CHAPTER-II

RELIGIONS OF MANIPUR

RELIGIOUS ACCOUNTS BEFORE THE ADVENT OF HINDUISM

Religion, as it were conventionally defined as "belief in, and identification with a greater force or power"\(^1\) has its extended hand where there are human beings. So the people of Manipur had their religion in any of its aspects as a faith or a belief or a cult from the very moment when the first humankind appeared. The true and actual processes and progresses of the theological and ethical school of thought and philosophy of the people of Manipur prior to the days of the commencement of the twelfth century A.D. are still in the realm of obscurity. Many native scriptures\(^2\), which are written probably in the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) centuries, plead for a lot possession of classic religious materials of Meitei religion before the advance of Hinduism, which are very poor in scientific, archeological evidence. But it is to think of the definition of religion as aforesaid. So the Meitei are bound to a belief in some kinds or an aspect of a greater force or power of the Nature. Hence the primitive and primal religion of the Meitei is worth to resolve as the

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Natural worship and probable to stand at the shrines of animism\(^3\) and animistic beliefs in the natural inmates for both the celestial and terrestrial bodies of visual visualisations, subject to fear and frightens and favour and forgiveness. Animism hoisted her flag of success in the valley of Manipur with the royal patronage of the then reigning king Loiyamba (C. 1074 - 1122 A.D.)\(^4\). The influxion of Tantric creed is evidenced during his regime and appeared to have been welcomed warmly\(^5\).

Manipur belongs to the Tantric high tide area internationally recognised zone of Tantric regions\(^6\), but it could not harm the animistic belief in the existence of soul in benevolent forms in all the beings and inmates of the nature.

Therefore, the spirit worship also bred from the belief in souls. The encroachment of Tantric cult during the tenure of over lordship of Meitei-Lord King Loiyamba is conceived to have been brought in by the Myama Ari -Lords or disciples\(^7\) arrival from the then Burmese empire under the lordship of Kyon - tsit - tha or Anaraw - hta. The Arism, a form of tantric Mahayanism was flourished during those days in the capital - city of Pagan but is make to have been weeded out of the city to wipe of the corrupted Buddhism by Ana - raw - hta and they were

\(^{4}\) O. Vogeswar, N.L. (Imphal 1967, p. 81)
\(^{5}\) I & K, op cit. p. 9.
probable to take shelter to avoid murder of the Pagan emperor who adopted and favoured Hinayana sect of Buddhism.

With the alteration of natural resources and human habitation changes in faiths and beliefs follow in the society of man. So the Meitei religion also adopted the laws of nature and followed the rules of human habits, manners and conduct to form a school of Meitei moral science in ethical theology. Therefore animal sacrifice to pray, homage and seek favour for success in defense and offence in the statecraft and administrative affairs is first displayed in the royal chronicle in 1470 A.D. The origin of the animal sacrifice nay other sacrifices, viz. fowl sacrifice, human sacrifice and floral offering for the welfare of the mankind are provided to have been much earlier to this date. Performance and observation of ceremonies of human life - cycle such as baptism, marriage, child birth, death in general, formal or public manner is also appeared to reflect in 1505 A.D. All these ceremonies are universally co-related with the religious faiths and beliefs and are concerned with religion and religious performances and performers. The religious performers are none other than the Priests, Shamans. Thus the Meitei religion attained the cult standard of religion more than the preliminary and primary stages of the faith and the belief in the Universal manner.

The Meitei were polytheist, even if they are believed in a Lord creator or Sidaba Mapu. Among them Sanamahi cult and Pakhangba cult are very important. The Meitei have not only the benevolent deities but they also have their malevolent or evil sprits or elksbeings of super mischievous natures from the very incidence when their benevolent deities are into being - such as Haraba or Leithingkai. The first transaction of evil sprits is appeared in 1589 A.D. 10.

The names of the evil sprits are kept under the unknown names of Leirang and Nungkarang. So it may be said a mare example of worship to the malevolent deities. But the progresses of the worship of benevolent deities were still running without any disturbance. Almost all the immigrants and native settlers of Manipur possessed and favoured their own religious faiths, belief, cults and creeds upto the expiry of the 16th century A.D. There was no state religion in Manipur, the then probably known to them as Poirei Meitei Leipak upto the period stated in the proceeding. Hindu immigrants followed various sects of Hinduism, like Saivism, Saktism, Vaisnavism of various sectorians, Tantrism etc. So even though no social respects the religion of his fellow social unit, none decried the religion of their fellow neighbours. But disunion in religious moral and thought affected the political union or disunited in political Manipur of those days. That is why unity in religion was highly essential by that time when the political consolidation of the seven clans or nine groups of the people of Manipur were needed for

pure union to form a nation under the name and style of the Meitei. The
then people of Manipur found the champion of united Manipur in the
cultures of Manipur as the person of the fountain of all the cultures of
Manipur as Laiying Shenbi Khagemba. Meitei King Khagemba (1597 -
1625 A.D.) had a mind of new discoveries and invention for the benefit
of his people. King Khagemba followed the old religions of the Meitei
and he observed all the traditional folk customaries of the logical thoughts
and beliefs but he reproduced them with the additions and omissions
of new inventions, formulation and the methodological fundamentals and
principles. He had introduced many important cults, which remains as
the backbone of the Meitei religions. The accounts of some of the cults
introduced by Meitei lord Khagemba for welfare of his subjects and
which are still prevailing in action are as below:

(I) Divine Sanamahi cult

King Khagemba introduced Sanamahi cult first for all his con-
tributed cults. Even though many scriptures pleads the existence of the
Sanamahi cult from the time immemorial, the actual development was
from the time of Laiying Sanbi Khagemba (1597 - 1625 A.D.). Divine
Sanamahi was regarded as the eldest son of Sidaba Mapu or Almighty
God. He is always with consort Langmai Chingcharolbi along with his
mother divine Leimaran Sidabi\(^{11}\), the universal Mother goddess.

etc.
Divine Sanamahi is the king of every house of the Meitei society and venerated at the south-western corner of the house. The first shrine in the Architecture of Phura of divine Sanamahi was erected in the complex of Wangol in 1617 A.D. Divine Sanamahi is the axis of the Meitei native religion of Manipur.

(II) Divine Thangjing cult and other three boundary of border administering divinity cults.

Khagemba, the inventor of the Meitei native religions introduced the cult of worship of the Thangjing cult popularly in the Meitei traditional aspect of Meitei religion. Divine Thangjing is conceived of the original clannial deity of Moirang clan. His divinity Thangjing is aspired by the valley people of Manipur as the administering deity of south-western border of the valley along with other three deities of boundaries of different directions and they are i) Koubru -the presiding deity of the north-western border of the valley, ii) Marjing -the administering deity of the north-eastern boundary of the valley and iii) Wangbaren - the presiding deity of the southern or southeastern border of the valley.

King Khagemba was not only introducer of the four divine presiding deities for different boundaries of different directions but also inventor of the cult and culture of nine Umanglai (bower deities). The names of the nine bower deities are¹² (1) Muwa Ningthou, (2) Leivingthou Hanba, (3) Naokan, (4) Mongba Hanba, (5) Chakhaba, (6) Koubaren, (7)  

Khamlangba, (8) Luwang Ningthou Pumsiba and (9) Marching. But during Khagemba's time the nine arbour deities had different aspects and name\(^\text{13}\). The king had worshiped all the then recognised deities at Kuchu by sacrifices the offering of lives in the unit of one hundred along with units of hundred floral associates in 1631 A.D. on the commemoration of the inauguration the royal coronation hall (Kangla)\(^\text{14}\). Thus the cults of other Meitei deities are descended from the introduced cult of Khagemba and the accounts of those other deities are taken up as under: -

**A. The cult of Nongsaba**

Nongsaba was a tribal god in origin\(^\text{15}\). The deity is described as brought down to Moirang Nongthombam by Moirang Sathi, then to the Meitei by Yumnam Tomba and Ngairangba and the deity was worshiped in the capital complex of Kangla by erecting a shrine and an arbour under the name of Kangla of Nongsaba from the very regime of Khagemba. Meanwhile divine Nongsaba was still worshipping as family deity of Moirang Laithangbam family and divine courtire of divine Thangjing of Moirang. The Meitei conceives divine Nongsaba as the Manifestation of the Almighty for the trial of justice of divinities and mankind.

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15. Nongsaba Laihui & Nongsaba Khunthok (Mss.)
B. The cult of Lai Kasa (Kasa Sorarel)

The cult of Kasa as the administering deity of the fate and luck of humankind and the guardian deity of the Meitei king is appeared to have been evaluated and originated during the paramony of Meitei King Khagembha. No mention regarding any account of the divine Kasa is transacted in the royal chronicle prior to the account of the deity exhibited in 1635 A.D. Divine Kasa cult has similar conceptions of Lengdon cult in the Ahom-Shan / Tai religion\(^6\). In the later period there arose another Kasa cult which is of an omensious cult of malevolent deity.

C. The cult of Nongpok Ningthou

The cult of Nongpok Ningthou whose actual name is divine Kainou Chingsamba is also appeared to have been flourished during the reign of Meitei Lord Khagembha.

Divine Nongpok Ningthou is conceived by the Meitei as to have equivalent powers, functions, duties and virtues with the Hindu adopted god Siva or Mahadeva. Nongpok Ningthou is described in his physical appearance and attires as the Hindu superior deity Mahadeva\(^7\). His consort is divine Apanbi / Panthoibi.

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\(^6\) Dr. Padmeswar Gogoi: Tai Ahom Religious & Customs; Gauhati 1976, p. 4.
\(^7\) M. Chandra Singh: Panthoibi Khonggu, Imphal 1972, p. 47.
D. The cult of Apanbi I Panthoibi.

The cult of divine Apanbi later changes her epithet as Panthoibi is also appeared to have come into existence during the time of Khagemba. But Meitei authentic scripture Panthoibi Khongkhul advocated and prosecuted as in both the legendary and mythological fashions of being an able lady of meritorious wits and wisdom's and at the rank of the supreme Mother goddess or else what her incarnation of a simple goddess as a deity of war and battle¹⁸ as that of the Hindu Durga or Dashera. Thus divine Panthoibi was worshiped by erecting her shrine and grove in the capital complex. Her first facial anatomical sculpture (Komai) of the form of a mask was moulded in 1699A.D.

E. Pakhangba Cult

Divine Pakhangba was the axis of the political culture of Manipur. The origin and evolution of this cult even if the Meitei scriptures prosecuted much earlier as establishing the thought and ideas of Pakhangba as being a god who partake the creation of the earth and its spheres as the younger son of the Almighty¹⁹, as transacted in the royal chronicle was appeared in 1572 A.D.²⁰. Then the account of the further process is not reflected in book until the reign of Meitei Lord Charairongba (1679- 1709 A.D.)²¹ who was marked by the Meitei scholars for his

19. Pudin & Leithuk Leikharon (Mss.)
contribution in the organisation of Divine Pakhangba cult by attributing the title epithets Tubi\textsuperscript{22}, which is awarded to none of the Meitei kings except him. So it is presumed that Tubi Charairongba added the cult of Pakhangba as a horned python god cult or sometime a dragon cult to the Meitei religion during his reign of 13 years. But the formal builder of the Pakhangba cult is evidenced to be the Meitei Lord Garibaniwaza, who had constructed the temple and shrine of divine Pakhangba, repaired the storied temple by cement flooring and attributed the lord Pakhangba the progenitive head of the then ruling royal dynasty by awarding the commemoration of accession and coronation of His divinity Pakhangba in 1747 A.D. as the first historical king of Manipur\textsuperscript{23}. The faiths and beliefs of this cult of divine Pakhangba stood at its zenith of popularity during the regime of Raja Nara Singh (1844- 50 A.D.) and probable to reproduce all his divinity's accounts of 365 coiled and serpentine diagrams as well as the manifestations and incarnations of His divinity in the apoches of ages which are in correspondence to the Hindu ages of four yugas.\textsuperscript{4} Divine Pakhangba is aspired by the Meitei society as the next axial divinity to divine Sanamahi in the religious aspects of the Meitei native religion and they preferably have much faith in the Nongda Lairen Pakhangba whom they conceived to be the last and presiding and administering deity of this Kounachak or Kaliyuga or the last age of the cycle of ages of this universe.

\textsuperscript{22} Tubi means the deity who offer water to humankind or a stream of life to humankind.
\textsuperscript{23} I & K, op. cit. p. 113.
F. The cult of Ancestor worship

The cult of ancestor worship is likeness with the Tudor of paternal Rule of the Confucianism of China. As the administration of the land of the then Manipur prior to the encroachment of the Hinduism was fundamentally based on the Tai/Shan administrative system, the adopting proposal of the source of Meitei native ancestral worship from the Tudor of Paternal Rule is highly admirable. The Meitei model of reverence and veneration of the ancestors are of the highest value of the religion and it is assumed that most of the Meitei native arbour deities were the ancestors of the Meitei.

RELIGIOUS ACCOUNTS AFTER THE ADVENT OF

HINDUISM

Hinduism, the religions of the Hindu as one of the most ancient religions of the world has many great branches, like Vaisnavism, Saivism, Saktism, Tantrism, Buddhism and Jainism and the followers of the anterior four are appeared to have encroached in the territorial jurisdiction of Manipur from the very ancient days without recognition and acknowledgement of dominion administrative authorities from time to time. But it is generally accepted that the recognition of the followers of the Hinduism as subjects of the Meitei king were obtained from

the 15th century of our era and the Hindu Brahmins the axial followers of the Hinduism were the poor easy-going section of people included into the lowest status of the gradations of the people of Manipur until the concurrence of the 6th / 7th decades of the 18th century A.D.

With the political tortures on socio-cultural arenas in India by the Muslim Emperor for Mahammadanism, the extension of the Hinduism in the north-eastern hilly regions of India were in full swing in the 17th and 18th centuries A.D. Again the political, social and economic conditions of Manipur or the Meitei king to withstand the Buddhist Burmese was forced to campaign help from the neighbouring Hindu kingdoms. So the Meitei king and his nobles were in anxious politics and desirous to adopt political policies to meet the Burmese in the teeth of the defence and offence of their kingdom by adoption of the then popular sect of Hinduism in the north-eastern India. Even though the followers of men of letters of many sects of Hinduism were inhabitants of the then kingdom of Manipur, they were of mild and meek sectorian of Hindu creeds wanting of sermons and dogmas of valour, courage, dare etc. for public and general favritism as the Meiteis were the men of battles/wars and advices and teachings for attaining powers by virtue of religious practices and practicable natures of the sectarian religion. So Charairongba (1697 -1709 A.D.) was awaiting and seeking informations for such a Hindu sectarian preceptor.

26. (i) N.H., (ii) B.K., (iii) B.M. (Mss.) etc.
Initiation into Saktism

King Charairongba who was the attributed to entitle the manifestation of the Meitei native super over-all being\textsuperscript{27} or lord and guardian-deity of the aquatic python affairs\textsuperscript{28} was heard of the Sakti cult and anxious of adoption the cult as to institute the Meitei royal dynasty and other clan to entitle to be the Hindu Kshetriya caste\textsuperscript{29}. But getting no chance of finding a reverent and enlightened preceptor in the then residing Brahmin in Manipur with regards to the matters and affairs of Saktism, king Charairongba was looking for one. He fortunately found what he was searching for in the person of Rai Banamali Acharyya, who was just migrated from Setta Gangga Tulsighata, Puri, Bhubaneswor, Orissa. So King Charairongba and some of his followers were baptized into Saktism or Sakti cult in 1626 Saka (1704A.D.)\textsuperscript{30}. His adoption in the cult of Sakti was also supported by the facts of his installation of the temple of Kalika\textsuperscript{31}, the greatest and almighty goddess in Sakti creed, prior to his installation and the temple is reported by the annals to have been burnt in 1702 A.D.\textsuperscript{32}.

Following his example, his eldest son and successor King Garibaniwaza (1709-48 A.D.) embraced Saktism before he ascended the throne of Meitei kingdom in 1709 A.D. Garibaniwaza as informed

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. p. 330.
\textsuperscript{29} O. Vogeswar Singh: Sanamahi Leikan, Imphal, 1972.
\textsuperscript{30} I & K, op. cit. p. 68.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, p. 66.
by a Meitei native scripture was initiated by Rai Ganggadhar the son of
his respectable father's venerable preceptor Banamali Acharyya.

Initiation into Vaisnavism

King Nongpok Wairang Pamheiba (Garibaniwaza) followed the
Sakti cult until his initiation to Vaisnavism. He was moved by the divine
love of Shri Radha-Krishna, which was in the developing stage in the
then Manipur. So he took initiation into the Vaisnavism sect of Nimandi\textsuperscript{33},
as the Meitei called in their native tongue. The Nimandi or Sanaka
Sampradaya had their worshiping deities in the gesturing dual pos-
tures of Krishna under the shade of Tomal tree growing in Vrindabana,
the forest Vrinda or the forest of the group goddess\textsuperscript{34}.

The mode of Nimandi was not suited and satisfied by the Meitei
King Pamheiba. He further wanted to worship the divine Rama but he
never neglected his native ancestral deities more specially to divine
Sanamahi who was always accompanied and associated in almost all
the defences offences for his country\textsuperscript{35}.

King Garibaniwaza found Santidas who had arrived along with
other 38 recluses in 1715\textsuperscript{36}(A.D). Along with Santidas Goshhai there

came Gopaldasa who baptized Pamheiba and his followers. But

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Rajendra Kumar "Rajeeb": World Famous Religious Doctrin and Sects, Delhi, 1988,
pp. 30-31.
\item \textsuperscript{34} D.D. Konsambi : The culture and civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline,
\item \textsuperscript{35} I & K, op. cit. p. 78.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid, p. 76.
\end{itemize}
Gopaldas left Manipur in 1720 A.D. Garibaniwaza was probable to be in confusion in the Hindu religious matters and affairs without a guide or preceptor for his guardianship in the matter. So Santidas Goshhai was probable to hold a chance of contact and association with the Meitei king after the departure of Gopaldasa.

When he has a good touch with the king of the Meitei, he popularised himself by executing various works of statecraft and warfare and become the nominal preceptor of Garibaniwaza for the cult of Rama. Meitei king Garibaniwaza was formally initiated into the Ramandi or Rama cult in 1730 A.D. Garibaniwaza was previously tried much for the welfare and development of Nimandi when he was following the creed, but he then punished the followers of Nimandi on the same line as he did to the followers of other creeds more than Nimandi by fines and exiles or banishments. Thus Ramandi cult is appeared to be the then state religion of Manipur.

After the death of Garibaniwaza his son Shyamshai Khurailakpa did not admire his father in the sectorianism of the religious matter. Shyamshai bosomed Nimandi and followed the sect when his father initiated and adopted Ramandi cult and such difference in the creed between the father and devoted son is reflected in the annals of the royal chronicle as awarding of punishment in the tune of payment of

37. Ibid. p. 90.
38. Ibid. p. 83.
fine and banishment to Shyamshai by Garibaniwaza in 1733 A.D.\textsuperscript{39}. But the sons of Shyamshai viz. Gourashyam/Maramba (1761-63 A.D.) and Bhagyachandra/Jaya Singh/Kartta/Chingthangkhomba (1759-61, 1763-98 A.D.) took the path of the religious sect which their father had endured up to his death. Further Bhagyachandra took the initiation into the sweet name of Govinda from the Bengal School of Vaisnavite sect of Madhabacharya or Madhabi in about 1774 A.D.\textsuperscript{40}.

According to the religious concept of Madhabi sect of Vaisnavism the axial deity of the sect is the three or trigestured (Trivanga) posing sculpture of Shri Krishna along with joyous dancing hand posed Radha but they were allowed to worship with other Hindu gods and goddesses like Shiva, Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Jagannath etc.\textsuperscript{41}. Again, as a Hindu, an idol or icon of the aspiring deity to lead the visual aspects of concentration and meditation to the deity / Almighty is highly essential. So Bhagyachandra with a residential god for himself became a vogue idea for the ideal and moral discipline of mind. He found many residential metal idols of different families and personals of Brahmans in the then Manipur. Under the intention of the Bhagyachandra idols of Shri Krishna or Govinda were carved out from the Jack fruit tree (collected from Kaina Hillock) by Wangkhei Gopiram and enlivened in theological sphere in 1779\textsuperscript{42} A.D. This day is a red letter day in the

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. p. 93.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid. p. 127.
\textsuperscript{41} Gokulchandra Singh Oinam : Shri Shri Vaisnab Itihas; Imphal, 1948, p. 79-80.
\textsuperscript{42} I & K, op. cit. p. 133.
history of the Hindu Vaisnavite Religion of Manipur for introduction, inauguration, celebration and commemoration of many aspects of Hindu Vaisnavite functions of worship, performances of paying homage for the Hindu Vaisnavite custom and traditions such as Rasa (The reputed Manipuri dance in the ballet of Radha and Krishna) and Sangkirtana (Chorus devotional vocal and instrumented music).

Many Bronze sculptures of Hindu deities of different pauses and postures of Shri Krishna under different names, Rama, Sita, Lakshmana etc. were brought into Manipur during the period under study. The sizes of the idols were of life quarter sizes and ones of the six and eight of life sizes. More over the sculpturing of wooden idols of Shri Govindaji and His brothers encouraged sculpting more idols in Manipur. Thus Hindu idols and icons of Vaisnavite culture touched the cores of every Meitei villages at every corners of the valley of Manipur in the posterior period until the fifties of our era.

Garibaniwaza is attributed to entitle the introduction of many Hindu festival. But during the regime of Rajashri Bhagyachandra as afore mentioned, Hindu devotional festival, festive procession etc. were introduction in Manipur43. Almost all the Hindu life cycle celebration and ceremonies Garvadhanam (to make pregnant), Swasti Puja (Birth ceremonies on the 6th days), Churakaran (Saving the hair of the head), Upanayan (to give the primary eve), Diksha (to pay the sharp-eye),

43. Ibid. p. 140,163 etc.
Bibaha (Marriage) etc. were introduced to current in the life of the Meitei Hindu. Thus almost all the Hindu Vaisnavite festivals were also begun to adopt in the Meitei society and are probable to complete the adaptation during the regime of Maharaja Churachand (1891-1941 A.D.) Singh.

In short the religion of Manipur prior to the Hinduisation of the Meitei had their own native religion developed from the primitive faith and beliefs to the stage of cult and then to the stage of partial religion which is governed by their divinities from the Almighty whose intentions and orders were conserved and carried out into action by a lord Creator. Under this Super god, there are many gods and goddesses who are functioning and carrying out their allotted duties for the welfare and development of the mankind of the Meitei universe. The axial deities in aspects of culture and politics of their country are respectively attributed to Divine Sanamahi and Divine Pakhangba who are not almighty themselves but the sons of the overall lord of the Meitei universe of divinities.

Regarding after the advent of Hinduism the following inferences are brought to light.

(1) The Meitei was first baptized into Hinduism in 1704 A.D.

(2) The first Meitei who embraced the Hinduism was Meitei lord king Charairongba (1697-1709 A.D.) and the first Meitei adopted Hindu
sect was Hindu Sakta sect (Saktism), a sectary of Hindu Saivism of South Indian branch.

(3) The first Meitei who initiated to Vaisnavism was Meitei King Garibaniwaza (1709-48 A. D.) who entered into the changes of three sects of religious aspects viz. - Saktism, Nimandi and Ramandi.

(4) Meitei lord king Garibaniwaza made the Hindu Vaisnavite cult as the state religion of Manipur in 1717 A.D. He erected the brick temple of Shri Krishna.

(5) Meitei king Garibaniwaza sculpted the image / idol of Hanuman and elevated at the present standing temple of respectable reverent Hanuman at the present Mahabali arbour in 1729 A.D.\(^4^4\). (5) King Bhagyaachandra (1763-98 A.D.) introduced the self surrendering submitting devotion to the divine Krishna / Almighty in the Hindu Vaisnavite theological school probably in 1776A.D.\(^4^5\).

(7) Following Meitei kings added and omitted many aspects of devotional doctrines, religious processes festivals etc. so as to build Manipur a мо/дeн Hindu state.

Thus, Manipur entered into the orbit of the Hinduism in the 18\(^{th}\) century A.D. and remains as land of Hinduism until now in the sky of Bengal theological school of Vaisnavism.

\(^{4^4}\) Ibid. p. 89 and 90.

\(^{4^5}\) Ibid. p. 129-30.