigned in the heart of the valley of Manipur. They vanquished some of the dynasties and submerged their territories. Thus, under the reign of Ningthouja clans, slowly and steadily the composite Manipuri society had emerged. By appearance, physical structure and from linguistic point of view Manipuris are obviously Mongoloids, speaking Tibeto-Burman sub language groups. Many British scholars believed that Manipuri (Meitei) were migrated from Yangtze and the Hwang Ho before the Christian era and entered north-eastern part of Indian sub-continent. Further, Capt. R. B. Pemberton considered Manipuri to be the descendants of Tartar colony of China.

We may safely conclude them to be the descendants of a Tartar Colony, which probably emigrated from the north-west borders of China during the sanguinary conflicts of supremacy, which took place between the different members of the Chinese and Tartar dynasties. (Pemberton 2012: 36)

But till now there are no reliable records when and how these people moved out of from their original homeland. Here Capt. Pemberton states Yunnan province of China as north-west border of China. From cultural aspects to archaeological pattern and linguistic point of view to lifestyles were quite different from said genealogy especially in pre-Hindu stages. But T. C. Hudson, Assistant Political agent of Manipur had a different opinion in these contexts and probably more logical than Pemberton. Mr. Hudson (2010: 10) opined as:

For this conclusion I can see no reason and think there is far more ground to conclude them to be descendants of the surrounding hill tribes. The languages spoken by these tribes are in their pristine state: I conceive then, that their spoken language, an indication of descent of the Munniporees might be found.

Discussion

The Hinduisation of Manipuri (Meitei) or adoption of Hindu culture by Manipuri in day today life is quite significance in terms of development and syncretization with traditional pre-Hindu culture. Some Indian scholars including Manipuri scholars writes very aggressively about Hinduism or Indianness and mention some sort of connection with rest of the India and the valley of Manipur from the Vedic age (G.P.Singh 2009 : 43). A large amount of the Indian scholars opined that Manipur valley and its inhabitants were exposed to Aryan civilization at a very early age. And they further mentioned that the process of Aryanisation can be traced back to the Vedic age. So, we can analyze some of the sources were mentioned by Indian scholars as well as Manipuri scholars.

There are some positive evidences to establish that one of the branches of those Aryans who migrated from Mithila or Videha (north Bihar) and settled in the Brahmaputra valley towards the end of the Vedic period entered Manipur through Surma or Barak valley where they disseminated Vedic religion, culture and philosophy as a result of which a large section of the non-Aryan Meitei population came within the pale of Aryanism. (Chaklakdar1962: 78)

The expansion of Aryan culture in Assam known in ancient times as Pragjyotisha and Kamarupa, Manipur and Tripura form Videha region in the Vedic and post-Vedic times is a widely acknowledged fact. (Majumdar 1968: 27)

The route by which the Kshatriya princes arrived is indicated in the traditions as being through Manipur, which lies within the basin of Irrawaddy. The northern part of the Kubo valley, which is the direct route from Manipur towards Burma, is still called Mauriya or Mouria, said to be the name of the tribe to which king Ashoka belonged. (Phayre1888: 4)

Not only these but also some of Meitei scholars such as Atombapu Sharma, a note scholar of Manipur has categorically stated that the Hindus or Aryans came from Mithila and settled in the valley of Manipur in the Vedic age. He has emphasized again and again that the archaic religion of Manipur called Sanatan Dharma is of the Vedic antiquity. W. Yumjao Singh (1966: 13), L. Iboongohal Singh (1987: 14) and R.K. Jhalajit Singh (1992: 22) all have advocated the coming of several groups of Indians to Manipur in the Vedic age and the diffusion of Vedic culture and civilization in Manipur at large scale. But it is quite strange things that the local text tells the different story. Though several manuscripts including Royal chronicle of Manipur and chronicles of other clans were speak about the existence of well-organized society of these people from the early part of first century in Christian era only. These are the only written records. The first historical reference made to these people and land is in the Shan Chronicle when Samlongpha, the brother of Sukhampha, the Pong king visited Manipur in the 8th century. The Royal Chronicle of Manipur *CheitharolKumbaba* also records this account though a variance by a few years later. Apart from this, other chronicle and manuscripts are completely silent on Manipur having any relationship or contact with other people until the 12th century when the Manipuris fought with the Burmese. Only from this period Manipur exposed to neighboring states such as Assam, Bengal, Tripura and other places of India. From this juncture the migration of Brahmins and non-Brahmin Indians were properly recorded especially in the reign of King Kiyamba (1467-1508) and continued until Britishers take over Manipur administration completely. List of Indian Brahmin migrants that merged with Manipuri (Meitei) are as follows with their origins:

Title	Origin	Reing
1. Adhikarimayum	Kharodah	Kiyamba
2. Shijagurumayum	Gujarat	Kiyamba
3. LeihaoThabam	Kanpur	Kiyamba
4. TakhelChnabam	Assam	Kiyamba
5. Kakching Tabam	Kaligram, Srihatta	Kiyamba
6. Phurailatpam	Nandagram, Uttar Pradesh	Kiyamba
7. Kanaochimyum	Kanpur	Chalamba
8. Loubuktongbam	Shanti	Mungyamba
9. AribamBishnulatpam	Barnagar Shwalpara	Khagemba
10. AribamSagollailatpam	"	"
11. AribamTampaklailatpam	"	"
12. Thongkhatabam	Kharodah	"
13. Kongbailaypam	Nabadwip	"
14. Hidangmayum	Kharodah	"
15. Sanglakpam	Kumilla	"
16. Samulailatpam	Kolkotta	"
17. Bachaspatimayum	Banaras	Paikhomba
18. Heikaksibam	Mudgaon	"
19. GurumayumAngomlailatpam	Kanongram	"
20. Srimayum	Gujarat	"
21. Manoharmayum	Gumdilanagar	Charairongba
22. Brahmacharimayum	Prayag	"
23. GurumayumAribam	Puri	"
24. Laimayum	Kharodah	"
25. Laipubam	Cuttack	"

26. Hangoimayum	Mathura Nandagram	"
27. Hajarimayum	Krishnangar	"
28. Choudhurumayum	Utkal	"
29. LaimayumAnoubam	Tripura	"
30. Laimayum	"	"
31. Mathurabasimayum	Mathura	"
32. Anoubam	Kanyakunja	Garibniwas
33. Hanjabam	"	"
34. Brahmacharimayum Anoubam	Bornagar	"
35. Gotimayum	Shantipur	"
36. Hidangmayum	Sunardipanpara	"
37. Gurumayum	Krishnanagar	Mayamba
38. Warilibam	Kharodah	Bagyachandra
39. Brajabasimayum	Brindabam	"
40. Dyandasmayum	Lahore	"
41. Adhikarimayum	Shantipur	"
42. Anoubam	Nandagram	Gambhir Singh
43. Anoubam	Tripura	"
44. Brajabasimayum	Shantipur	"
45. Acharyamayum	Dhaka	"
46. Gosaimayum	Shantipur	Narasingha
47. Kulinmayum	Bornagar	"
48. Anoubam Adhikarimayum	Raebareli	Chandrakriti
49. Radhakundhabasimayum	Radhakundha	"

Thus, we find that before the time of King Kiyamba (1467-1509 A.D.) the immigration of Brahmins and non-Brahmins started and continued up to 1981 A.D. In view of the activities of this migration may be categorized into two major parts (a) before Kiyamba they came here with missionary zeal to consolidate Hinduisation of Meitei society, (b) after Kiyamba they took shelter in Manipur to save their own life, culture and beliefs as during this time, Islam dominated over other part of Indian subcontinent. They were oppressive towards Hindus. The Muslim rulers imposed tax, destroyed temples and converted a large number of Hindus into Islam by force. Due to oppression and fear, they fled from their ancestral abode and took shelter where they save and free to observe their religious rituals. Manipuri king also allowed to settle in Manipur with their family and relatives and gives titles according to Manipuri traditions to every family to assimilate properly into the Manipuri society. Not only Indian origin Brahmins but non-Brahmin Indians also came to Manipur and settled there. List of non-Brahmin Indians are given below:

1. Khetrimayum
2. Pukhrimayum
3. Ngairangbam
4. Taibujam
5. Sagonsem
6. Ngathem
7. Pebam
8. Thoudam
9. Saikhom
10. Sanasam
11. Sanakhombam
12. Keisam
13. Ningthoujam
14. Mayanglambam
15. Naharakpam
16. Chiyam
17. Anongmayum
18. Anoubam
19. Kaakymayum
20. Kaakymphaibam
21. LalballeiSnagbam
22. Sangaisenbam.
23. ApambamPhayengbam
24. Son Mayum
25. Mayang Aribam
26. KhuraitabaThangjam
27. Lukhram
28. Mayangchangbam
29. Keidongbam
30. Arambam
31. Sombam
32. Pechimayum
33. Ningthouchanbam
34. Yupanbam
35. Wathambam
36. Huinammayum
37. Namoiyam
38. Kongthoubam
39. Thanjaomayum
40. Lairikyengbam
41. TakhelAyekpam
42. Chanambam
43. Takellambam
44. Kshetrinaotabam
45. Waribam
46. Kanhaibam
47. Laplakpam
48. Leihaorongbam
49. Lanjabam
50. Kangbamtabam
51. Lousambam
52. Pousangtabam
53. Chanamthabam
54. EsingKhaibam
55. Palkungbam
56. Kharibam
57. ThangjamWangkhem
58. Namsatakpam
59. Napetmayum
60. PheisabamArubam
61. WariphanbamThansaba - Khaidem
62. Kongjengbam
63. Pere Khongbam
64. SinggaKhongbam
65. Heirungbam
66. Thangangsabam
67. Moikhoibam
68. TakhelChangbam
69. Yukhatabam
70. Houdongkhongbam
71. Mayang HisabaLuplakpa
72. Awangtabam
73. Chingsubam
74. Changsangbam
75. Muhakmayum
76. Asangbam
77. Hingkhaibam
78. Khabam
79. Laikhumayum
80. Kongleimayum
81. Ayekpam
82. Laitonjam
83. SinnungtabaSenyeibam
84. Chukimayum
85. Khukhapam
86. Sunnarammayum
87. Tarangbam
88. Dhabanandamayum
89. Ukabam
90. Yumkabam
91. Naotam
92. Abujam
93. SanjuramMayum
94. Anandmayum
95. Oinam
96. Aheibam
97. Pakhanglakpam
98. Heikrujam,
99. Yumkhaibam
100. Yambem
101. Hidaksangbam
102. Sansenbam
103. Khullakpam
104. Yanggoijam
105. Namram
106. Khaditabam
107. Wakanbam
108. Meitankeisangbam etc.

Manipuri (Meitei) salais (Clans) were introduced to Hindu Gotras for the completed conversion or assimilate to Hinduism. Those Hindu gotras are given below:

1. Ningthouja	Shandilya
2. Angom	Kaushika
3. Chenglei	Bhardwaja
4. Luwang	Kashyap
5. Khuman	Madhugalalya
6. Moirang	Aitereya
7. Khaba-Nganba	Gautam

Pre-Hindu traditional Manipuri (Meitei) festivals were also converted to Hindu or as per Indian cultural norms such as:

HeigruHitongba	Jal Yatra
Ayang Yoiren Eruppa	Snan Yatra
WairaTenkap Festival	Kirtan of Lord Rama
PoireiApakana	Loipam Festival
KongbaLeithongPhatpa	Vishnu Samkranti
AhongKhongching	Ratha Yatra
Offering to Ancestors	Tarpan
Wakambung Chingnung Nongombi	Dusserah

Conclusion

Thus, slowly and steadily sidelining the traditional way of worshiping, demolishing of ancient temples, allowing the Indian Brahmins to performed ancient cults in place of Priest, imposing various Hindu rituals, allowing Manipuri (Meitei) ladies to marry and started family as according to Indian tradition. They learnt Manipuri language, embraced Manipuri culture whole-heartedly. This assimilation transformed Manipuri culture into a completely different shape. Manipuri Nata Sankirtana and Classical Manipuri Dance are perfect example of these assimilation which the world has known today. They dedicated their lives along with other Manipuri people during foreign aggression. Also, they contributed their brains in creating Manipuri literature, culture and became totally Manipuri by forgetting their place of origin.

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