CHAPTER - VI

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- A Historical Perspective
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There is found an enough evidences of the decline and flourished of many languages and script. It is an universally accepted that the writing system of Egypt, Sumer and China is oldest system in the history of mankind.\(^1\) The other writing system which existed independently in different places are considered as the branches of these three writing system. The writing system and script of Egypt is further developed in the other part of European countries. The present Roman script, Latin script and other European countries are the new modified form of Egyptian writing style and script. The west Simitic script, Hebrew script, Aramanic script etc. are the modified form of Sumer script and their writing style. The Japanese script is also the modified form and exact influence of chinese script. Thus, the new modification and adopted script has been more developed and more systematized then the original or form er script. Any way, these three written script are undoubtedly treated as the nucleus for the development of various script. It is recorded that the existence of an advance writing system was started from the later part of 4\(^{th}\) millennium B.C. This opinion was advance on the basis of scientific investigation and archaeological finding.\(^2\)

In the entire developmental process of the existence of the script the

2. The decipherment of the cuneiform scripts and hieroglyphic scripts was the achievement of the nineteenth century. At the end of the eighteenth century not a word could be read with certainty; the contents of thousands of lengthy records of great empire were recovered for modern knowledge.
people who have come to across about the decline of many script. Though it is very difficult to give a concrete evidences about the reasons for the decline of script. It is mentions that foreign interventions and innovation of new alien language are the key factors for the decline of the script. It is also said that the decreased of the number of populations who have spoken that language and used the script and assimilation of (peoples) cultures by different communities etc. are also equally important responsible factors for the decline of a script. But if we go back to the history of basic objective and nature of the writing system of the earliest historical period it is quite clear that at a particular stage of time the writing was a rare phenomenon and it had confined only to a section of people who were considered to be a civilized group. They used writing script in order to record their ideas which are directly or indirectly connected in every aspect of the field of the society. Therefore the writing system was confined for quite long time only in a particular section of the people and it was not properly used by the other group of people as they were not fully understand the important of the used of script and system of writing. As a result of this the practice of continuity of the used of script was not a regular features rather created a situation which brought a complete stopped the habit of writing system. Such type of phenomenon is also greatly responsible for the decline of a script of a given society.

As mention above that the Egyptian, Sumarian and chinese script are considered as the oldest writing system. But, though their system of writing are not completely decline the importance were given to other scripts and languages which developed in the later stages. For example, the Sumarian cuneiform writing script was developed like anything during the period of Mesopotamian civilization. But it had began to decline just after the coming of christan era.\(^5\) By the conservative christian priests, astronomers, business correspondence had started to cease/stop the used of cuneiform script and it was replaced by the Aramaic script.\(^6\) The same trend was also happened in the case of Egyptian hieroglyphic script through the real identity of this script is not fully declined but the importance is given mainly to the Greek, Latin and other European languages which are also a modified form of hieroglyphic script. It is mainly because of the coming of the Greek Civilization. The existence of the hieroglyphic and cuneiform script was come to the knowledge of the people in nineteenth century after having a through and exhaustive scientific research. But the problem of the identity of the Chinese script to a certain extend, just better than the Egyptian and Sumarian script. Still the Chinese script is able to maintain their identity with the process of modification. Very recently Sir, Thomas Wade who was a prominent scholar devised a system of Romanization for Chinese words. This new system known as Gwoyeu Romatzyh (National Language Latin Script)

\(^5\) Ibid : p.77.
\(^6\) Aramaic script has derivation from cuneiform. The Biblical Aram applies to an ethnical group and Jacob his mother and his wives are also represented as Arameans; Jews spoke Aramaic. Around nine century B.C. Aramaic became lingua franca and official script of the Near East and Persian empire. The direct and indirect descendants of Aramaic alphabet which employed like, Simitic, Hebrew, Central, Southern & South - eastern Asia.
was promulgated by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 1928.7

The same fate is also occurred the case of the identity of the Manipuri script. As already mentioned that the different theories were advanced in the history of the origin of Manipuri script and its affinity with others scripts. But still it is quite obscure to fix the date of the origin of the used of this script in this state. If we analysed from the mythological point of view it can be observed that this script is originated with the theory of the creation of universe. In this respect, all the Manipuri script is originated and connected with the system of the creation process of human being and formation of seven days.8 Panditraj Atombapu Sharma opined that 'the Meitei is an ancient nation having an ancient literature more advancely civilized than that of pre-Vedic period.9 Another opinion of Professor Kalidas Nag that the Meitei script has existed long before the period of Asoka 10. But in the ancient literature, there is no mentions the authors, date and year or exact period of the origin of writing system on Manipuri script. The evidence of the writing in the script which is recorded in the Royal Chronicle (Cheitharol Kumbaba) since 33 A.D. Till yet, the inscription of Khoibu Maring recorded the Manipuri script since as early as six century A.D. so far epigraphical source is concerned. According to Yengkhomnon, one archaic manuscript mentions that during the reign of Meidingngu Sameirang (518 - 568 A.D.) there was a conflict for the war of succession. At that time, some portions

8. Mss : Mayek Laishak Takpa  
of the Royal Palace and Nongdam Sanglen (Department of Scholars) were caught on fire and some important books like Cheitharol Kumbaba and some unidentified puyas were also burnt.\textsuperscript{11} From this fact it can be observed that the Manipuri writing system (Meitei Mayek) was existed far advanceley then before the reigned of Meidingngu Sameirang. On the one hand, it has been maintaining Meitei Mayek as the official script till the last part of 19th century just during the reigned of Maharaja Kullachandra.\textsuperscript{12} After this the people has weakness and incapacitation towards the process of drastic declination in the existence and used of Manipuri script.

It is historically experienced that the people of Manipur had enjoyed a distinctive culture and tradition. They had their peculiar practice of writing since long immemorable times. But, with the advent of Sanskritization which was socio-cultural and religious assimilation and conversion of Hinduism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century had directly responsible to lingere (decay) the use of archaic script in the minds of younger generations. As early as twentieth century modernisation and domination of western influenced under British colonial rule which was rooted out the practiced of Manipuri written script by replacing of Bengali Nagari script in totality in the soil.

\textsuperscript{11} Mss : Yengkhomnon.
\textsuperscript{12} Moirangthem Chandra singh : Meitei Mayek, Imphal, 1969, p.1.
SANSKRITIZATION PROCESS

The sanskritization process which was started in Manipur in eighteenth century was a great significant landmark in the entire historical process in Manipur. It brought a tremendous changes in every aspect of the life of peoples in general and whole state in particular. It was gave a serious affected in the features of future Manipuri script also. So that the comming of sanskritization process had given a great blow to the existence of traditional archaic script in the state.

The zenith of sanskritization process was reached during the time of king Pamheiba who was popularly known as Garibaniwaz. During his period at the initiative of one Hindu missionary monk Shanta Das the whole character of Manipur was changes from traditional indigenous character into Hinduism. He brought the tenet of Ramanandi cult and Vishnavite cult and he was also win over the mind of the king and thus the ruler of Manipur became a great patron of Ramandi cult. With the help of the king Shanta Das was able to preached the concept and doctrine of Hinduism in Manipuri and the ruler in order to pleased, Shanta Das had compelled the people to imbrace Hinduism. The degree of the invasion of the concept of Hinduism was so strong that even the name of this place had changes from traditional name into Manipur.  

13. Shanta Das, a Hindu missionary who came to Manipur from Sylhet in 1720 A.D. He proposed for the adoption of Hinduism relating to Manipur of the Mahabharata ruled by Babruvahana, son of the great Pandava hero Arjuna and it was accepted by king Garibniwaz and royal court.
In 1724 the title of ‘Maharaja’ was given to the king and the king was also ‘Manipureswar’. But in the coins issued by the king the name Garibaniwaza was depicted in the Nagari script. The name of the queen Gomati also depicted its in the coin issued by the king. The adoption of the name of ‘Manipur’ for this ancient kingdom and the introduction of Nagari script in coins which was the beginning of the process of conversion of Manipuri script into Bengali script.

The propagation of a new religion was taken with full vigour after 1720 under the active guidance of Shanta Das and the king had loyalty to all the Brahmans and astrologers. The traditional temple of Nine Umang Lais (sylvian gods presiding our villages and lineages) were destroyed and this process of temple sabotages known as “Sanamahi Kolu Yeikhaiba” in the history of Manipur. Subsequently, the king was decreed the employment to the Brahmans in worshipping of royal deities like Nongshaba, Panthoibi and Taibangkhaiba (Sanamahi) by denying the duty to the traditional priests of the Meiteis. The chronicle says that from 1725 Phairel 20, the cremation of the dead bodies to fire was re-introduced. There was objection to the king opening of the new tombs as it sacrilege for the Meiteis on which the objections were over ruled by the king. Such new development also banned the used of Manipuri script on the walls of temples and sculptures of the Umang Lais (forest Gods).

16. The Manipuri tradition were used to 4 funeral system of death bodies through fire, earth, air, & water.
According to manuscript ‘Miyat’ mentions that - by instigation of Shanta Das in 17 Mera, Nongmaijing 1732 the puyas which written by Manipuri alphabets were burnt out in front of Kangla Uttra under the royal decree. Out of 122 (one hundred & twenty two) puyas had burnt out and only 6 (six) can be saved. The following names of the Puyas which were completely burnt to ash:


At the instance of Shanta Das Gosai, the king was against the use of Meitei script, songs and prayers. He introduced Bengali script and substituted Meitei songs by Bengali songs. He, in a religious frenzy, collected the rare manuscripts numbering one hundred - twenty two. The books were burnt out by the Ramandi preacher with the help of the king. Six of them prove to be saved. They were 1) Nunglon, 2) pakhangba Naoyom, 3) Taoroilai Naoyom, 4) Singkhal Naoyom, 5) Yangbi Thiren, and 6) Sakok Thiren. Manipur has thus been deprived of many, valuable religious and historical books through Garibaniwaz’s fanaticism, and its events so called Puya Meithaba in the history of Manipur.¹⁹

But, it is interesting to note that the succeeding rulers of king Garibaniwaz and Manipuri preachers (Maichous) were heavy efforts to revive the pre-Hindu culture and almost re-write the puyas of that short period of time.²⁰ For instance, the copies of Puyas which were already burnt down have had preserved by the pandits in their private possession hiddenly and rarely even today. Nevertheless, historical speaking is that since the introduction of Sanskrit and Bengali characters by the king were

¹⁸. Mss : Miyat.
¹⁹. Mss : Ibid.
²⁰. Mss : Lareilathup.
gradually impact towards popularity of the written script to the people of Manipur. So, the historic event of puya Meithaba and relitious policy and interferences of king Garibaniwaz produced far reaching consequences in the history of Manipuri script.

**ESTABLISHMENT OF BRITISH COLONIAL RULE**

The last phase of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century Manipur began to interaction with the west under the direct rule of colonial British. It was a dark ages in the history of Manipur script though it has manifold development in different aspects. The Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891 was a short but momentous contest between unequal powers - struggle between a small land locked Asiatic country and the mightiest empire in the world. The process of integration of Manipur with India which had started in the 18th century at the religious level with the conversion of Manipur into Hinduism. It had reached a new water mark on its way to complete political integration half a century later though this kingdom was made a protected tribute - giving state under the British Indian Government. This war also marks the completion of the British, conquest of the Indian sub-continent.  

This historic war of Anglo-Manipur in 1891 marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new one in the history of Manipur; the era of sovereign and independent Manipur had been closed and that of the British rule in this kingdom started. At the last moment of this subsequent war, colonel

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Rennick's force of Silchar column occupied the Kangla capital on the morning of 27th April 1891 at 7 a.m. The Kohima column under General Collet and the mountain infantry of the Tammu column had also been appeared at the south gate. At 10 a.m. of this day all the three British columns had united in the Kangla spot. Thus the Manipuries completely fell into the hands of the British and the "Union Jack" of British flag hoisted by pulling down the traditional Manipuri flag "Mallem Paphan Leipuba".

From 27th April onwards, the chief political officer took charge of the state property and he appointed caretakers. He also arranged for temporary administration of the state. The Kangla palace (naturally Kangla, the capital was the seat of political, judiciary military, economic power; it was also the center of the social, cultural and religious activities) area of 1.83 sq. miles was taken over from the state and constituted as the British Reserve. That area was under the control of the Government of India and was administered by the political Agent to the Governor of Assam, the latter being the Agent of the Governor General in council. It was recommended by a military committee, which assembled on 1st September, 1891, with the approved by the Government of India. The cantonment Act, 1881, and cruelty to Animal Act, 1890, were also extended to the area. No Manipuri was allowed to settle within 500 yards to the British Reserved. Most of the important office buildings of the State were inside the British Reserve.
After this shoot but momentous, the British had began to destroy palace properties and monuments. The Kangla Sha which was erected by King Khagembha in 1533 A.D.\textsuperscript{27} demolished with the use of explosion dynamite. Besides these, Kangla mound, citadels, temple, the cave and the cultural objects viz, stone implements, and inscriptions were made burial and debris. Later on, the British deliberately wanted to familiar and analysed through local pandits about the sacred manuscript (puyas) of Manipur. To the effect that it extend the orders and commands which were collected all the puyas from the localities. The Cheitharol Kumbaba a royal chronicle which was written in indigenous Manipuri script, had been translated into English and Bengali. During the Anglo-Manipur war 1891, the palace puyas stored at Ras Mandal but man like Khuraijamba Lallup and others were carried out the puyas along with local puyas at Kangla. Thus so, on Inga 28th Panba, Monday, 1891, again as the massive gloomy of historical episode of Manipuri script was occurred by the British officer on which all the puyas burnt down at Manung kangjeibung at Kangla.\textsuperscript{28}

Accordingly, Meitei Puran, Manipur Itihas Bijoy Panchali, Chandrakriti, Surachandra, Kulachandra, Tikendrajit Charit (pp. 169-171) on June 4, 1891, definitely the puyas which was written archaic Meitei alphabets were burnt at Manung Kangjeibung. And the recognised and the non recognised puyas were burnt down but no one trace to saved such as puya Meithaba of Sanskritization period of Garibaniwaz. The names of the puyas were as follows:

\textsuperscript{27} Op cit: Meitei Khunaigi Shaktaklon, p.40.
\textsuperscript{28} M. Imocha Singh: Manipuri script: Lost of its importance. A seminar paper presented to the “Manipur Historical Society” 1996 at N.G. College, Lamphel.

With the process of modernization, the colonial British wanted to use modern education as a tools to strengthen the foundation of their political authority (hagemony) in the country. Of course, the spread of

Imphal, 1947, P.171.
modern education was not solely the work of the government; the christian missionaries and a few number of local enlightened also played an important part.

In 1874 a school was established in Manipur at the suggestion of the late political Agent Major General, W.F. Nuthal and the Government of Bengal presented books, maps, etc. but for want of encouragement on the part of the authorities. An English school was opened during the time of the political Agent. Sir James Jonstone (1877-1886) in Manipur and it was named after him. The Building was destroyed by the Manipuries during the rebellion. At the time when Major H.P. Maxwell assumed charged of the state, there was no other school in existence. From 1st June, 1892, the Johnstone School was re-opened. At the close of the year 1893-94 there were three schools working in the State- Johnstone Middle English school two lower primary schools (patshals)- one at Sekamai in the valley and the other at Mao in the hills. A school at Thoubal was opened but soon it was closed down for lack of support. Bengali was the language taught in the school. The Bengali character which was then used in parts of the valley.\textsuperscript{30}

In 1894-95, Ravd, William, Pettigrew arrived in Manipur for proselytization. The authourity refused him permission to do missionary work in the valley and thus he undertook the work of supervising the education of the State schools.

A girl school in Imphal was ready for occupation at the end of 1895-96 but it could not work due to failure of securing a mistress. Up to March, 1896, the number of schools was 8 besides, Johnstone Middle English school and 11 Patshalas in Imphal and one Patshalas at Mao. There were additional patshalas at Moirang and Bishnupur. In the girls school which was set up during 1897-98, only two girls attended. During 1904-05 Bengali primers (elementary school books) introduced along with Manipuri primers. Next year, two high school classes were added to Johnstone Middle English School. The Bengali Government employees, made good progress.

The number of lower primary schools were 48 of which 39 were in the valley. In the year 1906 -07, a new Patshalas were opened in the valley. A girl's school and a Sanskrit Tol were opened in Imphal. Besides, 6 new Tangkhul schools in the Urkhrul area and 4 Kuki schools in the Kuki areas were opened during the year.\textsuperscript{31} As a matter of fact, the Manipuri ancient script was totally replaced by the introduction of Bengali and Sanskrit language and script tought in the school as the medium of instruction.

Of late, some prominent figures and local popular people whom they enthusiastically approached Bengali school of Vaishnavism were supported to new recognised the Bengali script in Manipur.\textsuperscript{32} And the writers of western, Indians and local writers had emerged and enunciated their interpretation that Manipurities did not have any scripts, but it

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31.  \textit{Op cit :} \textit{Administrative change in Manipur after 1891, p. 32.}
32.  \textit{Op cit :} \textit{Meitei Khunaigi Shaktaklon, p.42.}
\end{flushright}
borrowed the ancient Indian scripts and the Bengali scripts. At least outwardly had blurred the original identity of script and self consciousness of the Manipuri young minds.

Form the conceptual study of the decline of Manipuri script which were taking place in two stages of Sanskritization and the modernization periods, reflected to decline of her history. Above all, the script of the Meiteis unpopular with the advent of Hinduism. Bengali script gradually began to take the place Meitei script when Hinduism became the State relation. In addition to, most of the important texts written in archaic Meitei script were re-written in Bengali script. Nevertheless, these external influences failed to abolished this script completely.

Surprisingly, the force of modernization under colonial British meant not only a shattering blow to the Manipuri society but script also rooted out from the soil. The introduction of modern education system and the instigation of outside minded people of Manipuries were able to possible to teach Bengali Script in the school. Thus, in the light of the above historical perspective about the process and extend of the modernization brought by the alien colonial people in which directly responsible for the forgotten of Manipuries’ indigenous script of to days generations.