CHAPTER III

INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM IN MANIPUR

Buddhism is a common religion of the South-east Asia, which is founded by Gautama Buddha. However there is no oral traditional or literary document that Buddhism was in Manipur.

Even though Manipur is geographically poor in communication with the neighbouring kingdoms in the days of yore and near past she is not much far away from the operating area of Buddhism and its disciples. Manipur was always in touches and contacs with the Buddhist up till the treaty of Yandaboo, 1825 A.D. Touch and contact bring to unlike nations or peoples into the likeness and oneness of habit, characters, natures etc. due to the exchanges of cultural objects, essential commodities, food habits etc.

Antiquities of Buddhist elements in the custody of Mutua Museum, Manipur state Museum, state Archaeology Manipur and other privates as well as adhere to the scattering, elsewhere in any field of the Meitei cultural heritages and cults are appeared to have brought in Manipur by immigrants from the South-east Asia and the invaders of the neighbouring Buddhist empire through their course of contact and impact. So the ideas of the Buddhistic thoughts, Philosophies and ele-
ments brought and imported in Manipur by the Myamma invasion of the 13th, 18th and 19th centuries and the events of the cultural and commodities exchanges in the 15th century A.D. between Pong king Chaopha Khekkhomba (Sao-Ngan-Hpa) of Mogaung of Myamma, (Upper Burma : Shan states) and Meitei Lord Thangwai Ningthouba or Shenbi Kiyamba (1467-1508 A.D.) of the polytheistic Meitei kingdom. The exchange is that - Lakwan, the trumped, the servant of the Mao-Shan king Khakhomba is exchanged with Sekta the drummer, the servant of the Meitei King Kiyamba in 1392 Saka (1470 A.D.)<sup>2</sup>. Other 11 (eleven) personals of king Khakhomba who would perform the different disciplines of the day today work of life were exchanged<sup>3</sup>. So the origin of the Buddhist influence in Manipur is pointed from the east and the most influential attributable to the worthiness of the direct origins among the other was Myanmar.

The Buddhist elements so far found in Manipur are as follows :-

(a) The standing Monumental Element

The Buddhist conqueror (Burmese) pulled down all the erections and elevations in the valley of Manipur during their sway and overrun for seven years known under the historical name of Seven Years Devastation of Manipur. But the Burmese never disturbed the

Buddhistic visionary productions and thus the Kyaung, (Meitei pro-

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1. Ibunghahal & Khelchandra op. cit. pp.216-224.
2. Ibid p. 19.
3. (i) N.H. & (ii) S.M.K. (Mss.).
nounce as “Kiyong”) style domed temples of Shri Krishna (at Brahmapur Guru Aribam Leikai, Imphal protected by Archaeology Dept.), venerable Mahabali Hanuman Thakur (at Mongbahanba or Mahabali arbour, Imphal) and divine Vishnu (at Lamangdong Bishenpur, protected by the Archaeological survey of India) are smiling in Manipur valley. The architects of these temples were from Myanmar.

These Hindu temples got rid of the Buddhist Myammas shaking hand from leveling down because of the fact that the Myammas were probable to aspire as the abode or Kyaung of their Lord, the Buddha at the apparent vision of the temple as every devotee of his god cares and respects the properties and dwelling of his own god. Therefore the Buddhist elements in Manipur is proved at the very bird’s eye view.

(b) Shrine Architectural Element

The Meitei in their art of temple architect are appeared to adopt directly from the Hindu pantheon and indirectly from the Buddhist Shan Myamma contact and contracted the Shans for the first in 1617 A.D. and the Myamma in 1697 A.D. in their respective architects.

Even though Vaisnavism was proclaimed as the state religion and extended as the same since 1717 A.D. the Hindu divinities revering temple of divine goddess Kalika and divine Krishna, the Buddhistic stupa type, dome-shape roofing extraordinary thick walling and high

5. Ibid pp. 36 & 70.
plinth level foundation was started to construct in the palace complex of the then ruling king Charairongba and he was followed by his son to construct Kalika temple in 1715 A.D. Krishna temple in 1722\textsuperscript{6} A.D. This temple architecture was continued to build more stylized Kiyongs, such as seven storied dome shape roofing temple of Ngangbam family in 1725 A.D., the Kiyong of Hanuman in 1729\textsuperscript{7} A.D. and others during the regime of Garibaniwaza. These architects were all from the present Myanmar. Even these building and temples were constructed for the transaction of the Hindu Vaisnavite divinities, the art and architecture are Buddhistic style. Many other building which bore, the Buddhist element on their architectural designs such as Uttra, the royal waiting room or public enclosure which was erected for the first at the palace entrance in Kangla cantonment of Manipur in 1629\textsuperscript{8} A.D. by King Khagemba (1597-1652) A.D. Its architectural feature are likely imitated from the Myanmar are in the possessions of (1) four facets on the side sheds extended from the central square main building, (11) the extended side sheds were all in square hut type, (111) the central main building carries a four faced smaller square hollows storey with ridged roofing decorated with crest in sing tine on the ridge end to end and hornish crossed on every facet of the storey. (IV) the four directionwise extended sheds had also ridged type up to the touches of the foot of the upper storey. This type of building are variably found in

6. Ibid p. 82.
8. Ibid p. 38.
almost all the countries of South-east Asia, especially in Thailand and Myanmar for their social ceremonies and celebration. The architectural feature of Sana Sangai Mathon Manga (Five storeys) and Sana Sangai Mathon Mapal (Nine storeys) has also the same fates of the element with the Uttra. These storeys decrease their sizes from bottom to top.

(C) Decorative Fixtures and Furniture

The decorative fixtures and furniture, used in both the Hindu and the Meitei native deities such as (I) The THAKAN (Arpar purda: over or above curtain), (II) The SHEKPIN (statra: storied over flap or above flutters), (III) The PE (umbrella), (IV) The CHONG (Paratata: insignia) and (V) CHANDUWA (Upar purda: Over curtain in case of death cremation), were also almost all the properties of the Buddhist disciple in the originality and archetype. These divining equipment are also in among some other sects of Hinduism at times.

(D) The Buddhist Sculptures: The Buddha Image

A few number of Buddhist sculpture and images are found in Manipur. Such images so far found in Manipur are of miniature scales and these are revealed by the fact of their sizes that they are of the icons of the domestic deity. These are probable to be left over images

10. Ibungoal & Khelchandra op. cit. p. 37.
of worship for those Burmese who once settle in Manipur for a shorter period during seven years devastation.

(E) Social Ceremony of Disposal of Death

The social aspect of disposal of death of the Meitei as emitted and evolved from their scriptural records and the present archeological findings at Sekta - Thumkhonglok Ching, 1989, Sekta - Kei mound 1991, Keibi Heikak Ching 1991 have proved to be an admixture of the local traditional and customary disposal and foreign Buddhist elemental death offering model. Out of all the archaeological findings in Manipur with regard to this social ceremony the Buddhist routine is evidenced to be of standarized one. As the archaeological findings so far carried out and their findings were concerned by the exploration of Lamboiching 1980, Thumkhonglok Ching, Chingmeirong Ching 1999 appeared to have the closest relation with the Buddhist monks tradition of Myanmar.

(F) Sekta Excavation 1991 Finds

Among the finds of the Sekta excavations, the important finds are the embalment of some skull with covering thin belmetal or copper masked. The culture of embalment with masks on the body relics is the tradition of the Buddhist countries and their provincial parts. This embalment is done in making the image of worship with the dead bodies of the great Buddhist monks after their expiry and retirement from

12. Massin and Nongkhairon Mss.
the worldly lives and kept or deposited them in a room of Pagodas, Kyaungs, Stupas etc. for paying respects and homage to them by those whosoever visited and came for worships to the universal Monarch - the Buddha. Such culture is still existing in the Pagodas of China, Tibet, in Kyaungs and Pagodas of Myanmar etc.14. But for the case of the Sekta burial mound, only the facial mask instead of full mask is found. But it is in the Buddhist traditional deviated custom.

(G) The Keibi Heikakching Exploration 1991

The Keibi Heikakching is a very small hillock situated on the bank of a small lake - like canal in the Keibi village on the near north-west of Sekta village. Here secondary ash deposited urn burials were explored. The culture of the ash deposited urn burial at the higher level on a hillock or raised up was a tradition of the Pyu people who were absorbed by the Myamma as their oldest people in their land of the Myanmar. One of such moulds was dug up at Hmawza in Myanmar15.

Thus the Keibi Heikakching hillock also responds to the investigation of the Buddhist elements in Manipur in the Myamma concept and conceived nature of secondary ash-interned urn burial.

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14. i. By Authority. ibid. 387.
15. Dr. P. Gogoi : The Tai and Tai Kingdoms; Gauhati, 1957. p. 70.
(H) Engrave stone with the symbol of footprint

The Meitei conceived the symbol of the foot as to be the symbolization of subjugation of tribe settling in areas where the stone was planted and of the conquest and domination of the areas by the Meitei King whose footprint engraved stone was erected. The Buddhist has their own concept of the footprint symbol. During the early spread of Buddhism the footprint of Buddha was often represented in the places where he was believed to have visited.

Between the concepts of the footprint symbols produced by the Meitei and the Indian Vaisnavites, the Meitei concept is nearer to the original concept of the Buddhism which was the evolution of this culture of symbolisation and symbolic introduction of the divinities in the name of the Enlighten one. So this Meitei concept was a modified and diverted culture of derivation and adoption of the Buddhism. If it be so, it is also an element of Buddhism which crept through the hilly region of Manipur during the regime of Meitei King Khagemba to whom the Shan settlers of Manipur in about 1602-03 A.D. had supplied. Such footprint depicted stone is in the custody of Nagaland state Museum, Kohima and which can be identified as the symbol of visit in the land of Khipumei, Meremei etc. now in the Kohima district of Nagaland in about 1770 A.D. by Raja Jaya Singh or Bhagyachandra.