CHAPTER VI

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In the foregoing chapters a critical assessment has been made of the historical development of temples, architectural features of Hindu temples and its contribution in the society. From the early period the land become a gateway to contact the mainland India with the South East Asian countries. The migration of Brahmins, invasions of Burmese, Tripuris and Muslims brought Manipur contact with the rest of the world. Manipur received various racial elements with different cultural groups of people. They contributed for the growth of the composite culture and a new way of life in Manipur. All the communities living in this country become united under one powerful community. The Meitei the ruling community, give emphasis on the development of the state. They opened up markets, constructed town, built roads, secular and religious buildings, developed cannels etc. Artisans, architects, priests etc. were encouraged to visit by grants of lands and servitors. These new comers were gradually assimilated with the people of the land.

Socially Manipur is a peaceful country and an open society base on the principal of liberalism. The people have been living in good term with other ethnic groups from time immemorial. The most of the rulers were liberal and enlightened in there policies towards all section of the people. After Meiteism, the traditional cult, the
Vaishnavism is claimed to be one of the oldest faith followed by the largest number of people of Manipur. Other religious sects were given due honour and land were bestowed on them to carry on their work in ease and comfort. The Meitei in course of time adopted Hindu manners and customs. They accepted Hindu faith. They increase there number by inviting the Brahmins and allow them to marry the local women and they become the Meitei Brahmins. The Hindu influence, as we have pointed out, entered the court during the reign of Charairongba. He formally accepted Hinduism and his successor were also initiated in Vaishnavism. Garibaniwaz was a great exponent of Ramandi Vaishnavism. Maharaja Bhaigyachandra alias Joy Singh, Gambhir Singh, Nara Singh and Chandrakirti were devoted follower and energetic patrons of Gauriya Vaishnavism. There policies of toleration made them popular amongst their subjects. They recognised Hindu scripture, honoured Vaishnavite priests. The Brahmins were granted full privileges and status. They made endowments and grants of land and servitors for the maintenance of Hindu temple. These temples become the seats of Vaishnava culture. Thus, the Manipuri rulers were deeply religious and extensive donation of lands made for the construction and maintenance of temples.

The forgoing discussion of the Hindu temple architecture of Manipur reveals that Manipur has a long history of art and architecture. This art continued for centuries. The architectural monuments of this state are lying scattered at different sites. Some of them were found in ruins. Manipur have already developed indigenous styles of temple of traditional deities. An independence type of architecture developed before
the influence of other culture. The available material enables us to trace the styles of temple architecture in Manipur. But non-existence of a complete single structure of temples of traditional deities was a great problem in the authentication of the actual type of the early period. But it would be wrong to suppose that no temples were built during the early Ningthouja dynasty. The surviving secular structure enables us to trace the styles of house building and other religious structure. Long before the coming of Hinduism and their contact with the South-East Asian countries, the Manipuri’s had developed a good style of architecture of their own. Whole concepts and designs differed from those of the Hindus and Muslims. Their system of art different fundamentally in their ideas and techniques. Not only the architecture but also the art of sculpture also highly developed. The physical anatomy of the deity is different from the sculpture of other parts of India. Deities are made of wood, stone, metals and mud or earth. After conversion to Hinduism the Manipuri’s produced images of different deities. The images show the Hindu influence with admixture of Mongolian features. Images also showed some local characteristic in dress and ornament of the deities.

The royal chronicle refers numbers of temple built perishable and non-perishable materials in different period. The perishable materials such as timbers, bamboos, straw, thatch, reed etc. were largely used for the construction of religious and other secular building in the early period. But it could not survive long. These types of row materials were easily available in the hill and the valley of Manipur. Later, from the 16th century A.D. non-perishable materials such as bricks, stone etc. of different shapes and sizes began to use for the construction of palace and temple.
The temples of pre-Hindu periods have nearly disappeared. The non-available of ancient monuments and relics to this present day were due to the frequent invasion of the Burmese marked by iconoclastic destruction, religious policies of the Hindu fanatic rulers, militant Brahmins proselytizing and use of perishable materials. The popularity of the icon of Hindu gods and goddesses caused erection of Hindu temple in the Manipur valley. The temple of Hindu gods and goddesses are mostly found in the valley of Manipur. Because the valley was inhabited by the Manipuri's Hindus since the beginning of Sanskritization. The temple remains shows that the Manipuri rulers were the great devout of Hinduism. The political instability because of Burmese and fratricidal war among the princes greatly disturbed the construction work of the country. However, they continued to build side by side with renovation of the old temples. Images of different deities were setup and temples dedicated to deities of different sects were erected. From the few that remain standing and the excavated or tumbled remains of other secular buildings and from the evidence of miniature replicas or representations on images and other literary sources we may classify a number of different designs.

There are four types of architectural designed found in Manipur i.e., (i) Indigenous styles, (ii) South-East Asian styles, (iii) Northern Indian style and (iv) Indo-Islamic styles architecture. From the investigation of the architectural styles of temples it is cleared that the temples of Manipur were more akin to Northern Indian temple type. A synthesis, however, was soon evolved due to a number of factors. Migration of different races from South-East Asian and North India and their social
and cultural element presented in this land led to the growth of a synthesis in art and architecture. Migration of Brahmins and the process of Sanskritization in Manipur also reflected in the art and architecture. A synthesis was created with the local culture. From the beginning of the 18th century a distinctive Manipuri culture took shape.

The Manipuri kings after their conversion to Hinduism began to build religious and secular buildings following the pattern of North Indian Hindu architectural styles and later adopted Islamic styles. These led to the development of Indo-Islamic architecture in Manipur. But the predominant architecture was Hindu temple. They freely employed Hindu master-craftsmen for designing and constructing their building including temples. These craftsmen naturally introduced the characteristics of the Hindu architecture like solidity and grace, while adopting Muslim features like arch, dome, minarets, geometrical device, etc. The workmanship and design of Hindu buildings combined with Muslim arches, domes, smooth-faced walls and spacious interiors. This continued to be the artistic quality of most temple of the 19th and 20th century A.D. South-East Asian influence also appeared in both religious and secular buildings. Burmese styles of architecture also found in other secular buildings. The architecture feature were mostly imported, such as large dome chamber with corner-minarets and the curved cornice, taken from bent bamboo caves of the village hut of Bengal and many decorative motives. Pillared entrances with arch were borrowed from the previous Hindu and Islamic architectural tradition. To these were added local characteristics.
The Hindu temples were built according to the canons of *Silpassastra* and *Vastusastras*. The Brahmin priest explained all the religious philosophy and astrological aspect to the craftsmen about the auspicious day, month and favourable place for the construction of Hindu temple, the *tirtha* of the Hindu community. Half burned wood, wood containing bees, tree within creepers, tree destroyed by animals, wood that has mud in it, tree fallen down on their own and irregular shaped wood were not used as building materials of a temple. Construction of a house was avoided in a place where the shade of the temple sikhara falls. The body of the temple of Manipur is divided along the vertical axis into four principle parts i.e., (i) *Adhishtana*, the plinth part or pedestal; (ii) *Bhitti* or *Jangha*, the wall part or body of temple; (iii) *Sikhara*, the superstructure and (iv) *Kalasa*, the topmost part of the temple. All the temple are free standing and no rock-cut temple are found in Manipur. The shrine-cell is the most sacred place of temple, where the image of the deity or symbol of god and goddess is kept. This sanctum is the holy of holies. The enclosures of temple are a wall, which separated cella from other space. The circumambularory path around the cella is another feature. It is constructed within the enclosure for the worshippers to move clock-wise around the cella. The pillars supported the roof for protection of shrine-cell as well as visitors. The tower is the different design of roof, which represent mountain the meeting place of gods and human beings. Most of the gate are situated facing with the cella, separating the secular space from sacred space. Decoration with different painting and ornamentation expresses an idea of the contemporary mode of life. Temples in Manipur generally constructed over a rectangular and square ground plan.
The Garbhagriha of the temple mostly followed a rectangular plan. Garbhagriha of some of the temple followed a square plan and in order to inter it one had to descend a flight of steps.

Triangle in ground plan was not practice. Mandapas are mostly square plan. The level of the floor of the Garbhagriha is higher than that of the floor of the Mandapa. Another feature of the temple is that Hindu temples are always associated with mandapas, pond or tank, totems and rest house dedicated by the rulers.

The Bengali hut type temple dominated till the beginning of the 19th century in the construction of Hindu temples. The hut style based on imitations of the common village house of mud or bamboo with thatch roof built in Bengal. Some of this type of temple dedicated to Radha-Krishna and hanuman are still became one of the most popular worshipping centre in Manipur, such as Hanuman temple at Mongba Hanba, temple of Shri Krishna at Brahmapur Guruaribam Leikai Imphal etc. From the second half of the 19th century, the architectural trends of temple appear to have much changed in comparison to the predecessors. This period marked the best synthesis of the Muslim ideas and Hindu method in the temple construction. From this period, experimented with numerous geometric forms and adopted different style in the construction of temple. The Indo-Islamic style was popular in this period both secular and religious buildings. A Hindu temple with its Islamic look is found mostly in Northern and Eastern India. Among the temples of Manipur, we also find blended of Islamic elements. During this period temples are bigger, decorative and ornamentation
that the predecessors. More experiments appeared with the geometric shape of the
ground plan of the temple. Geometry has been very successfully applied in this period.
The best example of the period are temple of Shri Shri Govindaji at New Palace
compound, Wangkhei Imphal East and temple of Radha-Ramon, Canchipur Hillock,
Imphal West. The Adhisthana of the temple built in the 2nd half of the 19th century and
20th century was higher than the temples built in the 18th and 1st half of the 19th century
A.D. The temple built in the early period were always facing south with single
entrances. The temples built in the late 19th and 20th century always facing East with
more than one flight of steps leading to the sanctum hall. During this periods pillars
are also distinctly highlighted and round pillars are generally placed in the front
corridors or porch.

Some of the temple built in the early period without free standing pillars. The
roofs of the temples were supported by thick walls. The decoration of sculpture as an
element of external decoration on the temple was not practice in Manipur. Only leaf
and floral motifs and geometrical designed used as decoration to the temples. Unlike
Tantric cult, the Vaishnavism of Manipur always avoided erotic sculpture present on
the temple wall. Because they believe that Rama and Krishna as the incarnation as of
Vishnu and their philosophy based on simplicity and complete devotion to these god.
The Sikhara of the temples of the early periods were domical like that of Bengali hut
type and not Pyramedical like that of Orissa. The dome roof including oblong,
octagonal dome, arch entrances and external decorations were the best example of
Islamic influences of the 19th and 20th century temple. The flat roof temples of
Manipur are a Chandni temples type of late medieval Bengal i.e., Temple of Leimapokpa Keirungba. Replica of miniature shrine began to highlight in different courses of the temple roof from the 2nd half of the 19th century A.D. The Kalasha is different from temple to temple. The final of the temples of Shri Shri Govindaji/Krishna is solar symbol and wheel. The Kalasha of some of the temples are vase-shaped final i.e., temple of Hanuman, temple of Shri Krishna, etc.

The temple was almost an axis of the cultural life of the people of Manipur. It was great landowners, offering employment at the time of its construction to architects and sculptors and thereafter to a number of managers, priests, cooks and many other classes of people. It was, in other words a corporate body, playing often a better part in the life of the ordinary citizen than the civil government. The erection of temple was known as the most meritorious deed. The royal chronicle refers to the construction of temples by the Ningthouja Dynasty. It gives very valuable information of temple building and endowments granted by the kings and nobles. Besides land grants the kings and rich nobles offer treasures, precious materials etc., from time to time to idols so that they might receive a rewards for their good deeds and draw closer to their gods. Therefore, some of the temples were centres of wealth as is proved by the Govindaji temple in which the Ningthouja kings and their subjects furnished costly ornaments made of gold and jewels to the deity.

The erection of temple was considered to be a highly meritorious religious activity. Whoever wanted to build temple, spent money on his own or the king spent
the amount from the state treasury. Sometime they erected temples with funds collected from the temple. Apart from the construction of new temples, repairing the existing shrines was treated as an equally pious and important work. In view of the iconoclastic activities of the Burmese invaders, repairs work must have been considered very essential. The management of the shrine of a big temple was put in the hands of a governing body called "Loishang" and the local temple was run by the Brahmin family or by the locality or community. The land grants made by the monarch are still held by the successor, individual and institution. They used to enjoy their old privileges. During the time of religious festival and ceremonies people not only of the locality but also of the neighbouring region got together under the auspices of the temple. The temple was also sometime a rest house for the travellers, who could spend a few nights there. People often assembled there to discuss local affairs and sometimes to hear the exposition of sacred literature such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Gita. The Loishang of Shri Shri Govindaji temple was also working as a centre of learning and functioning like a collage. The practice of keeping Devadasi or dancing girls was unknown and there was no custom of appointment of women as temple attendant. The Manipuri’s Hindu like other part of India performed various types of festival and sacraments. Since the early period unlike other religious sects, the Hindu of Manipur has no fix day for offering prayer in a temple. The day of festivals is always looked upon as the time of offering community prayers too. In each and every religious festival they used to visit to the nearest temple for offering to the temple deities. The Manipuri’s did not wholly give up their traditional faith and
practices. Both traditional *Meiteism* and *Hinduism* continued to practice in Manipur. The Manipur Hindus have been observing different fasts and festivals of traditional *Meiteism* since the early period. The two cultures came in contact with each other and influenced each other very much. It enabled the followers of the two faiths to live as friendly neighbours slowly working together for a more or less common way of living.