CHAPTER VI
THE MEITEI SOCIETY
The Meiteis were agriculturists since the commencement of their settlement in the present Manipur Valley. In prehistoric time, it served as the best harbour of various ethnic groups; while in historical period it was connected through cultural, political, economic and religious activities with a number of neighbouring states in India, South East Asia and China. Nevertheless, the Meiteis distinguished themselves by building up a state society which was developed through its traditional socio-political and economic structures. The knowledge of agriculture was a strong factor to transform the valley dwellers from primitive simple society to a complex form of society. Its natural position i.e. the availability of riverine facility, enjoyment of lake facility, acquaintance from the periphery areas, good climate etc. favoured them.

CLAN SYSTEM

There was not found any evidence of the existence of clan system during the reign of King Kamaiba who is claimed to be the first ruler of Manipur. But clan system existed in some form during the pre-Kamaiba period. There is a myth explaining the origin of the clans out of the immortal body of Atya Guru Sidaba. "According to this tradition, the body of Guru
which was floated in the disguised form of a dead cow was cut into seven pieces which were divided to different persons. Kuptreng received the portion of neck and his clan became Angom. Shentreng got the eye of Guru and his clan was known as the Ningthouja. The clan of Hammingba who got the head of Guru was Luwang clan. Leishangtao received the front legs and his clan became the Khuman clan. Noirang was the clan of Konshouren who got the striped belly of Guru. Khaba was the clan of Asongba who got left side of the head. Nganba was the clan of Tumangamba who received the red heart of Guru.\(^1\)

In pre-historic times, a number of tribes migrated into the Manipur valley. These tribes amalgamated with each other and the smaller tribes were absorbed to the parent tribes and thus, clan or salais were evolved in different ages. Probably, the number of the clans were more than seven but the exact number could not be fixed.

With the establishment of the Meitei state, Nongma Leiren Pakhangba introduced the seven clan system in Meitei society. The internal structure of the Meitei society was divided into seven clans i.e. Ningthouja, Khuman, Luwang, Angom, Noirang, Khaba-Nganba and Chenglei. Each of the clan
or salai consisted a numbers of lineages² formed by a number of family.

**FAMILY:**

Family was the basic smallest unit of the kinship system of the Meitei. They had the system of joint family. Primarily, the Meitei society was patrilineal in nature, therefore, father was recognized as the head of the family. When the sons got married, most of them were relieved from the main family controlled by a father. But, usually sons who were more well to do, lived together with the parents in order to look after their parents. In the case of the death of male head and the minority of the male son, the widow grand-mother and mother usually looked after the family as the head of the family. However, all the married persons were considered to share all the affairs of the family lineage and clan. They also got maximum responsibility in all aspects of society. At the same time, the married women were not neglected in the affairs of the family and lineage. The Meiteis enjoyed both single and joint family. In a single or small family, there were parents, sons and daughter. But in a larger or joint family, there were grand-parents, parents, sister-in-law, sons and daughters and grand sons and grand-daughters.
MARRIAGE:

The types of marriage of the Meiteis are classified into 4 (four) i.e. proper marriage has been performed after engagement, Chen-hong (chen means run, hong means marriage) has been done after elopement, Keima-Katpa (Keima means bride, Katpa means bestow) a simple marriage. Particularly, marriage within the same blood of the same clan was tabu and they were socially excommunicated. The Meiteis were exogamous and polygamy was practised in Meitei society. 'In Meitei society a low caste man can marry a woman of high caste; such system was completely contrast from the custom of the mainland Indian society.'

However, with the intensification of Hinduization process in Meitei society, the marriage rule became rigid that the Meitei youths were prevented from marrying the Brahmin and Muslim girls. Besides this, even marriage between the Meiteis and the surrounding hill tribes was severely denounced. In Meitei society, there was no hard and fast rule of the bride-price, though such custom was prevalent. The Meitei society was benevolent that widows were permitted to remarry, while the child marriage was unknown to them.
In Neitei society, usually adultery case was very rare. It was highly condemned and severe punishment was inflicted on adulterer. With the establishment of the Neitei state, there was established a special court of women better known as Pacha Loishang to deal with all the cases specially relating to women i.e. adultery, divorce, etc. However, in the 19th century, the adulterer was condemned to a fine in the court. If the offender or culprit failed to clear the fine, either he or his family member could be arrested. In order to meet the desire of the claimant, they were sold out as slave but such practice was rare. After arresting that female or man culprit, he or she was imprisoned until the claimant got satisfaction. Apart from these, there were some form of punishment, viz. excommunication, cutting of hair, colouring of turmeric to the shaved head, banishment, exposure to the bazar sometimes in semi naked condition in case of the crime committed against the royal family by the commoners were awarded capital punishment.

YEK THOKNABA:

It means blood relation having consanguineous kinship and common ancestor. Accurately it was traced from patrilineal side. According to the Meihoulon Salai Khaiba Fuya
the marriage within the same yak or blood relation was strictly prohibited. For example in Ningthouja clan there were 115 Yumnak. Out of this, 57 yumnak were in same blood and other remaining 58 yumnak or lineage were also originated from same ancestor. The concept is that Ningthouja clan was formed by two different groups of blood relation. Therefore, it is probable that the first group of salai blood relation would be allowed to marry the second group of blood relation.

SHAIRUK-TINNABA:

It was almost similar with Yek-Thoknaba. By chance, if a person left his clan and got affiliation to another clan or yak, he was allowed to have matrimonial relation with the clan where he affiliated but he was debarred from marrying the girl from his former clan.

PEN-TINNABA:

The Meiteis not only maintained the patrilineal consanguineal kinship but also preserved the custom of matrilineal form of kinship. The example is that when a women gets married to more than one husband, she gives birth two or more children; the children have different fathers but they
have common mother. Those children who have common mother are not allowed to marry each other.

In Meitei society, the cross cousin marriage was prohibited (i.e. marriage between the sons and daughter of brother and sister). It is also out of custom to marry sons and daughter of two sisters, though they married in different clan or salai.

**KEIRUP:**

It means a military organization. According to Nandalal Sharma, the main function of it was to act as a messenger of war. As soon as they heard the sound of drum beating from the capital, they or he informed the adjacent village Keirup. This organization was responsible for fighting the tiger menace, the catching of tigers and village protection.

**SHINGLUP:**

It took the responsibility of the village development programmes i.e. construction of bridges, roads, digging of tanks, draining of rivers and protection of forest. In case of death and illness, by sending representatives of each family of this organization extended help.
LEIRUP:

It is also another village organization which was in charge of development functions.

EMERGENCE OF CLASS:

There was no strict division of labour in the clan society. The pattern of the division of labour, at that time was entirely based both on age and sex. The commencement of settled agriculture led to property ownership and consequently unequal access to the means of production emerged. The dissimilarity of property owning caused to stratify entire Kentei society into two social divisions i.e. producers and enjoyers.

With the establishment of the Kentei state, the state society became more complex due to the growth of population and expansion of territory. And the Kentei society consisted of a number of social categories i.e. king and his royal family members, nobles commoners, priests, poets, singers and artisans. However, the Kentei state developed into the feudal administrative model, when king Lolyamba established Lulu, system which was the manifestation of the emergence of feudalism in Kentei society.
POSITION OF MEITEI WOMEN:

In the history of Meitei civilization, the role of the Meitei woman was so great. Though the Meitei society was patrilineal in nature, the women were granted freedom in many contexts and they also took great share in many aspects of society. It is very praiseworthy for their active involvement in the socio-economic and political activities of the kingdom. From time immemorial, their active participation in the works of production and reproduction played a great role to improve the economic position of the Meitei kingdom. They co-operated with the male section in the production activities like agriculture, fishing and gardening etc. Besides these, their activities of reproduction, weaving, spinning, embroidery and selling were very great. They inherited various kind of household works. Apart from their child caring and household work, they were able to earn more income of the family through secondary occupation like weaving and trading. In spite of that, they were not always confined to the home. Nearly whole of the kingdom’s management of the internal trade and marketing went to the woman side. The subsistence economic role performed by the Meitei women helped the society to be economically self-sufficient.

R. Brown describes working activities of the Meitei
woman that "many of the women walk miles in morning and purchase things from distant villages and sell it again to the Khwairambal Bazar in the evening". 3

Ancient Meitei chronicles and literary works describe the accounts of the Meitei women's role in the socio-political spheres of life. Pakhangba's mother Yaibirok took an important part in making her son Pakhangba the king of the Kangla. After the killing of Pakhangba by the Khabas, Jhira Kontingnu younger sister of king Nongda Lairen Pakhangba tried her best to install her brother's son Khuyo Tompok to the throne. Her effort was successful. After the death of King Urakonthouba, his queen played a remarkable role to make Naottingkhone the king of Ningthouja kingdom. 4 It was at the time of Ningthoukhomba, the Tangkhul tribes attacked the Meitei kingdom. Queen Linthoingambi, collected the available women who were dressed into male military dress and defeated the Tangkhul. Thus, with her wit and wisdom, Linthoingambi saved the kingdom. 5

During the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, a women's court named Facha Loishang was set up. It was presided over by queen Leishna to deal all the cases involving women.

Panthoibi Khongkun describes the free position of the
Meitei woman. Inspite of that they were under the supervision of their husband and confined to the household work, they played active role in the field of agriculture, trade, weaving, caring their children. They were allowed to participate in the public festivals, religious ceremonies and ritual works. They even played the game like Kang Sanaba.

The ancient historical and literary texts like Kangthou Kangbarol Ponqlen Puya Maichouba and Saxok Lanlen Achouba Puya clearly depict the nature of society during the reign of King Kangba in the pre-Fakhangba period. The society was characterised purely as tribal primitive in nature. There was neither class nor caste differentiation as the social division was primarily based on both sex and age. Although rice was known to them, food gathering was their main occupation. The means of livelihood was solely dependent on nature due to lack of a highly developed division of labour and technology. There was no surplus production things used was self-sufficiency. The people used to worship God Sanamahi. During that time, the custom disposal of the dead by exposure to birds and beasts was prevalent.

The practice of burial of the dead was introduced during the reign of Moriya Phambaicha. An ancient historical
text Numit Kappa provided detail information about the society of the reign of king Nongdamhan and Touhireng the joint rulers. During their chiefship, the society was distinctively stratified into king and his immediate royal members, nobles consisting of Ningthou pongba Tara, priestly group and commoners and slaves. Due to governance of the principality both day and night alternately by two brothers, the slaves were over burdened by day and night court duties. In order to get him free from the oppression, one slave, Khwai Nongchembam Piba, who could not look after his family properly due to heavy burden of feudal service, rebelled against king Touhireng. The revolt exemplified that the condition of the slaves was very deteriorated. The revolution ended with success and the condition of the slaves was improving.9

1uring the reign of Puthiba, agriculture was introduced.10 The beginning of field agriculture marks change in the society in a considerable way. It is an universal phenomenon that agriculture is the basic activity which allows for the regular generation of social surplus and it provides the facility to set up material based structural society. The social relation between the Mangangas and neighbouring clans, people and tribes, of course, increased and production centre
came to emerge. The existence of social formation among the Nagangs automatically commenced to regularise the surplus production.

Nongda Lairen Pakhangba founded a confederated Meitei state. This followed the evolution of the Meitei society for the first time in the history of Manipur. Formally, in the beginning, the advantages of a confederacy was appreciated by actual social relation between the tribes or clan principa-lities. Matrimonial relation would be prime factor in cementing a federal unity. The confederation tended to undergo transformation in the structure of all the social and political institutions. Out of the pre-existing clans' elements, a distinct Meitei social and political features were framed.

The society was composed of different grades such as king and his royal families, nobles, priests, poet and singer and common people including the slaves. 'The Meitei society was primarily a kinship and lineage based society.'

Since the population was small, all the able bodied men performed all social and economic activities. The population was the source of unpaid labour of the kingdom. With the establishment of state society, the indirect relationship
came to be predominant between the king and his subject.

However, agriculture was further developed during his time due to wide use of iron tools with the advent of Sorreteon and the reclamation of more cultivable land with the expansion of territory and the increase of population.

The female section was never aloof from social and political activities. The best example is that queen Leiana, the wife of Pakhangba presided over the Facha Court. She herself took a great part in organizing the game of the horse hockey which was started during the period of Pakhangba. The worship of Umangla (deities of the forest) and the system of giving rewards and distinction during his kingship were introduced.

The socio-political and technological developments at the time of Shuyoitompok was recorded in the chronicles. The kingthurol Lambuba mentions that not only the introduction of drum making and its innovation but also the bronze smelt and well-metal cast had been done. It further records the introduction of manufacture of well-metal gong (Senbung) and the development of weaving, printing designs of female cloths and dying of cloths. Canoe (boat) making was invented. It is realized that during his rule, artisans class
including weavers and tool makers came to emerge in Meitei society.

King Taotathingmang was highly conscious of the socio-economic welfare of the kingdom. Great water work began to be carried out successfully during his period. He and his younger brother Yoimongba dredged both the Imphal the Iril rivers by organising human labour. The main objectives of their dredging were to make widening and deepening of the river beds which helped to restrict from river flood and to drain the water from the marshes. The draining process water from the marshes brought to extend large agricultural areas. The dredging of rivers involved large human labour. Thus, the people were made conscious of the activities of socio-economic interaction among the people with the dredging of the river, whereas the king gained a great loyalty from his subject and he was successful to centralize more power. 16

The Naothingkhong Phambal Kaba records about the existence of warrior class during the reign of Urakonthouba. 17

The most important event during the reign of king Naothingkhong was made to contact with the Pongs or Jhans of Kabaw valley. According to R.B. Pemberton, the establishment
of relationship with the Shans brought a considerable improve-
ment in the aspects of habit, dress manner etc. of the Meiteis.
Kalbohal states "about the backwardness of the Meitei society
during the campaign of Samlungpha. The women put on Phanek but
topless and the men wore of dhoti. He goes on to mention that
the people were habituated to chewing dry fish. Instead of
it, Prince Samlungpha introduced the chewing betel nuts".18

The Naothingkhong Phambal Kaba describes the better
socio-economic position of the Meiteis. But politically the
Meiteis were not well strong, since the Moirangs and Khumans
were left on the way of confederation. In a lesser extend,
the Meiteis might be culturally influenced by the songs. But,
most probably, there was made a cultural exchange between the
two kingdoms.

Some of the artisans like goldsmith and silversmith
emerged. Both elopement and engagement were practised. The
custom of matrilocal residence and polygamy practiced by the
kings and princes were prevailing. 19 Fishing, animal rearing
and poultry were considered as the supplementing secondary
occupation of the people, while agriculture was their main
occupation. King Naothingkhong innovated coronation customs
like Leiruthak (a decorative object of the head) Chareining-
khoem (a triangular piece of cloth with a brocade hanging on
the back from the waist), Phirel phurit (along and loose shirt) for the king and Leiren Leichao (ornament of the hair), Kumshang Phanek (start, dark in colour), Kabrang Phanek (a cloth made of silk) for the queen. These elaborate dresses were known as Naothingkhong Phijet.20

"Loiyamba Shinyen" a historical document gives a detail information about the reigning period of king Loiyamba. During his kingship, there were a great transformation in many aspects of socio-economic and political features of the Nitei kingdom. He issued royal edict popularly known as "Loiyamba Shinyen" in which he promulgated all the laws of the kingdom relating to socio-economic and political aspects. With the codification of all the laws for the first time in the history of Manipur, the whole population was given their respective assignments according to their different Yumnak or families under the decree of king Loiyamba. However, the number of the professional class came to appear, the people could no longer be confined to agriculture alone. Even though the emergence of number of professional class i.e. artisan class, as usual agriculture continued as a sole responsible occupation of the Niteis. From his time, the professional crafts begun to take share as a dynamic supplementing occupation of the kingdom. The edict further records the introduction of etiquette of royal court, duties of king and queen,
royal customs, decorations, titles and awards to the nobles, keeping of standard time, administration of justice, feudal dues and service and royal painters.

Full scale development of social stratification signified the maturation of society, distinctively appeared during his time. King Loiyamba introduced "Lallup system". Gangnumei Kabui states that "the Meitel society with establishment of Lallup system marked the entrance of feudal society". 21 In our such system all male section age between 16 to 60 years were utilized as a compulsory labour. These male section were ordered to perform 10 days to the welfare of state services out of every 40 days. 22 By introducing such system, King successfully organized unpaid dedicated labour. The King's ability to accumulate labour without expending a single coin consolidated the centralized apparatus of the royal power. As all the able-bodied male section were obliged to cultivate one Fari (24 acres) of land more reclamation of cultivable area began to expand. The kingdom did no longer face the acute scarcity of labour. The new trend of structural transformation and improvement particularly socio-economic aspects exemplify that the Meitel society was no more stagnant society.

For the first time, King Kayamba constructed a Vishru
temple made of brick at Vishnupur. This signified the commencement of Vishnu worship in Meitei kingdom in an innocuous way. 23

His period marked the beginning of Sanskrit influence on the cultural life of the Meiteis and the evolution of temple architecture. However, the Shan elements were absorbed to the Meitei society, whereas the Brahmins remained as a distinct social class preserving and maintaining of their own religion. Such new changing trend of social process indicates the existence of plural society in Meitei Kingdom. 24

Cheitharol Kumbaba records the socio-economic improvement during the reign of Hungyamba. He introduced performance of Utrong-Hongba (celebration of the death anniversary), Kiyang Tanaba (boat race, an annual festival), U-Hongba (a ceremony of tree), Shangkhu ceremony which was known as Chupshaba later on (oath taking between the dead and living). The people used to wear wax coated shirt. 25

The reign of king Khagemba marked the development in the feudal Meitei state society. His liberal social policy led to the increase of population and helped to expand both habitation and agricultural areas. The Cachari-Muslims, the war
Captives, were allowed to settle in Manipur. This led to emerge a new social class known as Meitei-Fangal in Meitei society. They were given the local women in marriage. However, the increase of population compelled to extend more habitat areas and for betterment of settlement. King established a number of villages. Agriculture was more systematized by the introduction of transplantation method brought by the Muslims.26

King himself was highly aware of the welfare of his subjects. He set up as many as seven granaries (Kei) to store food grains to meet people's necessity during the famine. He established ten markets to provide the facilities of selling the surplus products and purchasing of required commodities. King himself initiated to construct numbers of canals and bunds to facilitate irrigation and to prevent flood.27

During his time, the Meitei had acquired the knowledge to use muskets and guns captured from the Bhans and the Burmese. The art of brick making learnt from the Chinese came to develop. There was brought certain improvement in the art of housing technology by introducing Holmit Yuba, decoration of eaves of the temples and royal house and Sana Yumbi. Tobacco smoking and pipe smoking were used with the coming of the Muslims.28
The traditional Bonamah cult was made very popular. The statue of Vishnu was used during the royal boat race. This indicates that the Meiteis began to practise the dual worship of traditional and Hindu god.  

He paid great attention to the development of the Meitei scripts and number of books deal with different aspects were written at that time.

Different types of sports like Inter-Pana (district) horse hockey, Inter-Pana boat race, archery competition and women race were innovated during the reign of Khagemba. Certain artisan groups such as black-smith, silver-smith, weapon making, brass-making and brick making came to exist at that period.

During the reign of King Khunjaoba Mera Santuba ceremony was started. He dredged the Nambul river from Khwairamband bazar to Chinga hill. He constructed not only bunds but also dug up systematic drains around the market.

As usual, King Paikhomba, dredged the Nambul river and constructed bund along the Imphal river at Singjamei. Tombs from the lanes or leikais of the villages were shifted to
the community land of the village. Lai-Kasha (god-kasha) was constructed and a girl name - Naoroibi was supposed to marry to the god.\textsuperscript{33}

King Charairongba employed foreign artisans particularly the Burmese in the construction of the temples. Therefore, the Burmese influence on the temple architecture was seen.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{Sanskritization}

King Garibaniwaza, was a great religious reformer. He accepted Vaishnavism which was forcibly declared as the state religion. Hinduism brought tremendous religious and social tension in Meitei society. Sanamahi Leikan records that 'for the first time, King Garibaniwaza or Pamheiba was baptised to the new faith like Madhavacharya school of Vaishnavism, by one Gopal Das on the 10th day of Mera (Aswin) along with some of his followers. Later on King became the devout of Ramandi cult under the influence of Santa Das.\textsuperscript{35}

The king under the instigation of Shanta Das decided to bring a forcible change of people's religion and social customs. So, on the first day of Makching (Bright fortnight Magha), many people were forced to perform Mongkhrang iruppa
(i.e. a kind of unbroken promise of the Meiteis which was
done by holding a branch of a tree, known as Hongkhrang
depth in the water particularly at Lilong, Sungjeng pond
etc.). Besides this, the king persuaded the people either
commoners or nobles to believe in new faith by inducing ro-
yal support and reward. By taking such various methods, king
was unable to bring forcible conversion of many people.

The rearing of poultry and pig around the capital
area and meat eating were strictly prohibited. The king de-
clared that those who reared such livestock should be expe-
lled to the countryside. It was a cruel step that King
Caribaniwaza destroyed the temples of nine Umangalis(forest
god). The tombs of former dead kings, queens, princes and
princesses were opened and skeletons of buried corpse were
unearthed. These were cremated. Thus, the cremation of dead
body was introduced to perform in 1725, thairel (February).
In place of the traditional Meitei priests, the brahmins were
charged in the worship of royal deities like Yumthel Lai,
Nongshaba, Pantebibi and Taibangkhaima (Canamahi). The Brah-
mins' sharing of worshiping and ritual duties brought to
minimise the responsibilities of the traditional priests in
certain extent, but it was impossible to destroy the impor-
tance of the traditional priests in Meitei society. The king
bestowed charity to all the Brahmans and strologers in order to improve their position or to know them in society. 37

However, King Garibaniwaza intensified the campaign of Sanskritization by adopting the policy of assimilation, substitution, identification and adoption of new name. Vaishnavism, the royal patronage religion became the state religion. Many of the statues of the Umanglais (forest god) were destroyed. These were collected and buried at Mongba- hanba present site of Mahabali temple. 38 After this, the king undertook the task installing the statues of Hindu gods and goddesses. The image of Hanuman engraved from a stone was installed in present temple of Mahabali. The statues of Rama, Sita, Lakshman, Bharat and Satrughana were also respectively installed. These were put together in the temple of Wangkhei Ningthempukhri Mapal at Imphal. 39

King banned the performing of the ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the traditional faith and these were gradually substituted and modified in Hindu fashion. As for example, Heikru Hitongba performed in Hiyangei (September) was identified as Jal Yatra, the Ahong Khongching performed in Ingel (June) as the Ratha Jatra festival, Chenou Hui Chintu as Govardhan Puja etc. The traditional gods and goddesses were
also assimilated with number of new Hindu gods and goddesses. As for example Laikhurembi was identified as Dashaahuja Levi Durga, Pakhangba as Mahadeva etc. 40

The traditional name of the kingdom was changed to Manipur. Since the Vaisnavism was recognized as a state religion, the racial origin of the Meiteis was started to claim as Aryan origin. 41 Thus, such theory was predominant for many centuries. Both the king and queen were given new Hindu names such as Gopal Singh and Gomati Devi respectively. The king was also given new Hindu titles i.e. Maharaja, Manipureswar and Mekleswar. Another new name of the kingdom was Mekle. 42

Santa Das introduced the Gotra system. The Gotras were assimilated with traditional seven clans or salais of the Meiteis. The Ningthouja clan or salai was identified as Shangdilya gotra, Angom as Kaushika, Chenglei (Serang Lei-shangthem) as Bhardhwaja, Luwang as Kashyap, Khuman as Madhugalya, Moirang as Aitereya and Khabe-Nganba as Gautum. 43

Santa Das with the permission of the king, collected many puyas (chronicles) and burnt (i.e. 122 puyas) into ashes at Utra Kangla. 44 Thus, the store house knowledge of the
Meiteis was largely demolished by the foolishness act of the king.

King Garibaniwaza should not be regarded as a modernist but better to call as a Sanskritizationist in the history of Manipur. At the same time, he was not free from a controversy. His development programmes was absolutely one sided. The traditional religion, most of the social customs and habits etc. were given up in the interest of Sanskritization. On the ashes of these, he launched his development programmes but not on the basis of traditional one.

The cantons of the Ramayana and the Parvas of the Mahabharata were translated from Sanskrit and Bengali into Meitei. This was an attempt to make the myth, legend and history of the Meiteis interwoven with the legendary epic of the Hindus.

During the reign of Chit Shai, Goudiya Vaisnavism got a great set-back due to the withdrawal of royal support. Thus, Vaisnavism could not be popularised at that time. Once again, traditional religion revived for a while.

After the death of king Garibaniwaza, socially and
politically Manipur was thrown into a sorry state, until King Bhagyachandra Singh returned to the throne of Manipur in 1773. In this period, Ramandi Vaishnavism got set back because of the absence of royal patronage, Chit Shai's revivalism campaign of traditional faith and the Burmese offensive. In the Meitei Society, there was no more development but chaos everywhere due to the Burmese onslaught. Population was also reduced as many Meitei war captives including craftsmen were carried away to Burma.

When Bhagyachandra Singh recovered the throne of Manipur, without delay, he reorganized the whole kingdom. A remarkable development occurred in the field of religion. Ramandi cult was replaced by Bengal school of Vaishnavism. The king was baptised to Gaudiya Vaishnavism by Pramananda. 45

His period was the heyday of Chaitnaya school of Vaishnavism. However, Gaudiya Vaishnavism was made as state religion in place of Ramandi Vaishnavism. The king bowed constantly to propagate this sect. The king adopted new title of Rajarishi. Having taken the role of spiritual leader of the state, he himself was involved in the propagation of the new faith. His daughter Simabati alias Sija Laloibi who was supposed to marry to god, was also baptised to this 'Vaishnavism'. 46 Thus, within a short span, the Gaudiya Vaishnavism
was deeply penetrated to the nook and corner of the kingdom under the careful royal patronage.

The king took initiation to make a number of wooden statues like Shri Govinda Je, Shri Bijoy Govinda, Shri Adi-vaita, Shri Copinath, Nityananda Ana Prabhu, Madan Mohan and Rasheswari. Except Rashevari, all are made out of jackfruit tree. These gods were respectively installed at different places. It is a basic strategy of the king to make Vaisnavism as a popular state religion. King's distribution of these images to different areas led to open some advantageous worshiping centres of this new faith in the kingdom.

With the intensification of Sanskritization, the position of the Brahmins in Meitei society was improved. It was compulsory duty of the king to protect both the Brahmins who were regarded as a virtual preacher of the Lord Vishnu and the cow which was believed as the vehicle of Lord Vishnu. They were exempted from the work of cultivation. They were also authorised to perform the religious work of the king and the nobles and were allowed to inhabit in every village of the kingdom. The temple supported by the villagers, were maintained by the Brahmins. Gangumuei Kabui states that not only the the temples acted as feudal control agencies but
also these served as the centres of religious propagation. A new honour title known as Ziga was entitled to the Brahmins. 48

King Bhagyachandra Singh introduced different forms of Ras Mandau such as Maharas, Kunjaras and Basanta ras. The newly emerged ras forms were synthesis of the traditional Meitei dance forms and Visnavite theme. Number of Palas (i.e., association of dancer and singer) like Ariba Pala, Sebak Pala, Hol Pala, Basanta Pala, Khubak Pala etc. were set up during his time. 49 Of course, racial martial arts of the Meitei would be gradually transformed into dance i.e., jagoi and pung cholom.

Both the Laikthiba (recitation of epic stories in Bengali language) and Haiba (translation of this recited stories in Manipuri) and Wari Liba (narration of the story in Manipuri language by a single person) were commenced. The introduction of these new system caused to make popularised the great epic and the religious stories (i.e., the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavat Puran, the Gita, the Chaityana-Charitramitra, Bass Vatar etc.) of the Hindus in the Meitei society. 50

There were numerous religious and life cycle ceremonies
viz. Choidep Chongba (a kind of dance to make please the god carried out during the Rathjatra and Durgapujah), Kotha Kritan had been performed during the Hari Utthan in E(eight) Kera (October, Swast Pujah (birth ceremony), Nahutpa, Nu-gunthangba etc. were recorded to introduce. 51

The offshoots of the Maharaja and royal princes were named as Ningthemacha or Rajakumars. They were addressed an honour name of Sanakhya. The social outcaste section was reduced to untouchable level. For the first time there was class tension and split between the Hindu and non-Hindu subjects, during the reign of king Bhagyachandra Singh. 52

In each and every aspect of the day-to-day life of the Hinduised Meitei society was profoundly influenced by the Bengali language and literature. The food habits of the Meiteis came to undergo change. Bengali scripts started to be used in writing book and other religious work. 53

With the intensification of Hinduization in greater degree, the Meiteis came to habituate the use of Bengali clothes, dhoties kurtas. In spite of that, the Meiteis continued to wear their traditional dress but the nobles and royalty sections predominantly wore the Indian clothing.
style. It is highly praiseworthy that the Meitei women could properly maintain their own identity traditional dress weaved by themselves for many centuries.

The reign of Chourajit Singh brought a new life to the Vaisnava movement in Manipur. He constructed seven institutional buildings for improvement of Sankritan and other cultural activities in the state. The worship of Birenchandra by the crown prince was introduced in Manipur. Sankritana, during his reign reached its high water mark.

There were reported certain progress during the reign of king Marjit. That the population came to increase and multiplied. Probably, in imitation of Burmese style, he built two masonry and introduced the installation of lion-like fabulous animals before the gate of his capital.

BURMESE INFLUENCE:

In 1819, the Burmese inflicted a cruel defeat upon king Marjit. The whole valley was completely destroyed by looting, captivating both men and women folks, torturing, massacring etc. Major section of the population fled to neighbouring kingdoms like Cachar, Tripura and Sylhet. Even the
cattles became wanderness. Fields remained uncultivated and so these were full of grass. The kingdom got completely exhausted of manpower. The Burmese stayed in the valley for some years. They forced to marry Meitei women. Hence, for the first time, the Burmese blood was certainly mixed to the Meitei society. In Meitei society there were no development in each and every socio-political cultural and economic life. Such happening was remarkably recorded as a Seven Years Devastation in the history of Manipur.

Under the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, Manipur regained her independence. King Gambhir Singh soon properly reorganised the kingdom. The social festivals like Ratha Yatra (car festival) Purna Yatra (the return of car festival) and festival of Goshtha Astami. He formulated Sanjanjenba dance drama. King improved the state communication system. The migration and settlement of the Kukis in Manipur had been recorded during the reign of King Nar Singh.57

British India's connection with the kingdom of Manipur brought to introduce western system of education in Meitei society during the reign of Chandrakirti. Sir James Johnston, a British Political Agent set up an English school later known as Johnstone School. About 2000 migrants were allowed to settle in Manipur. It enhanced the labour population of the kingdom.58
RELIGION:

The primary basis for the inspiration of the Meitei religion was the mysterious natural objects which could not be controlled by them and beyond their mind. Contemporary socio-political and economic circumstances, developments and aspects of the society are also considered as the main secondary basis for the growth of the Meitei religion.

It is possible that in the beginning the Meiteis were the worshippers of the natural objects. But with the passage of time, according to their developmental political change and socio-economic transformation, they also worshipped different gods to make suitable in their developing living life.

The earliest religious ideas of the Meiteis are those of a primitive animism where the forces around them which could not be controlled or understood by them. They believed in those gods who dwelled in these natural objects i.e. sun, moon, big trees etc. They were deeply influenced apparently by mysterious working of the awe-inspiring forces of nature. They looked upon all nature as a living presence. Naturally, the sense of dependence of human welfare on the powers of nature finds its expression in various forms of worship.
By and large, the Meiteis' religion was influenced by living and non-living materials. With the process of intermingling absorption and amalgamation of various ethnic groups caused to make as many as nine clans like Ningthouja or Mangang, Luwang, Khuman, Chenglei (Charang-Leishangthem), Thanga-Kangbong, Angom, Noirang, Kha-Nganba and Heirem-Khunjam. Later on, only the seven clan i.e. Ningthouja, Khuman, Noirang, Luwang and Chenglei, having independent separate territories emerged in the valley. Apart from the worship of the natural objects, the people of these seven clan worshipped their different ancestors as their deities. Presumably, some of the clan leaders who appeared as a god were real ancestors of the ethnic groups or Salei (Clan), while most of them being the leaders of the tribe, were political progenitors. Such ancestors bear historical significances i.e. rememberance of its originality and preservation of clan identity. By way of the example, Khumanpokpa alias Thongaren was worshipped by the Khumans, Luwangpokpa alias Poireiton by the Luwangs, Nongpok Ningthouja alias Pakhangba by the Ningthouja, Pureiromba by the Angoms, Ngangningsing by the Noirangs, Khambingou by the Khaba Nganbas and Nungaoyumthanba by the Chengleis". 59

Atiya Guru Sidaba the supreme god created the Meitei
Universe as well as human beings. After testing the intelligence of his sons, Sanamahi and Pakhangba, he chose Pakhangba as a king to rule the newly created divine world. Historically, Nongda Lairen Pakhangba established primary Meitei state by subjugating Luwang, Mangangs, Angoms, Chakpas and absorbing other tribes. This brought a great structural transformation in religious aspects. With the emergence of the Meitei state, Sanamahi became the important household god, while Pakhangba was regarded as divinity king of the earth. Thus Meidingu Pakhangba propagated Sanamahi-Pakhangba cult to the subjugated clans and absorbed tribes. The Meiteis had the idol worship. These statue were put inside the temples.

However, the supreme God Atiya Guru Sidaba is described as sky god who remain as the supreme God but his position was reduced in concept. The actual important state worshipped God was Sanamahi. Leirema the consort of supreme God, became the supporter goddess of her son Sanamahi. She was identified as earth goddess. As a consequence of the emergence of new confederated Meitei state Sanamahi was required as the important God head and it reduced the clan ancestral gods to second class status.
Probably, it should be a political objective of King Pakhangba that his divinity status and the propagation of Sanamahi cult to the people would strengthen his position. Later on, he was also worshipped by the people. It was due to his adventure of military work. On the other hand it was on account of his successors who wanted to make themselves the descendents of the godly king. Their pretention helped to get massive loyalty from his subject. The sense of loyalty carries the idea of awe and respect of the divinity possessed kings. The development of awe and respect brought to think the general people that only the divinity blood of Mongda Leiren Pakhangba was eligible for the throne of Kangla. Thus, the Pakhangba cult was propagated by the future kings of Kangla, and their subjects in the form of snake. The emergence of Pakhangba cult did not reduce the importance of God Sanamahi. God Sanamahi the most important god was worshipped primarily for protection and prosperity of life and for the welfare of the people. He dwelt in each and every house of the Meitei kingdom. But Pakhangba was worshipped to cure the disease of the people. He usually dwelt in the forest, bush, lakes, rivers etc., since he was incarnated in the form of snake.

The Meiteis have as many as 364 Umanglais pervading
over the valley. Out of these there were four important deities or gods residing at the four corners of the valley. God Thangjing was presiding at Moirang on the south-western, Noubbru on the top of the mountain at the north, Karjing at the northeast and Wangbren at Sugu at the south.

Laisharuba, the traditional ancestral worship, preserves the ancient Meitei culture. Actually, Laisharaba ceremony is distinguished by strange mysterious beliefs and superstition, strength and weakness and charm and happiness. In a considerable way, it has been performed either in honour of ancestral god of each sangei or in honour of dalai or clan heroes i.e. Pibas. According to L. Ibunogohal Singh, "Umanglai had been broadly divided into 3(three) kinds (i) Umanglai for the whole Meiteis, (ii) Umanglai belonging to the whole Meiteis but their duty of worship had been done by a particular sangei like Soraren by Sorensangbam and (iii) Umanglai for the sangei lineage i.e. Hijamalirema of Hijam".60 S.N. Parret also states that "Laisharaba has 3(three) forms, although the differences in observance between them are relatively minor. These are Kanglei form performed at the palace, Moirang form observed by the Moirang yok and the Chakpa form carried out by the vois."61
The popularity of Sanamahi was, of course, slashed away with the introduction of Rama Cult. Now, god Sanamahi is reduced to a mere household deity but the Pakhangba worship was apparently almost neglected but not lost totally. Worship Durga identified with Panthoibi led to the reduction of the importance of Panthoibi. By building of temples and mandaps, king institutionalized the worship of Rama and his followers. Besides these, number of Hindu gods and goddess i.e. Mahadeva, Vishakarma, Hanuman, Lakshmi etc. were worshipped by the Meiteis.

The right of management of the Hindu gods and temples and mandaps were handed over to the Brahmins. They also performed most of the ritual and ceremonial duties i.e., birth, marriage, death, other household rituals. The traditional maibas (priest) and maibis (priestess) could be ignored in ritual ceremonies though the Brahmins occupied important position in rituals and religious aspects. The establishment of Vaishnavism in Meitei Kingdom could not dare to destroy the custom of Umanglai (forest god). It continued to preserve magnificently the traditional customs. It can be concluded that although the Meiteis believed in Vaishnavism and worshipped various number of Hindu gods and goddess, still they remained to worship traditional gods and goddess. There was a religious syncretism between the Hindu beliefs and traditional Meitei myth.
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