Chapter-V

The Advent of Ramandi and Gouriya Vaishnavism

Manipur, being a depot of exchange where the east and the west meet, has composite culture and cultural heritages. With regards to the religious faiths and beliefs of the neighbouring lands of the east and the west are the Buddhism and Hinduism respectively. When the time and situations came in course of the socio-political history of Manipur and forced the inhabitants of the monarchial kingdom by the pressures of the Buddhist or Burma for security, protection and safeguard the liberty, freedom, independence and sovereignty of the country Manipuri adopted Hinduism. This is a striking feature of touching the core of the social affairs by the political business as the Myanmar had superiority in all respects of economic conditions, enterprises of weaponry in the aspect of fire arms, strength of army which constitutes the power and forces of monarchial or imperial rule.

Initiation into Sakta Sect of Hinduism

Hinduism has different branches such as Shaivism and its sub branches Shaktism, Vaishnavism, etc. and even the Buddhism and Jainism are enumerated and drawn in the sphere of the Hinduism. The branches of the Hinduism have various and variant sects of monotheistic and polytheistic forms, features etc. Hinduism, the oldest religious works of the world, wins to be one of the great religions and the orthodox followers of which had much
encounters with bullet like words and many enhancements with enabling verses with the followers of Buddhism prior to the Islamic invasions of Hindustan.

Meitei monarch Tubee Charairongba (1697-1709 A.D.) had the intention and aspiration for adoption of Hinduism in the concept and notion of completing the Myanmar in the political realm. As the Myanmar on the east is the Buddhist he intended to enter into the socio-political alliance of the people of the west, who professed Hinduism to collect his men and build his foundation and background. So Meitei-lord Tubee Charairongba introduced the worship of divine Kalika the greatest goddess of Saktism who can bestow the blessing of salvation,\(^1\) prior to his and his followers adoption and initiation to this religious sect.\(^2\) It is remarked in the royal chronicle.\(^3\)

…..Haowoibam Lanhanggeekum shak 1623.. wakching tha ..Thashinong Eeraida shanggai Yumjao mei hou-e|| thonglen, shagolshang, kalikasung, mangkan shangsung. Shang 6ma chak-e||…

From the above statement it is proved that Meitei-king Tubee Charairongba adopted Sakta religious sect posterior to his and his followers’ initiations into this religious sect in 1704 A.D. as the burning of the temple of divine Kalika is in the incident of the incendiary occurred in 1702 A.D. The initiation of Tubee Charairongba and his followers including his first and eldest

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\(^1\) N.N. Bhattacharyya, History of the Tantric Religion, New Delhi, 1987, p.348.
\(^2\) Lm (L) Ibunghohal and N. Khelchandra, op.cit., p.66.
\(^3\) Ibid, p. 66.
son Mayamba or Meitei lord Garibnawaza (1709-48 A.D.) is recorded in the said same royal chronicle.\textsuperscript{4}

\ldots Moirang Kongyambagee kum shak 1626\ldots shajibu tha\ldots 5ni yumshakeishada Ningthem Charairongbana chingna laiming lougadaba kheibikpu chakhennei-e|| Nongmada lou-e||

From the above fact and find it is brought to light that the Meiteis entered under the fold of Hindu world with the first and foremost initiation of conversion into Hindu Shakta Kalika sect in April, 1704 A.D. This information of adoption is also supported and supplemented by the statement of Meitei scripture Sanamahi Laikan.\textsuperscript{5}

Even though the information of the Meitei scripture Sanamahi Laikan is appeared to differ to the direct point of view with the statement of royal chronicle this is not a contradictory version and the statement of the Sanamahi Laikan was not made in the favour of Vaisnavism\textsuperscript{6} but it is not permissible in accordance with the view of the royal chronicle.

The Conversion into Vaisnavism

Vaisnavism, being supported by many religious thinkers and philosophers and great reformers, theistic advocates, counselors, etc. have different and variants sects for venerations of various gods and goddesses in the domain of the Hindu polytheistic universe. This religious branch extended its

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{5} O. Bhogeswar, op.cit., 1974, p.47.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, p.47.
hands to draw in even the deities, their cultural and cultic heritages, motto and motive of revering the deities of Shaivism, Shaktism, Buddhism, etc. in its theistic fold.

Thus lord Shiva the supreme godhead of Shaivism was made to be one of Trinity of Vaisnavism and Lord Buddha, the ultimate divinity of Buddhism was attended to be the 9th incarnation of the 10(ten) particular incarnation of Lord Vishnu, the Almighty god in the Hindu Vaisnavite pantheon. Thus Vaisnavism is primarily set under the sects given below:-1) Bhakti, 2) Shree, 3) Madhvee or Madhvacharyya, 4) Rudra, 5) Nimat or Nimbaditya or Sanaka 6) Ramananda or Ramat, etc.\(^7\)

The Advent of Ramandi Sect

After the expiry of Meitei monarch Tubee Charairongba in 1709A.D. Meitei-lord Mayamba alias Garibanawaza Maharaja ascended the throne in the next month of the expiry of his father, at his personal age of 20 years. He was a follower of the divine Kalika worship sect of Saktism as he had been initiated into this sect in 1704A.D. during the regime of his beloved father. He was a staunch aspirant of the cult in the youthful phase of his life. But as he had a soft core of heart he had the desire to adopt Vaishnavite religious thought and idea. So he was looking for the same opportunity of the same but he could not able to fulfill his desire until 1717A.D.

1) The coming of Nimandi Sect

When Meitei-lord Garibanawaza was carrying on his administrative functions of his kingdom the king of Ahom or “Tekhau” for Ahom in the vocabulary of the Meitei-s, being intended to establish foreign diplomatic relation with the kingdom of Mekhali had sent a party of envoys in 1715 A.D. The party was led by the religious tutorial guide of the then ruling Ahom king and consisted of 39 (thirty-nine) ideal Brahmins of ascetic and socio-economic renunciations including the preceptor of the Ahom king himself. Their arrival is marked in the royal chronicle of Manipur.

The preceptor of the Ahom king and some other Brahmins left Manipur in the same former company for their home in the Ahom country after the completion of their work of envoy. But some of them specially ideal Gopaldas Beiragya and Shantidas Mahanta had stayed in Manipur after the departure of the company of envoys. Ideal Gopaldas Beiragya had better knowledge and higher standard is the Hindu religious matters than Santidas Mahanta the associate of ideal Gopaldas himself and Rai Ganggadhar Acharyya, the preceptor of the Sakta sect of Hinduism. His way of spending time in the ritual works for his adoring deities viz. Lord Krishna and his paramour, divine Radha had amazed the Meitei monarch and he satisfied himself and pleased the matter with the imitation of the ideal Gopaldas’s way of paying homage and devotion to Lord Krishna and divine Radha. So Meitei-lord Garibanawaza approached and proposed the ideal Brahmin Gopaldas to be his preceptor with the reinitiation into the Vaishnavite sect of the worship of the coupling images
Krishna and Radha. The Brahmin responded the proposed in the satisfaction of the Meitei monarch. Thus Meitei-lord Garibanawaza was reinitiated into the Nimandi sect of Hindu Vaishnavism by Gopaldas Beiragya in 1717A.D. The information in this regard is recorded in Cheitharol Kumbaba.⁸

During the days when theistic tutorial guide Gopaldas Beiragya no activity of Shantidas Mahanta is described in the royal chronicle. Even though he had came to Manipur along with Gopaldas and was a colleague of the latter, his name is not mentioned in among the accounts of the latter (Gopaldas Beiragya) in the same chronicle. From these facts and finds it is reasonably conceived that the quality, virtues, knowledge, caliber and talent of Gopaldas were far superior to those of Shantidas Mahanta.

2) The Advent of Ramandi Sect

Shantidas Goshhai was a desirous man of high position, status, liberty and name and fame. He wanted to handle him capricious effect, influence, etc. over the ruling monarch of Manipur as his friend and colleague Gopaldas Beiragya had handled the mind of the king. But as cited precedingly he had lower knowledge and inferior talent, to contest Gopaldas but he had the aspiration and zeal to earn to fulfill his objective. As favoured by his fate and fortune his colleague Gopaldas Beiragya was proposing to leave Manipur for his native kingdom. Thus ideal preceptor Gopaldas Beiragya left Manipur in 1720A.D. The matter is recorded in the royal chronicle.⁹

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⁸ Lm(L) Ibunghoal and N. Khelchandra, op.cit., p.76.
⁹ Ibid, p. 78.
After the ideal religious teacher had left Manipur Shantidas Goshhai made plan to feed his desire. As he was a cleaver and wise man looked attentively the nature, habit, character, of Meitei-monarch Garibanawaza so as to read his mental core so that he might know the favorite conception and conceptualization with regard to the human virtues, characteristics, qualities in him (Garibanawaza). He found what he had searched for the innate nature of Meitei king Garibanawaza. He understood that this monarch of the Meitei-s was a worshipper of the Heroes and he respected men of valours, gallantries and pleased, favoured, etc. the courageous and brave men. So he was to be talked with the narrations and references of heroic works, activities and achievements of honourable Ramachandra, the hero with the tactful warfare of archery in the Hindu first epic Ramayan. He introduced himself then as the devotee of Shree Ram and follower of Rama’s cult (Ramandi). With regard to the coming of Shantidas in Manipur is shown by the Meitei scriptures Sanamahi Laikan, Sanamahi Laihui (Achouba), Khagemba Langjei, etc. as to have been called upon by divine Sanamahi from Shilot by going the deity himself. After his arrival at the royal capital of the then Manipur he is said to be started to act on the religious matter immediately. After having the knowledge of the religious sect which was then adopted and followed by the Meitei monarch and his subject he contradicted the same as it was the religious
faith to be adopted by the feminine class. The words of disparagement of the Nimandi by Shantidas Goshai as lined in Sanamahi Laikan.\textsuperscript{10}

...Tubee nangna chatnagadaba Gouriya Lairamlen athoiba bhakti maramchat aside Brajabasa chanura stri shakhenbeeshinggee maramchat mahakne. Waram amadi Beiragya lamboiba, namu megee lanbu thoudu nungbu oina maninglamba, momnu chebglou shackoi henbeeshingbu palem mama oina ma-uraba..lamboiba adushinggee maramchat mahousha-ne || Gouriya mapurengedharmaha laiarlen achikpa aside poirei meeyaman-gee natte.||..

The Activities of Shantidas prior to Reinitiation in Ramandi

The activities of Shantidas Goshhai prior to the reinitiation of Meitei-monarch Garibanawaza and some of his followers into Ramandi sect of Vaisnavism is appeared to commence since 1720A.D. according to Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal chronicle of Manipur.\textsuperscript{11} By this time Meitei-lord Garibanawaza was a loyal and trustworthy follower of Nimandi sect and he is appeared as to have the staunch idea and thought of the Nimandi cult. He was busying in the construction of the temple of divine Krishna, his personal and domestic deity. The information in this regard goes as:\textsuperscript{12}

...Puthem Eethaigee Kum maka 1644..kalen the..5ni Ningthoukabada krishnagee kiyong Hou-e||.. Thawan tha 22ni

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{11} O. Bhogeswar, op.cit.,1974, p.48.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, p. 48.
This temple of Lord Krishna was constructed inside the enclosure of the capital complex of Meitei-lord Garibanawaza and the site of the said capital is under the denomination of “Kangla fort compound” at present. The temple of Lord Krishna constructed by Meitei-lord Garibanawaza was in utility as the abode of the deity up till 1726 A.D. and was avoided the temple unused as the idols of the divine Krishna and auspicious Kalika were shifted to be temple on the bank of the great pond at Wangkhei/Kongba and “Ningthem Pukhri” at present.

Reformation into a Hindu Kingdom

Meitei-lord Garibanawaza was busily trying to set aside the Meitei customary behavioural and characteristic phenomena and social traditions, which were accountable under the socio-economic, abuses of the Hindu religious faith and customary conduct. He took up actions to avoid and cease the eating of beef by infliction of punishment in the form of public exposure (Khunggoinaba), and penalized the rearing and domestications of pig, hen, etc. by exile in the rural areas and with the imposition of fines, etc. He also ordered not to worship the Meitei native divinities under the name and style of Umanglai 9 (Nine sylvan gods) and rendered to adore four primary Meitei indigenous deities in the Hindu ritual fashion by making the Hindu Brahmins to

13 Lm (L) Ibungohal and N. Khelchandra, op.cit., p.82.
14 Ibid, p. 87.
15 Ibid, p. 83.
16 Ibid, p. 83.
venerate divine Nongshaba, Lord Yumthei-Lai (Male and Female Yumjao-Lairemma) divine Panthoibi and Lord Taibang-Khaiba (Sanamahi). The record of this last incident is showing under in the original version.\(^\text{17}\)

…Wamanba Meragee Kum shak 1645. Hiyanggei the thaneen-nong Eeraida Leningthou Nongshaba, Yimthei Lai, Panthoibi, Thaibangkhaiba 4mada Bamon Eeratpa chang-halle||

Meitei monarch Garibabanawaza was trying to erase and sweep away the indigenous cultic faiths and beliefs with the destruction of the temples and shrines of the local gods and goddesses. He dug out all the buried grounds of his ancestors, drew out all the bone remains and cremated all those bones in the Hindu motto and motive of disposal of dead by cremation on the bank of river Ningthi or Chindwin in Myanmar at present. He also made and reconstructed the Kingdom of Manipur into a Hindu monarchial country with rendering title to the Meitei-monarch with the Hindu title Maharaja (the great king) or His Majesty in 1725 A.D.\(^\text{18}\)

Meitei-lord Garibananawaza, then took up actions for the full reformation of this country into the Hindu kingdom. He excavated the big pond of an area of 100x100 square fathoms (one fathom is equal to 6 feet) at Kongba (at present Wangkhei).\(^\text{19}\) He completely destroyed the images (facial or skull anatomy) of the nine sylvan gods (Umang lai mapan) by burying those in the

\(^{17}\) Ibid, p. 85.
\(^{19}\) Lm (L) Ibungohal and N. Khelchandra, op.cit.,p.84.
bower of divine Mongbahanba in 1726 A.D.\textsuperscript{20} and the shrine and idols of 7(seven) other gods and goddesses, viz. Laiyingthou (Nongpok-ningthou Kainou Cheengshomba), divine Panthoibee, Lai-wa-haiba (divine Lord Sanamahi), two Lammabee (Tangthong leima or Lemthong Leima i.e. Sharangthem Lairemma and Leishangthem Lairemma), Soraren (counterpart of Hindu Indradeva) and Hoidon-pokpee (the reverential clannish deity of the Khaba-s) were also destructed in the same year.\textsuperscript{21} But no objection of the people against any step of the destructive acts were seen during the period under the regime of Meitei-lord Garibanawaza.

Reinitiation into Ramandi Sect

The Ramandi sect of Vaisnavism, as cited above, is the cult of hero Ramachandra of Ayodhya, the main role of the Hindu first epic. The sect also permits to worship deities or deified ones related to Ramachandra such as Sita (his consort), Lakshman (his younger step-brother), Hanuman (his best devotee), Bharat (his younger step-brother), etc. along with the image of Rama. As Shantidas Goshhai was trying frequently to win the mind and opinion of Meitei monarch Garibanawaza to follow his whimsical cult of hero Rama, the mind and thought of Meitei-lord Garibanawaza is appeared to have some approaches towards the faith of divine hero Rama in C.1728-29 A.D. Even when he was busying and had heavy work programmes in the politico administrative affairs during the said period he had the intention to do something for the cultic sect of Ramayan. So he wanted to sculpture the stone

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, p. 86.
image of divine Hanuman, the incarnation of Lord Rudra, the manifestation of Lord Shiva and the greatest and most faithful devotee of Shree Rama, the 7th incarnation of Lord Vishnu. He rendered to carve the stone-image in 1729 A.D.\textsuperscript{22}

The carved image of divine Hanuman was worshipped in a temple constructed in the month of Hiyanggei (November-December) of the same year and the temple was inaugurated in the instant month.\textsuperscript{23} Shantidas Goshai was always in the association of the Meitei monarch telling the stories of hero Rama narrated in the great epic. Thus the whole attention and mind of Meitei-lord Garibanawaza were attracted toward the cult of hero-worship cult of Rama designated under the style of Ramandi. So he was reinitiated into this sect of Vaishnavism under the fashion of the ceremony of the Hindu twice born (Dvija or Lukun-thangba).\textsuperscript{24}

...Shadokpam Shaipugee kum shak 1651... wakcheeng tha..thaneennong Yumshakeishada Gurusung Ningthemsung Lilongda Eerup-e|| Adu numitta Mahapurushhna Lukun thangbee-e||

The above account is the reinitiation of Meitei-lord Garibanawaza and some of his followers into the Ramandi sect of Hindu Vaishnavism. Even if it be so he had still the faith in the Meitei native cult of the veneration of divine

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, p. 89.
Sanamahi and the act of Meitei-lord Garibanawaza that expresses the faith in the indigenous Meitei cults is recorded in the royal chronicle.\textsuperscript{25}

Meitei-monarch Garibanawaza was a man of independent will and he had impressive thought and idea that his followers, dependences were to take his ideas. So he conceived that everybody in his Kingdom without distinction of royal family personnel’s, noblemen and people of general and scheduled classes were to adopt Nimandi when he was adopting the same and to adopt Ramandi when he was following Ramandi. But some of the people including royal family personnel’s, especially his younger step-brother Mungyamba alias Manu Shai, the Yaiskullakpa and his eldest son, prince Shyam Shai, the Khurai-Lakpa did not adopt the religious sect as he expected. When he adopted Ramandi sect the other cited precedingly were following the Nimandi sect. So he took up actions against them to do as he pleased.\textsuperscript{26}

Such impositions of penalty as an offence were taken up frequently\textsuperscript{27} so as to threaten the subject of general and superior classes of people so that they might reinitiate into Ramandi sect. So some 3000 (three thousand) people performed the reinitiation ceremony under the style of wearing the Hindu sacred thread in 1737A.D.\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{flushleft}\footnotesize\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, p. 90. \\
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, p. 90. \\
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, p. 91. \\
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, p. 91. \end{flushleft}
The Embrace of Excessive Asceticism

Meitei monarch Garibanawaza, being a man extreme balance mentality and morality while he was enduring with the Ramandi sect embraced the excessive asceticism of religious phenomena. In this regard it is recorded in the royal chronicle.\(^{29}\)

...Langpoklakpam Moirambagee Kumdi shak 1661 Eengga tha..5ni Shagonshenda Ningthemnachingna Pramartha dharma lou-e||

The Pramartha dharma (Parama=highest, most excellent, arth=meaning, object, or means and dharmma = religion, moral merit, etc.) is not actually a separate religious sect but remains as the essence in almost all practices of every Hindu Brahmanical religions. This is called the Vanaprarsta Ashrama (the stage of forest living) in the Hindu Brahmanical division of life. So after the embrace of this Pramartha dharma Meitei monarch partially left his capital royal palace and resided on the western side of Leishang Hiden in the vicinity of northernmost appendage of the Langthabal hills since 1720 A.D.\(^{30}\) (but it seems to be from 1740 A.D.) and at Ramashala (Apong-Eengkhol) since 1748 A.D.\(^{31}\)

Actions Taken Against Native Culture

Some of actions taken in this regard have already been mentioned above. But such phase of destructive nature executed while Meitei-lord

\(^{29}\) Ibid, p. 92.

\(^{30}\) Ibid, p. 92.

\(^{31}\) Ibid, p. 92.
Garibanawaza was adopting the Ramandi sect of Vaisnavism is appeared to have begun since November 1732 A.D. according to the royal chronicle of Manipur.\footnote{Ibid, p. 93.} Some of such harmful actions are describing below as shown in the Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal chronicle of Manipur:

i) While preceptorial of guide, Shantidas Goshhai was out of station in Manipur about two year (from Hiyanggei 3rd, 1652 Saka to Poinu 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1654 Saka)\footnote{Ibid, Pp. 95,96,102,106,etc.} two disciples of Shantidas Goshai, named Bhagavandas and Narayandas having inferior knowledge insisted on the monarch to burn the old Meitei manuscripts and damage the image of divine Lai-Waa-Haiba during the absence of the preceptor. The monarch took up the proposals into actions and the Meitei manuscripts dealing with various subjects were burnt to ashes and the image of divine Lai-Waa-Haiba or Lord Sanamahi was broken into pieces by hammering on the metal idol. On Sunday, the 17\textsuperscript{th} day of the Meitei luni-solar month of Mera in 1654 saka (corresponding to a date in the 1st week of November, 1732 A.D.).\footnote{Ibid, p. 99.} But no man of flesh and blood living then decried the loss of the Meitei native and indigenous culture and cultural materials.

When preceptor Shantidas Goshhai returned to Manipur on Monday, the full moon day of the month of Poinu (December-January) in 1654 saka (1732/1733 A.D.) found the information of destruction and the initiators of the destroyer. He turned Bhagavandas and Narayandas out to leave Manipur so that they might not do such works in future and requested the Meitei monarch to re-
sculpture the image of divine Sanamahi.\textsuperscript{35} Thus the image of divine Sanamahi was remolded and reestablished his worship on the first day of Manipur luni-solar month of Thawan in 1655 saka (corresponding to a date in August, 1733 A.D.\textsuperscript{36}

The cult of Ramandi sect of Hindu Vaishnavism flourished in Manipur from 1729-30 A.D. under patronage and preaching of Meitei-lord Garibanawiwa. As the king, being a forceful man of independent will, was trying to spread the religious sect by force but most of the common people did not adopt the faith heartily. So some of his followers viz. 1) Kisore Shai, Son of King Garibanawaza, 2) Bamon Wari-hanjaba, and 3) his son, 4) Brahmaram, 5) Krishna, 6) Monk (Lamboiba) Lokadas, 7) Moirang Lanhaba, Katvan, 8) Pheida-hanjaba, younger brother of Lanhaba, 9) Shellungba, the younger brother of Moirang Lanhaba, 10) Angom Chandramani, 11) Nauroiba Shellungba, 12) Ningthoukhongjam Kamdeva, 13) Ningombam Shyamram, 14) Wangkhei Maimu, Pheida-hanjaba, 15) Takhel-lambu, 16) Lairen Tumba, etc. had retained the faith until their dead.\textsuperscript{37} Thus the running and prevalence of Ramandi sect of Hindu Vaishnavism in Manipur ended with the expiry of Meitei-lord Garibanawaza with his followers and associates in January, 1752 A.D. at Tonphang Hithathen, the ferry at the mouth of river Imphal (in present Myanmar).\textsuperscript{38} This massacre of Garibanawaza and his followers led by Shayam Shai Khurailakpa, the eldest prince-son of Garibanawaza at Tonphang-

\textsuperscript{35} Raj Ku. Sanahal Singh or Guneshwar alias Aminsana, Satjal, Imphal, 1970, p.91.
\textsuperscript{36} Lm.(L) Ibungohal Singh & N.Khelchandra, op.cit. p.119.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, Pp.93,91,58.
Hithathen was a drama of patricide planned by queen Gomati in feeding her grudge against Garibananwaza for the murder of her beloved husband and taking her to wife.

The Introduction of Gouriya Vaishnavism

The name of Gouriya Vaisnavism or the Vaishnavite sect of Bengali school of Hinduism is standardly called Brahma Sampradaya and generally titled Madhvacharyya or Madhvi Sampradaya. Even though this sect of Vaishnavism was introduced universally by Madhvacharyya as cited above, it was reformed and refined by Gourangga Mahaprabhu or Chaitanyadeva of Gouradesh or Bengal and encroached to Manipur through the realm of Gouradesh. That was why this sect of Vaishnavism is known to the Manipuri people under the appellation and style of Gouriya Vaishnava Dharma. With regard to teaching of Chaitanya it is provided as:

......Krishnadas sums up the teaching of Chaitanya in two sentences: “If a creature adores Krishna and serves his Guru he is released from the meshes of illusion and attains to Krishna’s feet” and “leaving these, i.e. temptations and religious system based on caste (the true Vaishnava) helplessly takes refuge with Krishna”. He denounced caste, proclaimed the universal brotherhood of men and the inefficiency of mere Karma or ceremonial rites. He preached faith in Hari. He held that through love and devotion, song and dance, a state of ecstasy could be produced in which the presence of God would be

39 Lm.(L) Ibungohal and N. Khelchandra Singh, op.cit. p.120
realized by the devotee. Love is the watchword of Chaitanya cult which exercised profound and wide influence on the masses……..

Initiation into Gouriya Vaishnavism

The first and foremost Meitei-King or Manipuri who had initiated into Gouriya Vaishnavism is reported to be Meitei-lord Cheengthang-khomba (1759-98 A.D.) alias Rajarshi (Saint-king) Bhagyachandra, Raja Jaya Singh, Karta Maharaj, Nungnang-khomba and Cheengshang-khomba. He, before his initiation into the Gouriya Vaishnavism adopted Nimandi following the pront of his honourable father Shyan-Shai Khurailakpa. The initiation of Meitei-lord Cheengthang-khomba is provided to have been ceremonised during the tenure of Kingship of Meitei King Bharat Shai (1752-53A.D.). But the narration provided in this connection and relation is appeared to be beyond measure due to the time and situation of said period. By the reigning time of Meitei-lord Bharat Shai both the princely Gourashyam, the elder brother of Bhagyachandra and Bhagyachandra himself were searching for and chasing to kill by Bharat Shai to clear his way to save the throne of Manipur. So they were out of station at Imphal and were hiding somewhere in the area of Moirang under the protection and supervision of their maternal uncle Khelemba and paternal uncle Ananta Shai. As the protection and care for life were more important than the adoption and initiation into a new faith, the embrace of the Gouriya Vaishnavism by Bhagyachandra by ceremonial initiation is seemed to be beyond measures.

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40 Ibid, p. 120.
The political situations and conditions of Manipur from 1752 A.D. to 1764 A.D. were profoundly running from bad to worse. Revolts and invasions of different internal princes and external rising power, i.e., the Burmese to expel and forfeit the right of the heir apparent to the throne made the history of the then years. Even though Meitei-lord Bhagyachandra had taken up some acts and activities for the socio-political welfare and protection of the kingdom no religious reformation was made due to the phenomenal calamities of threatening situation of invasion of the Burmese, who had the establishment of a new royal dynasty under the style of Konbaung dynasty under the leadership of Alau-Ung-Phaya/Bhoora (1754-64 A.D.). While the Manipuri-s under the second tenure of kingship of Meitei-lord Cheengthangkhomba were in the realistic illusory visions of raid of the Burmese, they, the Burmese actually invaded Manipur in January-February, 1765 A.D. As the Manipuri could not withstand the invaders after ferocious fighting at Tamu and Kakching, the country was conquered by the Burmese and the Meitei king left his kingdom in the hope of seeking aids from the Hindu Kingdoms on the west of Manipur. He first fled to the kingdom of Kachar where his paternal aunt was reigning as the queen. But the Kachari king was helpless to aid him to wage war against the rising power of the Burmese, so he led his nephew to the Ahom kingdom to seek help from the then powerful and heavenly King Rajeshvar Singh (Chao Surempha).

Ahom king and his nobles agreed to help the Manipuri king who was known to them under the name of Joy Singh and made him to stay as political asylum until the arrangement for helping him was completed. During his stay near the bank of river Tilao which was known to the Manipuri as Tekhao. Meitei King Bhagyachandra had met a Brahmin named Paramananda Acharyya. Meitei King Bhagyachandra was charmed by the good nature, behaviour, etc. with regards to the religious trait and trend of the ideal Brahmin. So he approached and prayed Paramananda Acharyya to make him his disciple by initiation of him (Bhagyachandra) into the religion which he (Paramananda) was so strictly and devotedly following. Brahmin Paramananda Acharyya was a resident of a place which was lying near the place where Meitei king Bhagyachandra and Ahom king agreed to the proposal of helping and aiding the Meitei king. He initiated him into the Brahman/Madhavi sect of Hindu Vaisnavism but the actual date of this initiation is not recorded properly and distinctly. The date of initiation of Meitei-lord Bhagyachandra lies on a date within the period from 1765 A.D. to 1767 A.D. The first or preceding Guru of Meitei King Bhagyachandra was Nelambar Meeshra Thakur who was also known as Ram Gopal Veiragya who initiated Bhagyachandra into Nimandi sect of Hindu Vaishnavism. But Paramananda Acharyya came into Manipuri as the royal preceptor of Saint King Bhagyachandra from Ahom.

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Thus Meitei-lord Cheengthangkhomba embraced the Brahma sect of Hindu Vaishnavism which was refined and flavoured by well known Vaishnavite saint Chaitanya of Gouradesh or Bengal with his devotional melodies and rhythmic dances. Meitei King Bhagyachandra returned to Manipur as a devotee of Gouriya Vaishnava Dharma from Ahom kingdom in March, 1768 A.D. By this time he was trying his best to recover his kingdom from the Burmese occupation and his mind was lying deeply in the depth of political art and science to bring peace and tranquility in Manipur by solving the problematic matters in the political affairs of his kingdom.

The Spread of the Religion

As aforementioned, Meitei-lord Cheengthangkhomba had come to Manipur as a devotee of Brahma/Madhvai sect of Hinduism from Ahom country. He could bring the Burmese in good terms in 1776 A.D. He had keen interest in this sect and so he wanted to spread this religious faith to the reach of every heart of the Manipuris. He did not use the forceful means in preaching the gospels of this sectarian faith like his grandfather Meitei-lord Garibanawaza but employed the instruments or message of love and devotion to the Almighty. As the primary deity of this sect is divine Vishnu, the second deity of the great trinity of the Hindu religious pantheon he adored the god Vishnu with the erection of the first and foremost Vishnu temple of Manipur at Lammangdong.

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48 Ibid, p. 52.
50 Ibochouba, Chitreshwar, Kulachandra, op.cit. P.58.
So the name of Lammangdong was changed to Vishnupoor, the abode of lord Vishnu or the place where divine Vishnu was worshipped.

Meitei-lord Bhagyachandra had the consciousness that the people of Manipur had a firm belief in the worship of the coupled idols of lord Krishna and his beloved paramour divine Radha and he himself was also an ascetic devotee and renounced lover of the veneration of the idols of coupled Radha and Krishna. As the doctrine of this religious sect permits to adore any one of the incarnations and manifestation of divine Vishnu as the primary god along with others gods and goddesses in any pantheon of any religious sect he made up his mind to establish and sculpture the idols as he aspired in the images of divine Radhika and her lord Krishna. Many previous scholars in Meitei Hindu religious faith propounded this idea as if the lord himself had expounded the matter by appearing himself in the dream of Meitei-lord Bhagyachandra. As the Meitei-lord had found the regarded tree in a jack-fruit growing then at the Kaina hillock, he had rendered to sculpt the images of divine Vijayanatha Govinda, Madana Mohan and Lord Govindaji in 1776 A.D. But the idols were animated and set on the altars(s) for worship in November-December of 1779 A.D.

After the carving of the image of divine Govinda in 1776 the idol of divine Radhika under the Manipuri name and style of Raseshvari (the queen of Rasa balletic melodrama) was sculptured in C. 1784 A.D. Meitei-lord

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51 Ibid, p. 58.
52 Lm.(L), Ibungohal & N. Khelchandra, op.cit. P.125.
53 Ibid, p. 129.
Cheengthangkhomba not only made divine Govindajee the kingdom’s god but also installed the deity as the overall king of the monarchial king of Manipur. He also sculpted the idols of Arambam Nityananda of Imphal, Gopinatha of Ningthoukhong and Anuprabhu of Nabdipa West Bengal and distributed the gods to his near and dear ones and relatives to worship at different places of inside and outside Manipur. Thus Meitei-lord Bhaghyachandra spread the religious sect of Chaitanya cult of Bengal school of Vaishnavism to every corner of Manipur, rather, as far as West Bengal. Meitei-lord Bhagyachandra, while he was on the journey of pilgrimage to visit the divine Ganga, the river which can deliver all the sins of human beings gave the hand of his youngest daughter-princess Harisheshvari to Rajdhon Monikya, the then king of Tripura. But this matrimonial alliance became a part of the Saint-king’s propagation of the Gouriya Vaishnavism in Tripura. He made all the Manipuri of his time devotees of divine Govindajee and Raseshvari in the course of his spread of the religious sect which he had interested most. This religious sect of Gouriya Vaishnavism is still running its operations in Manipur.

The Impacts of Hinduism in Manipuri Society (1704-1950)

The religious concept and true cultic creed of the Meitei in the realistic and factual sense are the composite idea of the ancestor worship and spirit-adoration cults. When they took the divine Kalika reverential cult of Sakta religion the development of the monotheistic faith of divine Mother goddess worship cult was elevated. This cult has many impacts on various sects of adoring the female principles in the theistic sphere of the Meitei. The worship
of DEVI (the female deity) in singular form and coupling nature or posture in native trait with male deities in the Meitei cultic phenomena are prevailed through several ages. The idea and general notion of the Devi worship with regard to universal Indian context is appeared to have been developed during the period of the Gupta’s paramouny in India. In this regard it is prescribed: 54

Another important aspect of the religion at this time was the Devi worship – the cult of the mother goddess. The worship of Devi penetrated the main bodies of Saiva and Vaishnava sects. Among the goddesses, Lakshmi, Durga or Bhagavati, Parvati occupied prominent position. The Siva-Sakti doctrine – became the cult of Lakshmi-Narayan and the Gita itself alludes to “My Prakiti”. Some scholars hold the opinion that the rise of the Tantric creed in the Gupta period was due to this Devi worship.

Even though the worship of the Universal Mother Goddess flourishes since the age of Harrapan civilization in India, 55 the Devi worship cult was the one, mainly emphasized on the coupling or matching of gods and goddesses. Again, the Sakti cult was the cult of worship of the female one as the Supreme Almighty. These phenomena have remarkable influences and impacts in Manipuri native and indigenous cults. One of such example is the worship or cult of divine Panthoibee who is described as the Supreme Mother Goddess on one side and as a simple powerful goddess on the other hand. The accounts of the different aspects of divine Panthoibee as the Supreme Mother Goddess, a simple powerful goddess and a human being go as under:

54 Ibid, p. 133.
1) As Supreme Mother-Goddess

2) As a Simple powerful goddess

3) As a human being

Divine Panthoibee who had the nomenclature of “APANBEE” at her earlier stage of development of her cult is described as a lady of human flesh and blood who had her father named Tubee Thingkok Lairemma, mother called Lainamung-namungbee. Malem Tampak Lairenhanbee, and seven brothers, etc. She was described as to have legal marriage with Khaba Taram-khoinucha, the prince of the Khaba clan who were reigning then with their capital at Kanglei-pungmayon, etc.

From the above circumstances it is brought to light that the cultic concepts of divine mother Goddess and female deities who have been consorted with male divinities as the husband and wife are vividly seen in many Meitei scriptures like – Panthoibee Khongul, Panthoibee Naheron, Konthoujam Nonggaron, Nongban Pombee Luwauba, etc. There are also many other goddesses such as Phou-woi-bee (literally the goddess who becomes the paddy, but colloquially, the goddess of paddy or cereals), Nongthang Leima (the goddess of lightenings), Ngareima (the goddess of fishes), Thumleima (the goddess of salt and brine springs), etc. and all these goddesses are regarded as either the incarnations or manifestations of divine mother Goddess, titled

58 Ibid, p. 31
60 Ibid, p. 141.
61 Lm.(L) Ibungohal & N. Khelchandra, op.cit. p.41.
Leisheeren-Leipunbee or Leimaren Shidabee. Thus the idea and philosophy of female divinities are well-developed found in the Meitei cultic school of theistic pantheon and these developments are appeared to be the precious impacts of the adoption of the Sakta Kalika worship cult.

Impacts of Hindu Vaishnavism

The sects of Hindu Vaishnavism are the most influential faiths and beliefs which have great and darling impacts in the Meitei society. As the sects of Hindu Vaishnavism those crept in the valley or basin of the river Imphal and her branches and tributaries were (I) Nimandi or Sanak sect, (II) Ramandi or Ramat sect and (III) Madhvi or Brahma sect or Gouriya sect of Bengal school under the religious refinement and reformation of Shri Chaitanyadeva of Shrihastha (Shri hatta or modern Sylhet, Bangladesh). Even though the last one is the most effective sect, the former two have also some important impacts in the socio-religious sphere of the Manipuri society.

(1) The Impacts of Sanaka Sampradaya

The Sanaka Sampradaya or Nimandi sect of Hindu Vaishnavism as aforementioned was adoring cult of the coupling images of divine Radha and Lord Krishna and the presiding scripture for controlling and ruling over the disputing matters with regard to the sectarian creed and conducts is Shrimad Bhagavata. Most of its characteristic rules are under the bindings of love, meditation and devotion to divine Radhika so as to attain the eternal feet of salvation, liberating from the fastening of birth-cycle of the soul or human vitality of rebirth which is colloquially assumed as Lord Krishna the compact
of truthfulness which manifested as the personification of man in blue complexion as the sign of eternity.

The impacts of this sectarian faith of the adoration of Lord Krishna as the supreme Godhead along with divine Radha as the way leading to the supreme godhead remain forcefully in the religiously refined and reformed sect of Gouriya Vaishnavism. As reverent Chaitanya or Gourangga adopted Lord Krishna as the supreme Godhead through his reformation of the Brahma Sampradaya or Madhvi sect of Hindu Vaishnavism as an impact of the Nimandi sect or Sanaka Sampradaya, the thought and philosophy of Lord Krishna for his being the supreme Godhead of the Hindu pantheon remains the same idea. This impact had much forceful effect on the religious philosophy of Manipuri Saint King Bhaghyachandra. That was why he had left the adoration of divine Vishnu, the Supreme Godhead of the Hindu pantheon and second great deity of the Hindu Trinity as established divine Govinda as the State god of Manipuri. The saint king had placed lord Vishnu as the domestic and personal god of the King(s) of Manipur while divine Govinda (one of the most popular and familiar names of Lord Krishna) was made the kingdom’s deity.\textsuperscript{62}

(2) The Impacts of Ramandi Sampradaya

The cult of worship of heroic Ramachandra as the axial deity in the nature and norm of the Hero-worship cult was introduced in Manipur by Shantidas Mahanta of Sylhet, Bangladesh in C.1729-30 A.D. Divine Rama was paid homage with the images of two or more heroes, viz. Lakshmana, the

\textsuperscript{62} M. Chandra Singh, op.cit. 1999, p.4-5
younger step-brother of Shri Rama, Hanumanta Maha Veera, the ape-like devotee of Shri Rama (who is designed as the 7th incarnation of lord Vishnu); Sugriva, the king of ape-like human beings, Jambhuvan, the bear-like hero, Anggada, etc. Among these divinities in the veneration of the followers of Ramandi sect there is a heroine of female chastity and womanly loyalty under the name of Sita, the legal consort of Shri Rama. As the ideal of this chastity of Sita or the example of chaste Sita it is appeared to evolve the burning of female spouses by themselves in the same pyres of their respective husbands since 1725 A.D. Thus the culture of Hindu Sati-daha (Burning of the chaste woman) had encroached into Manipur valley and flourished until 1784 A.D.

The impact of the heroic cult of Ramandi provided the massive valour and courage to the general mass people of Manipur. Only an army made of about 20,000 soldiers and warriors of Meitei could conquer and plunder many Burmese towns and villages in 1738 A.D. This matter is described by E.W. Dun as under:

“In 1738 he again crossed the Ningthi river…. At the termination of the rains in the same year, at the head of a force of 20,000 men, marched between the Burmese army, three divisions of which occupied the towns of Matsem, Dabayen, and Myedu, and to use the language of the Burmese historians, “without stopping” attacked and carried the stockade positions around the ancient capital of Sagaing, of which he obtained possession.”

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63 Ibid, Pp.30-31
64 Ibid, Pp.39-49
Thus the spirit, valour and courage of the Meitei in their war-likeness were enlivened not only in fighting of the Burmese but also to the struggles for extension of boundaries towards the west of the then monarchial kingdom of Meitei-lord Garibanawaza.

The love of worship of hero Rama was renewed by Meitei-lord Cheengthangkhomba. The saint-king made Shri Rama the Senapati or Chief of army of monarchial kingdom ruled, the then by divine lord Govindajee as the monarch, being offered the throne of Manipur by his devotee Meitei-lord Cheengthangkhomba. This tradition of being Shri Govinda, Ramji Prabhu and Vrindavanachandra (Vrinamchandra) to be the king, Senapati or Army chief and Jubaraja respectively is still enduring in the Hindu Vaishnavite domain of the Manipuri Hindu. Meitei lord Labanyachandra (1798-1800 A.D.), the eldest son of Cheengthangkhomba arranged to cast the metal image of Ramji Prabhu in 1798 A.D. for worshipping the deity in the long run. This image of divine Rama along with the other metal images of Sita and Lakshmana still exist as the objects of veneration in the shrine newly erected at Wangkhei Ningthem Pukhri Mapal, Imphal. Thus the impacts of Ramandi cult, even when the cultic nature and norm were in extinction, are still prevailing in the Manipuri society as a part of the following religious sect.

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66 Lm.(L) Ibunohal & N. Kelchandra, op. cit. Pp85-86,94,96,etc.
67 Ibid, p. 142.
(3) The Impact of Brahma Sampradaya or Chaitanya Cult

The impacts of Brahma/Madhavi or Madhvacharyya Sampradaya or popularly the Gouriya Vaishnavism sect or Shree Chaitanya or Gouranggga cult has the highest in the peak influential matrixes of the Hindu Vaishnavism in the Manipuri society. It is said so, as the products and productions of the Manipuri Hindu Vaishnavism brought the Manipuri-s to the recognisation of the international Hindu society or the cultural world of all the religious by its renown balletic melodrama under the name and fame of “Manipuri Rasa”. The agent and preaching pastor of this religious sect was Meitei-lord Cheengthangkhomba as shown above. With the embrace of this sectarian faith of Vaishnavism the worship of Vishnu was introduced and initiated in Manipur. The Vishnu temple at Lammangdong or Vishnupoor, the first shrine where the worship of Lord Vishnu in the formal ritual was started is still narrating the events of adoration of the particular deity of Brahma Sampradaya. From this place of Vishnupoor the classical music specially the vocal songs and melodies sprang up from among the folk songs of Manipur. This classical song is termed as “Keertana” (prayer song sung in praise and enumeration of virtues and qualities of divinity). Lammangdong or Vishnupoor may also be treated as the native land or birth-place of divine Govindajee of Manipur as the image of the said deity was sculpted in the then palace yard of Manipuri Kingdom at Vishnupoor.

The Brahma Sampradaya in the religious refined form and feature of the reformations with teaching of the great devotional saint Chaitanya has offered
much a lot not only in the moral and ethical purposes but also in the social
cultures, conducts, manners, etc., as a creed for mental peace. The Manipuri
could possess the art and science of sculpturing idols in wooden materials.
Examples of such sculpturing art may be set as the idols of divine Govindajee,
Vijayanatha Govinda (Vijoygovinda of Sagolban), Madanamaohan, Gopinatha,
etc. The cult also provided the art of making Potloi, the costumes of the
Manipuri Rasa and the most parts of this art are appeared to cover with the
appliqué and embroidery arts of needle works.

The chorus duet and solo classical dance, balletic melodrama in the
devotional theme, plots and ideas as well as the choir, duet and solo vocal and
instrumental music in classical forms and features in the devotional lyrics and
librettos are also provided to evolve in 1779 A.D. under the titles of Nata
Sangkeertana and Rasa in the fields of Manipuri arts and culture of the realms
in song and dance realms. This event of introduction of classical song, dance,
ballet and balletic melodrama is recorded in the royal chronicle.

These performances of the Rasa which is always accompanied with the
Nata Sangkeertana (the balletic chorus performance of devotional melodies) as
the purvaranga (prologue) of the performance had produced many other art
forms of dances, ballets, melodramas, etc. such as Nupee-Pala (woman’s
chorus devotional ballets), Vasaka-s, Khubak-Eeshei (rhythmic ballet with the
crapping of hands) of both male and female as well as Shanshenba (Gostha or

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69 Laishram Mangi, op.cit.p.38.
cow herding balletic melodrama), Kunjarasa, Vasantarasa, Nityarasa, Divarasa, Pung-cholom (drummers’ dance), etc.

The Brahma/Madhavi sect of Hindu Vaisnavism also offered the spending the life in the Hindu way of life-style with enjoying vegetarian food habits. The observances of the life’s ceremonies of the different Hinduised subjects of the Hindu kingdom of Manipur are also followed the Hindu customary norms, traits and trends. The monarchial kingdom of Manipur was elaborately recognized as a Hindu Kingdom in 1829 A.D. with the acknowledgement and recognisation offered by the Hindu societies on the west of Manipur starting from Sylhet.\textsuperscript{71} A code of Hindu marriage to be adopted by the Manipuri Hindus only was produced during regime of Meitei-lord Cheengthangkhomba in 1790 A.D.\textsuperscript{72} This code was titled “Sambandha Nirmaya” and was modified and improved with the additions and omissions of the rules and examples of the code of Manipuri marriage during the reign of Meitei-lord/Raja Chandrakeerti Singh (1850-86 A.D.) K.C.I.S. in 1874 A.D. (1796 saka).\textsuperscript{73} Thus Manipuri could follow their own law of marriage with a distinctive thought and philosophy differed from the regulations of other Hindu marriage.

Opposition against the Hinduisation

Where there is an action there is a reaction in the universal law of action and reaction. But no reaction against the Hinduisation and sanskritization of the

\textsuperscript{71} Lm.(L) Ibungohal and N. Khelchandra, op.cit, p.172.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, p. 133.
Manipuris and their culture or cultural materials is seen unless and until the 3rd decade of the 20th century excepting some claims of unsatisfaction expressing in the written comments of some unborn persons or romantic personifications so far concerned with the written records found in Manipur valley. The versions or comments of claim or decry of the Hinduisation of the Manipuri-s prevailing in the contents of books of predictions are also appeared to have been written in later period so far concerned to the linguistic and lingual points of view. The dialectic composition of the said versions, even when those deceptively tried to employ the archaic words or phrases have close relations with the modern or pre-modern Manipuri dialects posterior to 1891A.D.

Even though Meitei-lord Garibanawaza severely tortured the people who did not followed his whim with regards to the socio-religious matters or the persons stood against his will for following the Ramandi sect of Hindu Vaishnavism no person of human flesh and blood came forward to complain for his action of impositions of fines, floggings and banishments. Inspite of such protests the Manipuri-s were appeared to have been in close interlacing together in the united fashion to invade against the Burmese under the calls with war cries of Meitei-lord Garibanawaza for wagging war against the Burmese.

Some modern scholars opine that Meitei-King Jitshai (1748-52A.D) was raising arms against the Hinduisation of the Manipur by forging the revenge for killing his own father under the advice of his mother Gomati Rani. Again no contest or complain for Hinduisation or spreading of Hindu Vaishnavism came
up during the tenures of kingship of Meitei-lords-Cheengthangkhomba, Labanyachandra, Madhuchandra (1800-03A.D.), Chourajit (1803-13A.D), Marjit (1813-19A.D), Gambheer Singh (1825-34 A.D), Chandrakeerti (1834-44A.D), Nara Singh (1844-50A.D), etc. But the modern communal claim and complain of being the Meitei who followed the indigenous cult of Sanamahism, etc. are appeared to have been started since C.1930A.D. Let the religious matters be remained as those were and let the followers of the religion also be allowed to adopt what ones likes.
Hanuman of Hanuman Thakur Temple of Manipur

Shri Govindaji of Imphal

Shri Govindaji Temple of Palace Compound, Manipur

Shri Govindaji Temple of Kangla, Manipur

ISCKON Temple of Manipur
Vishnu Temple of Bishnupur, Manipur

Manipur Classical Dance Ras Lila