CHAPTER-V

CONTRIBUTIONS OF HINDU TEMPLE IN SOCIAL SYSTEM AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT
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For more than six hundred years Hinduism and Meiteism co-existed in Manipur check by jowl; they were, therefore, bound to influence each other. The fusion of the cultural traditions of Hinduism and Meiteism gave birth to a composite culture. There are two distinct phases of the growth of this culture. First was from the 15th century to the first half of the 18th century and the other were from the second half of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century. The main contribution of the first phase was made by king Garibniwaz and the second phase for the growth of the composite culture was under Maharaja Bhaigyachandra (Jai Singh), aided by his liberalism, it bloomed as a common cultural heritage of Manipur. The kings of Manipur were devout and staunch Hindu, they did not close the door to Islam, Christianity and other religions. For generations the Maharajas have personally adopted the Vaishnava faith. These sects gained a prominent place over the ages. Many temples of Lord Rama, Lord Krishna and Radha were set-ups by the kings throughout the ages in different part of the valley.
The medieval period is famous for many faceted cultural developments. Medieval Hindu and Meitei saints by their attempts to create a brotherhood between two communities greatly helped in the cultural development. Artists, musician's etc., also contributed to its growth in their own way. Under the influence of several movements in medieval period, the Hindu and Meitei communities began to imbibe each other's thoughts traditions and customs such as marriage, class, distinctions, dress, food, language, music, architecture, etc.

Manipur with a very rich cultural heritage of its own was an ideal place for the uprising and mingling of new cultural traditions. "The Meitei arts and culture had assimilated in its melting pot the cultures of all the migrants of all hues including the best traditions from the neighbouring places, like Burma and Bengal etc., which Manipuri genius had transformed into one of the finest cultural traditions of the world".¹ The most important aspects of cultural developments during the period were: the Manipuri culture was largely religious, in the growth and enrichment of this culture people from different parts of Manipur and outside contributed equally; and the cultural norms which the Meitei introduced in the field of architecture, painting, music, dance, etc., deeply influenced the future course of Manipuri culture during the subsequent centuries. Thus, the growth of a composite culture in Manipur is as a result of contact, intermixing and assimilation of the cultural traditions of India, Burma and other Southeast Asia and the Meitei culture during the medieval period.

The association of Hindus with Manipuris was not through the invaders of the west but through the medium of the hindu priest and Hindu traders who were one of the most important conduits of Manipuris foreign trade. The contact with the Burma and other Southeast Asiatic countries were through foreign trade and invasion. A number of Hindu saints and preachers came to Manipur and settled especially in the valley. They adopted this country as their own and contributed for the growth of a new synthesis of culture. It was during the reign of king Garibniwaz that Hinduism was declared as state religion. However, the Meiteism was continued to practice side by side with Hinduism. Those who converted to Hinduism also continued to worship traditional deities. In the field of scholarship, literature and art also the two communities came under each other’s influence. Meitei scholars began to study Hindu philosophy and sciences. They were attracted towards the study of Hindu sciences of medicine and astrology.

The mutual linguistic exchange was reflected. Sanskrit language and Bengali scripts began to use by the Manipuri scholars side by side with the Meitei scripts. Religious instruction is imparted in Sanskrit and Bengali. Its growth and development have been so remarkable that there is no exaggeration in stating that it has served, in the last few centuries, as a powerful vehicle of literary expression. For the enhancement of the knowledge the Sanskrit texts of mathematics, astrology, medicine, politics etc, were translated into Manipuri language. During the period between king
Bhaigachandra and king Chandrakirti many religious books from Sanskrit and Bengali were translated into Manipuri language.\(^{[1]}\) The rulers of this kingdom were also great patrons of dance and music. The most notable ruler among them was Raja Bhaigachandra. Raja Bhaigachandra was a man with imagination and was deeply versed in Vaisnavic literature. He devised many notes, scales and melodies of which Raja was famous. The Raja introduced the Nata-Sanskirtan (Anouba-pala) and also formulated a classical dance which is known as Rasa Lila, a form of dance drama depicting Shri Krishna playing Ras Lila with the milkmaids of Vrindaban.\(^{[2]}\) The evolution of its distinct form was the result of an interaction between the earliest ritualistic dances and the Vaisnava Bhakti cult. He dedicated the first Manipuri Rasa to Shri Givindaji on the 11\(^{th}\) day of the bright half of the month of Mera/Kartika, 1779 on the occasion of the installation ceremony of Shri Govindaji.\(^{[3]}\) The Courts offered many musician and dancer, patronage and livelihood. The best musician and dancers were collected and encouraged them to choreograph dances for Vaishnavite rituals. Some Sanskrit and Bengali works on music or devotional song were translated into Manipuri language. The close association with other Indian musicians and exchange of thoughts between them also promoted the general progress of dance and music in the period.

3. C.K., p. 133.
Thus, long association, the growth of the converted Meiteis and their mixing freely with the Hindu community, the demand for peace, justice, security and proper government, the spirit of tolerance, the desire to admire and assimilate each other’s custom, broader and tolerating outlook of the Hindu and Meitei saints and their attempts to unify the two communities, the Meitei ruler’s liberal patronage to the fine arts and litters and the influence of several liberal movements in medieval period, led the Hindu and the Meitei communities to imbibe each other’s though, traditions and customs and consequently many important social changes took place.

This process of synthesis and harmony continued throughout the medieval and modern period and Bhaigyachandra’s reign was its high watermarks as evidenced in almost every walk of social and cultures life. The Manipuris particularly the Meiteis adopted a variety of Hindu traditions and customs in their day to day life. In domestic life, in music, in the fashions of dress, in the ways of cooking, in the ceremonials of marriage, in the celebrations of festivals, art and architecture shows very clear the influence of Hindu culture. There are references in chronicle that Brahmins were employed in the state service and they held important posts. King Garibaniwaz appointed Santidas Adhikari as his political and religious advisor. Thus, the spirit of mutual harmony, co-operation and toleration began to grow among them.

Manipur rulers showed respect towards Hinduism and many of them converted in it. They respected Hindu saints and Sadhus. They used to go to the sacred places as pilgrimage in different parts of India. They also donated land for the construction of
temples and mandapas. Financial assistance was also made for its maintenance. The Hindu Brahmins enjoyed a large measure of liberty with regard to their religious rites and ceremonies. The temple cult was almost monopolised by the Brahmin priests. In social customs and etiquette many common practice came to be adapted. The life cycle of a Manipuri in its various stages of eight Sanskaras (rituals) is marked by the performance of the Sankirtan. These sanskaras constituted the soul of Manipuri culture. The birth of a child and marriages were celebrated with Hindu rites and rituals. In the wedding ceremony many common practices and dresses came to be adopted. Many Hindu festival were also introduced i.e., Krishna Janma (birth of Lord Krishna), Durga Puja (worship of goddess Durga), Saraswati Puja (worship of goddess Saraswati), Diwali (in honour of Lakshmi) Shiv-Ratri (in honour of Lord Shiva) and Holi (in honour of shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu )etc. “There are Hindu ceremonies, performed by Brahmins, such as the milking of 108 milch cows before the temple of Govindaji on the presence of the images of Radha-Krishna at the rives bank, when the people cry aloud for rain and the priests mutter mantras”.¹ Some of the old traditional festivals were replace by Hindu festivals. Such as Kongba-Leithong Phatpa was replaced by Bishnu Shangkranti (April-May) the festival of Ahong Khongchig (in July) was replaced by Ratha-Jatra, offering of foods to the ancestor (in September and October), was replace by Pritulok-Puja, Chanou Huichintu (in November) was replaced by Govardhan Puja etc.²

² O. Bhogeshworo, Sanamahi Laikan, pp. 63-64.
The conversion of the Meiteis in Hinduism created a new social order. The social changes were mainly the product of certain economic developments and religious elements. From the 17th century onwards, we find two strong social currents flowing in Manipur; one was to assimilate the foreign elements and another was the introduction of caste system. The varna system was began to enforce. The orthodox section during the period accepted hereditary instead of culture as the deciding factor in the determination of caste.

According to traditional belief and principles all Manipuris are equal and there is no distinction or discrimination among them. But with the introduction of Hinduism caste and class distinctions arose among them. The Manipuri kings championed the cause of protecting all the section of the society. The conception of caste system was gradually developed among the Manipuris. All the Meiteis were regarded themselves as kshatriyas. The conception of untouchables evolved in due course in the Manipuri society. They did not inter into matrimonial alliances with each other. They were divided into seven Salais on clans. Each Salais or clan was divided into a number of Yumnaks (surnames). Later, the Brahmins, the Muslims the Lois etc. were included within the framework of the Manipuri society. With the introduction of Vaishnavism in Manipur the Salais changes to Gotra i.e. Ningthouja as Shandillya, Angom as Gautam, Luang as Kashyap, Khuman as Madhugalya, Moirang as Atrey-Angiras, Khaba-ngaba as Bharadvaj and Sarang-Leishangthem or Chenglei as Vashistha.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11} O. Bhogeshwor, \textit{Sanamahi Laikan}, pp. 59-60.
The Lois was entitled to be considered as Kshatriyas after undergoing some ceremonies of an initiatory nature. The Loi is not recognised as a pure Manipuri, they appear to be descendants of the former inhabitants of Moirang one of the original tribes which formerly occupied the valley to the south.

The Brahmins were regarded as the highest among the varnas. Distinctions made amongst the Brahmins on the basis of occupation, learning, moral purity, religious, regions or locality and family etc. They enjoyed certain social economic, political legal and religious privileges. But this privilege seems to have been confined to the learned Brahmins only. The Brahmins occupied the most respectable and prominent position in society, but their functions were not confined to learning and performance of priestly duties. Some of them were scholars as well as ministers. No ceremony could be performed without Brahmin priests and no important religious or social matter can be settled without referring to the Brahmin community. They were in charge of Shuddhi ceremonies (purification ceremonies).

During the community feast only the Brahmins could cook and serve the food. The non-Brahmins could not touch the deities. Brahmins were priests in temples, owners of large estates, high officials and so on. A large number of land grants were made to them. They could not awarded death sentence. The Brahmins and the Meitei Kshatriyas in particular were distinguished for the purity and simplicity of their lives.

1. M. Kirti Singh, Religious Developments in Manipur in the 18th and 18th Centuries, p. 90.
People were generally remarkable for their qualities of honesty, courage etc. In general, the character of the people was marked by and exceptionally high degree of honesty. The Hindu culture influence on the upper class Meitei society was reflected in the later dress, food and social manners. Sacrifices involving the killing of animals and drinking were stopped by the king. Their food habits were replaced by vegetarianism. On religious feasts, the Manipuri Brahmans mainly discharge cooking. Food offerings for the deity consists of cooked and uncooked articles were also vegetarians, fish, meat and wine are not offered to them.

Women occupied a very honourable high position and freedom in Manipur society. Women had complete freedom of though it was desired that they remain under the protection of some male guardian. They attain temples for public worship without considering social classes and age groups. They move freely, publicly attended the feast dances and even composed hymns. Some of them were very learned and were imminent literatures. Women of the nobility and higher castes were carefully educated. Music and dancing formed an important part of their curriculum. Women were well versed in dancing and music as well. Polygamy was in vogue but the Pardha system was not known. There are numerous references of women’s participation in feast and festivals. Women were permitted to take to the study of religious text and indulge in spiritual activities. We get a number of references of learned women who dedicated there lives for the service of the god and goddess.
One of the leading women in 19th century was Sija Lairoibi, the daughter of king Bhaigyachandra. She looks after the Pujas of Govindaji. Sija Lairoibi through her devotion to Govindaji had high spiritual attainments. Her dance and song reflect her intense devotion. “It was Lairoiba Sija the ‘Radha of Manipur’ who gave concrete shape to an extremely devotional form of dance, conceived by her father Jai Singh.\cite{1}

She used to dance before Govindaji playing the part of ‘Raseswori’. She also composed some devotional songs in Bengali to sing for the pleasure of her beloved Lord Govindaji. Sija Lairoibi, the daughter of king Jayasimha went to Nabadwip as a profounder of Gauriya Vaishnavism and found a temple of Anuprabhu in this area.\cite{2}

She acted as the chief priestess of the temple and look after the pujas of Lord Govindaji. During the reign of Maharaja Churachand (1891-1941), Maharani Dhanamanjari Devi, the chief queen of Maharaja Churachand, led the women dancers at the royal mandapa with superb skill and devotion.\cite{3}

The important religious institution was the Brahma Sabha, which framed an elaborate ritual, regulating in detail every point on the basis of scriptures. Brahma Sabha, the highest authority on religious affairs was established during the reign of Bhaigyachandra (1759-1798) and a book known as Wayen Lairik containing all the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{1. J. Roy, *History of Manipur*, p. 53.}
\footnote{2. M. Kirti Singh, *Religious Developments in Manipur in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, pp. 95-96.}
\footnote{3. Mangsuri Chaki-Sircar, *Feminism in a traditional Society*, p. 108.}
\end{footnotes}
rules and regulation to be observed by an orthodox Meitei Hindus was composed.\textsuperscript{[11]} The king was the head of the institution and the Acarya or Raja-Purohit assisted him and many other learned Brahmin priests of high social rank. During the reigns of king Chandrakirti(1834-1844, 1850-1886) and Churachand(1891-1941), the Brahma Sabha was very powerful institution. The Sabha encourage to establishing Hindu temples and mandapa in each village. The community was ordered to support these financially. The Brahma Sabha by the time of king Chandrakirti was a part of the palace, which interpreted the smriti texts for the people.\textsuperscript{[12]} The Brahma Sabha was a committee of Brahmins who suggest the methods of Hindu rites and rituals and the mode of worship in the temple. The Brahma Sabha also conducted the initiation ceremonies. The person of a non-hindu community want to be a Hindu, he has to take permission from the Brahma Sabha for conversion. Brahma Sabha also encourages all the Manipuri Brahmins to wear Chandan marks on their nose and forehead after daily bath and also in the public function. Peoples were punished if they ignored the rule and regulation issued by the Sabha. The Brahma Sabha has the power to outcast any person or family if he or she violated the rules and regulation of Hinduism. For joining the society the ostracised family should paid a particular sum of money with an application to the Brahma Sabha for performing Sudhi or purification ceremony.

\textsuperscript{2} M. Kirti Singh, *Religious Developments in Manipur in the 18th and 18th Centuries*, p. 244.
This system was known as Mangba-Sengba (unclean and clean). "On October 31, 1947, the Brahma Sabha issued an order to ostracise 38 persons on the ground that they were the members of Meitei Marup or devotees of Sanamahi religion and that had renounced Gauriya Vaishnavism without any respect to the Veads and Brahmanas and that they had their own sect mark on their forehead. The order further asked every Hindu Gauriya Vaishnavite not to mix up with them in any religious function and not to dine with them".11] Thus, Brahma Sabha was the highest authority on Hindu religious affairs in Manipur and the decision of the Sabha was the last word in many social and religious issues.

The primary function of the Brahma Sabha was propagation of Vaishnavism, initiation of disciples, provision of ethico-devotional codes and holding of religious festivals. Brahma Sabha was the guardians of religion and morality and kept close watch over disciples. The heads of the Sabha maintained agents at different localities and paid personal visits at the and thereby tried to elevate the moral and spiritual standards of the villages. The Brahma Sabha also played an important role not only in the sphere of religion but in other fields also. It enriched Manipur life socially and educationally and contributed a great deal to the realm of literature and art. Thus the Brahma Sabha was primarily organised for effective propagation of Vaishnava faith and for spiritual and cultural uplift of the people at large.

1. M. Kirti Singh, Religious Developments in Manipur in the 18th and 18th Centuries, p. 118.
The Meiteis adopted Hindu doctrines and followed many of their traditions. They offered sweets with great pleasure on the temple or saints listened with reverence to the recitation of the Gita. It shows that the Meiteis were favourably inclined towards Hinduism. They were strongly supported to idol worship, which was practice before the introduction of Hinduism. The rulers liberally endowed the Hindu temples and shrines. They installed a permanent image on those temples and become the centre of religious activities. Visits to the places connected with Vaishnavism are also considered as meritorious acts. They always make arrangements for the daily worship of ‘Radha-Govinda’ in their own family temples or used to visits to the nearest temple.

An important feature of vaishnavism in Manipur was the popular worship of the Avatara, i.e., descents or incarnations of Vishnu. The two major forms of Hindu Vaishnavism was practice in Manipur since 17th century A.D. One was Ramandi Vaishnavism and another was Gauriya vaishnavism. Ramananda, who flourished in the first half of the 15th century, was the first great Bhakti saint of north India. He propounded Ramandi cult. He opened the door of Bhakti to all without any distinction of birth, cast, creed or sex. He was a worshipper of Rama and believed in two great principles, namely, perfect love for god and human brotherhood. During the period of Garibaniwaz, the Brahmins preached Ramandi cult as the highest form of religion and the king declared it as the state religion with the instigation of Santidas a Brahmin priest.

The Gauriya Vaishnavism was introduced by Maharaja Bhaigyachandra. This sect was originated to Chaitanya (1486-1533) one of the greatest saint of North India. He preached the religion of intense faith in one Supreme Being who he called Krishna or Hari. He was free from ritualism, and his worship consisted in love and devotion. He was a great exponent of Krishnite form of Vaishnavism.

Chaitanya accepted that Krishna alone is the most prefect God. Vaishnavism, as preached by Chaitanya, created an unprecedented sensation and enthusiasm in Bengal and its neighbouring religious like Orissa and Assam. It was his followers and devoted disciples, who after the master's death, systematised his teachings and organised themselves into a sect called Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Bhagyachandra Maharaja successfully established this school of Vaishnavism in Manipur. This is one of the notable contributions of the Maharaja as a part of his religious reform policy. Many Vaishnava missionaries came to Manipur during the reign of Bhagyachandra and propagated Vaishnavism.

It is said that a relative of Chaitanya, named Ram Narayan visited Manipur during the time of king Bhagyachandra. "Vaisnavic cult from Bengal was spread into Manipur through the hard work and sense of dedication as missionaries of a handful of religious teachers who hailed from Bengal. They brought with them the entire ‘Vaisnab Padabali’ of Bengal and taught the local singers to sing exactly in the Bengali fashion."[2]

A very distinctive feature of Vaishnavism was the concept of Bhakti. The concept of Bhakti means single-minded devotion to one god, the object of the devotee’s adoration is to secure the grace of god for the sake of salvation. “The word Bhakti first appears in the later Vedic texts. The earliest reference to worship of and devotion to a personal god, out of which Vaisnavism arose, may be traced in the Astadhyayi of Panini (c.5the century B.C)”[1] Bhakti loving faith in god, an important element of Vaishnavism, began to growth rapidly from the time of Gupta period.[2] The doctrine of Bhakti or devotional faith, as a means to salvation, and opposed to the path of action (Karma-marga) and the path of knowledge (Jnanamarga) is considered to be the foundation of modern Vaishnavism.[3] The Bhakti cult discarded the rituals and sacrifices as modes of worship and instead emphasised the purity of heart and mind, humanism and devotion as the simple way to realisation of God. The Bhakti movement was essentially monotheistic and the devotees worshipped one personal god, who could either have form (saguna) or be formless (nirguna). The followers of the former, known as Vaishnavas, were further subdivided into Krishnamargis and Ramamargies, who regarded Rama or Krishna both incarnations of Vishnu as their personal God respectively. The followers of Nirguna Bhakti discarded idol worship. They said that God is omnipresent and resides within the heart of man. The Manipuris recognised Saguna Bhakti, belief one personal god and image worship. To fulfil it they built temples in many places and kept idol for worship. All the dances, festivals and Lila are oriented towards Bhakti devotion.

1. N.D. Choudhury, Historical Archaeology of Central Assam, p. 108.
The temple is the spiritual centre from which religious and social life was regulated. Temple going and places of daily public worship were introduced. Before the advent of Hinduism daily worship was practice only in the house. All the religious rites and festivals connected with Vaishnavism are performed by the Manipuris with due ceremonies in front of the temples. Worship of Hindu deities through games and sports were also practice in Manipur. It helped to develop indigenous sports in Manipur. Some of the important games and sports were played in front of the temple or temple ground. The deity was the witness of the games. The important games as a part of religious festivals are Hiyang (Boat race) and Yubi-Lakpi (Snatching the coconut). During the reign of Khagemba in the 17th Century, the king and the image of Vishnu also participate in boat race in order to amuse the people with game.\(^1\) It is a religious festival, held during the month of September, where God is worshipped through boat race. Another indigenous game of Manipur is Yubi-Lakpi (snatching of coconut). “In the Vijaya Govindaji temple people put on the guise of gods and demons and play these games. It is symbolic of the old legend which tells the fight between gods and demons for the drug of immortality in the churning of ocean”.\(^2\) Thus, idols were regarded as the symbols of divine being and their worship through games & sports in front of the temple was also a common feature with all Manipur Hindus.

The contribution of the Manipuri Vaishnavas to the music and dance through Kirtan and Rasa and its performance in front of the temple are widely recognised. Dance perform in front of the temple is not new in Manipur. This system was practice before the introduction of Hinduism in Manipur. The classical dance of Laiharaoba is purely a ceremonial dance. It is performed only before the temple, after observing necessary and incidental Pujas, of the god for whom the performance is held. With the establishment of the permanent Hindu temples regular performance of devotional dance and music of different items were developed. "Dances are devotional or ritualistic rather than entertainment of the eyes. It is a ‘Sadhan-Bhakti’ a kind of devotion to god for both the dancers and the on lookers".\[1\] Among the most important dance is Ras Dance. Ras dance is generally performed only in front of the temple. Devotion to the temple deity through dance is its main theme. Ras Lila performances follow in other temples after its celebration at the royal temple, Govindaji. The dance is religious and a medium of worship. It is never exhibited as a show before any guest. "Because Manipur Ras is not for showing to audience or lookers on, but it is nothing but a dhyan or job (meditation of and devotion to) of god who played in Brindaban in human form”.\[2\] To the vaishnavas of Manipur, the Sankirtan (which includes the Ras Lila is really a Mahayajana- a great form of worship and prayer, associated closely with the life of the people".\[3\]

2. L. Iboongolah Singh, Introduction to Manipur, p. 117.
Dancing as a profession for few classes of people is unknown to them. Dance at that time was not confined to a particular professional dancer. Every one could join the dance festival if he or she is experience on it. There was no division between the rich and poor, men and women, old and young. Anybody who does not belong to the social fold of Manipuri Hindus could not take part in it. Most of the villages had their own groups for Jagoi (dance) and Pala (musician). They also attained the royal temple for celebration of ritual performance. The royal family, participate dance in many occasion. Mentioned may be made of ie., Shija Lairabi, daughter of Bhaigyachandra, family members of Raja Nara Singh, Chruchand Singh etc. As a devotion to the temple deity they participates Rasa dance, Jalakeli (devotional play in water) and Kirtan. Even in the Laiharaoba (merrymaking of god), pre-Vaishnavite dance, the kings, members of the royal family, officials, and the common people participate in it under the direction of high priests and priestess. King Bhaigyachandra, participated Nat Sankirtana, that preceding the Ras Lila, at the time of the first dedication of Ras Lila in 1779. He played on Pung (Mridanga), while his uncle Ngoubram Shai (Shah) was the leader of the vocal group. In the Ras Lila young princess Vimbabati played the role of Radha while, the chief queen did the leading Sakhi (makok chingbi vrinda sakhi) with other queens and members of royal family participating as Gopies. Visit to the temple and pilgrimage and their performance of devotional dance and music are considered as meritorious acts and part of their cultural life.

The temples are remain busy throughout the year with socio-religious activities such as scripture reading, devotional singing sessions, ritual, feasting, weddings, funeral ceremonies. Ritual connected with the various stages of life such as initiation into the Vaisnavism, called Laiminglouba, marriage and death rites and connected ceremonies were also performed or take place in the mandapa of local temples. Village’s mandapas were also used as centres of diffusion of Bengali and Sanskrit knowledge. The art of story telling (wari liba) and narration and explanation of sacred texts (Lairik Thiba-Haiba) in the temple mandapas by a learned Brahmin was introduced from the time of Bhaigyachandra reign.\(^{[1]}\) The themes took up from the sacred texts such as Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas.

Each of the major Vaishnava festivals and ceremonies like Ratha-Yatra, Dolyatra, Jalakeli, Ras Lila etc., begins at the royal temple Govindaji and followed by hundreds of smaller temples all over the valley. All the Vaishnava festivals and ceremonies at the royal temple organised by the temple committee called Loishang while in other temple, community organised it under the supervision of the Brahman priest at his residence mandapa.

\(^{[1]}\) E. Nilikanta Singh, *Fragments of Manipur Culture*, p. 60.
Most of the temples in ancient and medieval India had a large numbers of Devadasi (attendants to gods) or Natis (dancing girls). Because dancing was included in the ritual at the temple. The temples engaged them for singing and dancing before idols for fanning them during procession and generally adding to the attraction of temple rituals and feasts. The custom of the association of dancing girls with temple probably became quite common in the 6th century A.D.\footnote{1} By the time of the visit of Yuan Chwang (7th century) the institution of temple dancers had been well established in India.\footnote{2} In the south Indian Kingdom, the more prosperous temple maintained trained groups of dancers. But the system was abused and eventually in many temples the Devadasis degenerated into shamefully exploited prostitutes, their earnings being collected by the temple authorities.\footnote{3} The institution of Devadasis or dancing girls, which was practised in other part of India, was totally abstained in Manipur. The practice of keeping dancing girls is unknown. There was no custom of appointment of women as temple attendant. Women voluntarily joined dancing and singing before the deity with the permission of the Jagoi Loishang (institute of dance) Jagoi Loishang was affiliated to the Loishang of Shri Govindaji temple to look after the rules & regulations of dance performance before the deity. They do not appoint any person as temple dancer.

\footnote{1}{N.D. Choudhury, \textit{Historical Archaeology of Central Assam}, p. 144.}
\footnote{2}{Ibid., p. 144.}
\footnote{3}{Romila Thapar, \textit{A History of India}, Vol.1, p. 211.}
From the time of Raja Bhaigyachandra, Lord Govindaji was not a mere image but a living deity to the Manipuri Hindus. They used to derive immense spiritual merit and benefit from the worship of the sacred images. To look after the temple, the Raja of Manipur established an institution or council named after Govindaji called Loishong of Shri Govindaji in the second half of the eighteenth century A.D. The cultural life of Manipur since the 18th century largely centred round the Vaishnava movement and the institution of the Loishang of Shri Govindaji. The Loisharg of Shri Govindaji included in the welfare department as a part of state administration. The institution had the highest status in the socio-religious system. This institution never interferes in the internal affairs of the state politics and administration except social and religious matters.

The Loishang look after different aspects of social religious and cultural life of the Manipuris. Numbers of institutions affiliated to the Loishang of Shri Govindaji temple for the service of the deity were Pala Loishang, in-charge of singing song for deities, Bhandari, in-charge of the store of food grains for deity headed by a Keirungba, Pujari, in-charge of cooking for the deity, Duhon Loishang, scattered clean water over the people of the deity, Malli, in-charge of gardening the temple complex and supply flowers for the deity, Jagoi Loishang, in-charge of devotional dance and Brahma Sabha.\textsuperscript{11} Each of which was under a supervisor. The king was the head of the Loishang of Shri Govindaji. Other members of the Loishangs who took the charge of

daily ritual, manner of worship food item for offering devotional dance and music etc. 
were appointed by him. They were mastered on there profession. The kings have the 
power to appoint or remove any members of the Loishang. It was during the reign of 
Maharaja Churachand Singh, when he possess the idol of Govindaji, God of the 
reigning prince, the family priests were promoted to the royal temple and the former 
Brahmins, who officiated in the post for some generations, were dismissed.\[1\]

Other Hindu temples were owned or looked after by a family or a clan of 
Brahmins. Each locality or group of family supports the temples.

The earliest Loishang, which was established before sanskritisation was “Pandit 
Loishang”. The king was the head of this institution. He was assisted by many Maibas 
(priests) and Maibis (priestess). Maiba Loishang, Maibi Loishang and Pena Loishang 
(a bow instrument for music) were affiliated to the Pandit Loishang. The pandits are 
well verse in ancient Meitie scripts and ritual procedures. They were in-charge of the 
organisation of the traditional worship. They conducted all religious rites including 
sacrifices and magical ceremonies.\[2\] Side by side with the Loishng of Shri, Govindaji, 
the pandit Loishang was very active even today.

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The Loishang of Shri Govindaji temple performed threefold functions of a legislature, executive and judiciary— all fused into one through Brahma Sabha. These functions were mainly confined to the social and religious matters. Several rules and regulation of the community as a whole are discussed and enacted from the temple through Brahma Sabha and here they do the important functions of a legislative body. The laws and regulations thus evolved or initiated are executed with utmost care by these temples and here the temple served the imperative function of an executive body. The rules and regulations passed by the Brahma Sabha should not be violated. Such of those who violate the rules and regulations or those who have committed criminal acts are punished either by way of fines or excommunication. Loishang of Shri Govindaji temple was the highest judicature for the people in social and religious matters. It is proposed to highlight and study the rights, responsibilities of the employees of the temple and the crimes listed and the punishments awarded by the temple management. The king was the head of the Judiciary.

The status of a temple was decided by the power status of the patrons. Those who were the employees of the temple of Shri Govindaji enjoyed more security than their modern counterpart. The Brahmin, who took care of the temple, which on the one hand enhanced their social status, and on the other, strengthened their link with the ruling groups. They continued their control over the temple. They played their role in different rungs of medieval power structure. Temples had their sphere of influence beyond their respective villages. The Loishang of Shri Govindaji temple helped for the maintenance of harmonies, social relations and development of spirit of co-operation.
amongst villagers. The Loishang tried many cases and dispensed justice on social and religious controversies.

The income of the Loishang was from lands granted by the kings and from religious tithes contributed by disciples and from occasional donations and subscriptions from disciples and devotees.

Temple constituted a powerful social, religious and economic entity. They served not only the spiritual needs of the people but also played an important part in their material life. The temples, in the early medieval period of India, played a very prominent role in the economic life. Temples received donations from various sources in the form of land, money, jewellery, gold, etc., and become the centre of the repositories of wealth. Various types of land grants are known to us from different sources. The most important grants, which are related with religion, were Brahmadaya and Devadaya types of land grant. The motive behind these grants was to earn religious merit and also a mark of royal favour. The Brahmadaya type of tenure was granted to those Brahmins who performed sacrifices, spiritual guides, priest and those learned in the Vedas. The giving of gifts for the use of their services was a ritualistic duty. The Devadaya type of land grant was made to the temples, for its maintenance. Such lands were exempted from the payment of taxes and fine. The granted lands were free from official harassment. The Brahmanas were forbidden to dispose of Brahmadaya lands to non-Brahmanas as is evident from the Arthasashastra.
According to Kautilya, Brahmanas could not alienate such lands by sale or mortgage to the members of other castes.\textsuperscript{11} The privileges were exclusively confined to their cast community. The Brahmanas were also assigned Agrahara villages. Agrahara was granted as a gift to certain Brahmanas. "Although the land was after inherited by the family of the grantee, the king had the power to confiscate it should he be displeased with the behaviour of the grantee."\textsuperscript{12} These grants were exempted from taxes, non-interference from the entry of troops. As a result of this the Brahmanas and the temple grew rich and wealthy.

There are four kinds of revenue free lands in Manipur viz., (i) Ningthou Lou (Sanalou), which was personally enjoyed by the king, (ii) Lairou, a grant of land for the maintenance of some particular temples; (iii) Lugun Lou, land given to the Brahmins on the occasion of their taking sacred thread, (iv) land given free to the favourite and relatives of the Raja and to the official and the title holders which were subsequently known as Kharopes and Talab lou".\textsuperscript{13} The land held by the civilian population paid land revenue in cash or kind. Besides this they have to attain Lallup. "But no lease or Patta of any kind was issued to these land holders and the king could dispose of land held by the cultivators in any way he like, from this it is clear that the raja was the absolute proprietor of the land".\textsuperscript{14} He could give away or retain any land according to his will.

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Land revenue, being one of the basic sources of income to the government, was collected from all cultivable lands whether owned by private individuals or other public institutions. Only the granted lands to the Brahmin and temple were free from taxes and enjoyed various forms of immunity. The management committee and other staffs of the temple have to attain Lallup for the state. The lands granted to the Brahmins were free from taxes. However, the Brahmin community was liable to Lallup, during which they cook for the Raja and their idol Govindaji.¹ They also attained Lallup for the purpose of rite and ritual for the temple. Religious establishment paid land tax at a lower rate than the former. All the cultivable land owned by the temples paid land tax except land granted by the king as Lairou, for the maintenance of the temple.

The temples and the Brahmins were not free from the financial regulations of the state. The government used to grant sometime exemption and remissions were made to a number of temples. The temple enjoyed the privileges of free grazing for its cattle in government land. These privileges naturally helped the temples and Brahmanas to keep a large number of animals at a low cost. The state authority never levied pilgrim tax. State derived revenue from the pilgrim tax was unknown. The devotees were free from taxes who used to visit to temple on festival days. Instead the devotees use to donate money to the temple voluntarily. The tax-gatherers were very liberal while collecting the tax from the temple and the Brahmins.

¹T. C. Hodson, The Meithei, p. 63.
They become oppressive only when they failed to attained Lallup. The tax was probably paid to the state for performing police functions; that is for the protection provided to the service lands of the temple servants and temple properties. The land revenue in kind was collected under the supervision of Lourung Puren Achouba or Phunan Selungba, who also managed the land settlement, revenue administration and also made a general survey of the then existing land.\(^1\) It is difficult to give the rate at which they were levied and exact nature of their collection. The tax paid in kind by each cultivator varied from 2 to 12 baskets of paddy of per Pari per year.\(^2\) The civilian villages got a Pari of land per head from the field around their villages, but they were to pay land revenue or rent of one Chengkok (about 20 seers) of rice to the king every year along with the lallup.\(^3\) Since 29\(^{th}\) April 1892 land revenue was paid in cash at the uniform rate of Rs. 5/- per Pari.\(^4\) The rulers did not interfere in the internal affairs of the land attached to the religious institution or temples. The revenue from such land was allowed to be utilise mainly for the smooth running of such institution. The lands, which were granted to priests and temples by the kings, received special treatment from the British administration.

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Temples were established without any donatory inscription. Due to abstain of donatory inscription, we have poor knowledge about the aspects of patronage and maintenance of some temples. Perhaps the temple property and income was so meagre and guaranteed that the donors did not find the need of spending over the inscriptions to record them.

The practice of granting land to temples had started as early as the time of the early Ningthouja themselves and from the times of Garibaniwaz this gathered momentum. Lands were given to temples for the maintenance of their daily routine. Sometime lands were granted for a particular period or live time.1 Apart from granting lands to the various temples, the Rajas of Manipur also made various presents and other offerings at the different temples and to the Brahmins also and thereby pleased the gods.

During the reigns of Raja Garibaniwaz and Bhaigyachandra, the Brahmanical Hinduism flourished to a great extent and majority of the Meitei community embraced Hinduism. They generally speaking, showed due respect and courtesy to the Vaishnava monks and made grants and endowments for the maintenance of the temples. It was during the reign of Bhaigyachandra that most land donations were made to the temples and the Brahmins. The kings donated not only lands, but other articles also. In the 18th and 19th centuries, they turned jealous attention to building and rebuilding of Hindu temples. The rulers after turning full-fledged Hindu converts gave

support, sympathy and encouragement to sculpture and architecture by granting land
and making presents. Temples were also built under the patronage of nobility and high
officials of the state also. The king also donated tank for the maintenance of temple.
Chronicle mentioned in several occasions about the excavation of tanks for the temple
deities, by the rulers of Manipur.

The temple got enriched by land grants and donation made by the rulers and the
high officials of the state. The village chief and merchants also made donations from
different localities. Sometimes the traders used to collectively donate a portion of their
sale-proceeds to local temples. Guilds, for the maintenance of temples collected
stipulated amount from their respective members and paid them regularly. They also
made their donations in the form of paddy field. Lands were also assigned to various
functionaries of temple. Brahmanas received a large share. Temples received many
gifts at the time of the coronation of the crown prince, the royal military expeditions or
seasonal festivals. Temples also received many gifts for performing ritual and
ceremonies at the temple mandapas from the local people.

Temples received contribution from the disciples on the occasion of religious
ceremonies and festivals. Some of the disciple used to make an annual contribution in
cash and kind to the temple such as rice, fruit etc. Consequently, the temple became
the owner of large landed estates. The architecture of such temples is a reflection of
their economic status. Their architectural style is the indicator of their period of
prominence. Each of these temples rose to prominence in different periods in the 18th
and 19th century. The temple of Shri Govindaji is one of them. The temple of Shri Govindaji also received tax for performing Suddhi ceremonies (Mangba & Scngba). In many instances fines collected from criminals were also given to the temple. Those who were unable to pay fines to the temple, they have to attained Lallup more days than the normal duties of Lallup. If he failed to obey it the temple authorities threatened to excommunicate. Besides, there were occasional fines imposed on the disciple involved in committing certain office such as insultation of Brahmin, avoiding the used of Chandanmark on the forehead, killing of cow by the Meitei Hindu etc.

The temple also received jewellery, utensils etc., as a gift. Thus, the temples derived wealth from all sections of society. King and chiefs, merchants and landowners vied with one another in presenting rich offerings to their favourite places of worship.

All the temples were well provided and this gave them a sound and independent financial footing resulting in various activities both religious and secular. The authorities of the temples used to check the proper utilisation of temple funds to prevent misuse of temple funds. The lands of the temple were given out to a peasant who appears to have been sharecroppers. The product of temple land was collected and spent on the specific purpose. The temple of Shri Govindaji emerged as a rich landlord, a portion of its general funds were generously spent for some ideal and useful purpose. The socio-economic life of the king was highly centred around the temple of Govindaji. At the time of financial emergencies or natural calamities, the
Rajas used temple treasury particularly the temple of Shri Govindaji. The temple was successful in utilising the available resources in a suitable and proper manner for the welfare of the people. The incomes of the temples were mainly used for the maintenance of the temple structure, festival for the payments of the priests and other employee. The payments were made in the form of paddy and sometime the head priests were remunerated through land. This was varied from one to another according to their status. The amount of the payment of paddy is different from temple to temple.

Besides being places of worship the temple posse's characteristic of a socio-economic centre. At times of natural calamities, the temples are utilised as place of protection and safety. Persons of eminence are honoured and receptions held at temples. The temples offer employment opportunities to several persons. For their employees, free quarters are provided in and around the temple. Players, drummers, priests or assistant watchmen are provided dwelling places. From the incomes of the temple, they not only renovated the temples but also arranged for specific endowments for the regular poojas, rituals, festivals and ceremonies connected with the temples. The surplus produce of rice fields attached to a temple was utilised on public work and public worship, other welfare activities and also used to build another temple.

Temples were also built for several purposes. They were built to please the higher authorities by dedicating the temple or calling the deity in the name of such authorities. Some built them to raise their social status. Many devotees named their gods upon their personal names, which served the purpose of perpetuation of their
name and provided them a status in their society. Communities in the towns had their own need of providing an organisational identity through such temples. Thus, apart from the concept of religious merit, there were several socio-economic faces to the temple building activity. Today, majority of the temples of the villages and towns operated and their resources were manages at a local level for which the higher officials of the locality provided support. The royal patronage and the devotee’s contribution through grants and gifts, temple placed on a sound economic footing and thereby helped them to give exclusive attention to the pursuit of religion and culture. Their economic freedom helped to develop the art of dancing, music and thereby contributing to the cultural development of Manipur. Manipur would have been poorer culturally, had there been no such grants and gift made by the rulers so generously for religious charitable purposes.

Some of the big temples have a full-fledged staff to manage its affairs. The temple management committee was known as Loishang. The Loishang of Shri Govindaji temple was the most popular. The members of the Loishang were selected from among the most respected inhabitants of the state or locality. Besides the temple management committee, there were also large bodies of staff at temple including scribes, singers, musician, washer-men, oilmen, cook etc. The majority of the members of the loishangs were the Brahmins. The Brahmanas originally managed the temple estates. These loishangs served the purpose of a bank, received deposits of donations and endowments which it held as trust funds. Deposits in temple were regarded as safe because of their sanctity. Kings also kept their treasures stored in
temples. Sometime kings borrowed money from temples in times of distress. "Manu prescribes punishment for persons in interfering with the temple property".\[1\] No one could claim property rights over the property of the temple of Shri Govindaji except the king. The king extent control over the temple affairs. Sometime, royal enquiries into the temple accounts of Shri Govindaji temple were also made.

Due to land grants and various types of gifts, great temples possessed large estates and enormous wealth, which had vast landed property. A considerable portion of nation wealth was concentrated in these institutions. "The role of temple as a landowner and also of its wealth and material power finds mention in a number of inscriptions of North and south India".\[2\] The temple priests become very influential with the emergence of temples as wealth landlords. The large-scale settlement of Brahmins was a measure to counterbalance the dangerous feudal forces by ritual means. Temples represented the institutionalised religious feudal organ. The temple authorities also played their part in the development of feudal economy. Land grants and the donations made to the temples gave them feudal dimensions. The Brahmins and the temple, which received land through grants become acting as feudal lords. The temple provided favourable conditions for the formation of feudal agrarian relationship. The temple authorities also developed land for the progress of temple economy. They needed a large number of workers to work in their land. They never exploited the peasant, who was working on their land. The temple authorities also sold

2. Ibid., p. 269.
and purchased lands. Titles of previous holders were cancelled, cultivators were evicted and proprietorship was transferred to the temple and a perennial and permanent fund of revenue was endowed to the temple. They leased out their lands to tenants. Big temple had a large number of tenants under them. Unlike the temples of other Indian state the temples in Manipur were not the owners of slaves. Temples became one of the important land-owning institutions. Due to the grants of land and gift, temples formed the centres of economic life for the Brahmins. They seem to have emerged as important intermediaries in lands. The land grants led to the establishment of Brahmanas supremacy and standing in special relation for the king they fulfilled one of the essential conditions of feudalism.\footnote{Radhakrishna Choudhary, \textit{Economic History of Ancient India}, p. 82.}