VAISNAVISM UNDER CHARAIRONGBA AND GARIBNIWAZ

The religious history discussed in the foregoing chapter (Ch. I, Sec. IV) makes it plain that the Vaisnavism was the dominant religion of the kings since the time of Kyambā. The successors of Khāgemba, i.e., Khunjaobā and his son, Paikhombā seem to have followed this faith. The history of Vaisnavism during the 18th and 19th centuries in Manipur can be divided into two periods. The first period covers the reign of Charairongba and Garibniwāz. During this period Nimbārkism and some earlier forms of Vaisnavism flourished; and then came Rāmānandi from Sylhet.¹ The influence of Saṅkaradeva (an Assamese saint of the first half of the 16th century) was also felt during this phase. It covered some thirty years. In the second stage, Gaudīya Vaisnavism appears as the state religion under King Jayasimha. From this time dates the existence of Caitanya school as a powerful sect though some records assign it to a much earlier period.²

The data on the strength of which we seek to give an account of Vaisnavism especially in the time of Charairongba and Garibniwāz are those provided by literature, folk traditions, inscriptions, icons in the temples and verbal information from

1. See infra.
2. Vide infra, Ch.V.
individual scholars. The literary sources consist of some manuscripts such as the Manipuri translations of the Epics, Garibniwāz Lāiming Loubā (a book describing the initiation of Garibniwaz into Vaishnavism), Ningthourol Singkak and Miyād. King Charāirongbā's rock edict found in the compound of Konthoujam Lāirembā (a primitive goddess) is an important source of information. Images of Rāma, Lakṣmana, Sītā, etc., are still found by the side of Ningthempukhri (a big tank). The stone statue of Hanumāna is found in the Mahābali temple. Manipur is rich in temples. The temple of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa built by Charāirongbā and the temple of Hanumāna built by Garibniwāz are now in existence. Coins of Garibniwāz depicting his affiliation to Rāmāndī Vaishnavism have also been found.

Some forms of Vaishnavism seem to have flourished in Manipur since the 8th century. It became firmly established during the reign of Kīyāmā in the 16th century. It got further strengthened during the reign of Charāirongbā. It is stated in Bāmon Khunthoklon that the Brāhmaṇ inhabitants of Tripura, West Bengal, Mathura (Uttar Pradesh) and Orissa migrated to Manipur.


4. See fn. 3. W. Yumjao Singh observes that the Konthoujam Lāirembā stone is the oldest one yet discovered. The letters in this inscription are different from those available in various MSS. This inscription celebrates King Charāirongbā's grant of land to this deity.

5. Based on the collection of N. Khelchandra Singh, Superintendent, Secretariat Library of Manipur.
during his reign. The descendants of these Brāhmāns are
(1) Guru Aribam, (2) Lāimayum, (3) Lāipubam, (4) Hangoibam,
(5) Hazārimayum, (6) Manohor-mayum, (7) Mathurābāsi-mayum,
(8) Lāimayum and (9) Chowdhurimayum. They worshipped various
images of Visnu. King Charairongbā was the first Manipuri king
to be formally initiated into Vaiṣṇavism. From Sveta-gaṇaṁ
Puri came a pious Brāhmaṇ named Kṛṣṇachārya alias Rāi Vanamāli
with some of his companions in Merā about October, 1703. His
wife Kṛṣnamayi, two Sudras and a Brāhmaṇ named Balbhadra
Brahmachāri are mentioned as members of his party. A year later,
22 muni gośais (Sādhus who do not speak) came to Manipur.²

The pilgrims were received favourably by the king. Rāi
Vanamāli induced Charairongbā to profess the Vaiṣṇavite faith.
The king along with a group of his courtiers performed a fast
on Wednesday, Sajibu/ about April 5, 1704. This was the day
of his formal initiation to Vaiṣṇavism. Vanamāli's descendants
were called Guru-Aribams. The word 'Aribā' (old) was added to
the family to distinguish it from the descendants of the Guru of
King Jayasimha who were simply called Gurumayums.¹¹ So, in

9. See fn. 7.
10. See fn. 7; R. K. Sanahal Singh, Manipur Itiḥās, pp.47-48. The date of initiation is given as April 6, 1704 by R. K. Sanahal Singh.
11. See fn. 7.
future, we shall use the surnames, Guru Aribam (descendants of
the Guru of Charairomba) and Gurumayum (descendants of the
Guru of King Jayasimha) in course of our writing to avoid
confusion.

Charairomba acknowledged his gratitude to his pre­
ceptor by assigning a place of honour to him and to his
descendants in festivals and ceremonies held in the palace. In
Manipur they lived as religious functionaries. The king placed
a village, a hill and 100 acres of rice-field at the guru's
disposal. These were supposed to be a sort of guru-daksinā.
King Charairomba constructed a brick temple of Radha and Krsna
at Brahmapur Guru Aribam Leikāi. It remains in tact. The
images of Radha and Krsna worshipped by Rai Vanamāli is still
worshipped by his descendants, the Guru Aribam Brāhmans. He
also constructed a nine-roomed brick house for Guru Vanamāli.
This building was destroyed by the Burmese in the early part of
the 19th century.

Charairomba though a Vaiṣṇava is said to have his
leaning towards the worship of Kālī. He constructed two brick
buildings for Kālī - one in 1706 and another in 1707. One of
the temples collapsed after some time on account of poor
workmanship. There is a reference to another Kālī temple in
the Cheitharol Kumbābā. It was destroyed by fire.

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14. See supra, Ch.VIII (Saktism).
King Charairongba patronised devotional singing or Kirtana which was better known as Pala Ariba or Bangdesa. The term Bangdesa is possibly derived from 'Banga desa' which means the land of Bengal. The celebrated musician, Leipākmachā who assumed the title of Konthoujam Ojā (teacher) developed the old Kirtana songs. The song is composed of seven letters, "Rama Kṛṣṇa Govinda" arranged in order. They are chanted to this day, not only in Govindaji temple, but also in village temples. People feel greatly comforted when they sing in his style.

School of Vaiṣṇavism

There are remarkable differences among the scholars of Manipur as to the school of Vaiṣṇavism followed by Charairongba. R. K. Jhalajit Singh holds that the king followed Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism. There is no antagonism between this form of Vaiṣṇavism and the mode of worship continuing since the time of Kiyamba. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the principal God from whom other incarnations emanate. He is the supreme Reality in the system of Charairongba. The very word, 'Bangdesa' suggests a close connection between Manipur and Bengal. A Bengali Kirtaniya group introduced this type of Kirtana in Manipur. But we do not accept this view as substantially correct as the chronicle does.

17. See fn. 6.
not refer to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in his reign. The Gauḍīya system began to develop only in the reign of King Jayasimha.

Another view about the school of Vaiṣṇavism has been recently put forward by L. Ibungohal Singh. He holds that Charairongba replaced his allegiance to Viṣṇusvāmi sect by Mādhavacārya sect. He holds that the Meitheis followed Dāsya (sentiment of servitude) and Sakhyā (the sentiment of friendship) under Charairongba.18 This is corroborated by N. Khelchandra Singh who holds that Garibniwāz, the son and successor of Charairongba was initiated into Sakhyā Dharma by a Brāhmaṇ named Gangādhar before he became a Rāmāndi. But it is not convincing as the worship of Rādā and Kṛṣṇa by the king was not a feature of Mādhava school of Vaiṣṇavism.19 The joint worship of Rādā and Kṛṣṇa was a feature of Manipuri Vaiṣṇavism.

R. K. Sanahal Singh holds that Charairongba adopted the Nimāndi (Nimbārkism) school of Vaiṣṇavism. In his Manipur Itiḥās he writes that a Brāhmaṇ of Nimbārka sect came to Manipur on a preaching tour and the people favoured it.20 This view is treated as reasonable on the following grounds: (1) The worship

19. S. C. Mukherji, A Study of Vaiṣṇavism in Ancient and Medieval Bengal, Calcutta, 1966, pp.183-192 (Appendix-A). He observes "Followers of Nimbārka and Viṣṇusvāmin also worshipped Rādā in conjunction with Kṛṣṇa. There were other sects, viz., the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, the Mādhavās and the Vithobas of Mahastra, who did not accept Rādā as a deity. It was Nimbārka (c. 13th century), who made the worship of Rādā-Kṛṣṇa exclusive in his sect."
of Rādhā practised by the Nimbārka sect suited Manipur better than the Mādhava sect. (2) The sect has its strong-hold in Puri, Cuttack, Bengal, etc. It is not unreasonable to suppose that some preachers from these centres came to Manipur and influenced the king and the people.

From the literary evidences it seems that the forms of Hinduism, viz., the Viṣṇusvāmī sect, Mādhava sect, Nimbārka sect and Saivism also flourished in Manipur. Worship of Śanāmahi Pānthaobi and some other primitive deities developed side by side with Vaiṣṇavism in Manipur. There was no persecution on the grounds of religious beliefs. Mutual tolerance was the norm. Charāirongbā had respectful inclination towards indigenous faiths and culture and allowed their free growth.

It is evident then that the conversion of Vaiṣṇavism was confined to the king and his nobles who peacefully and gradually worked to extend it to every home of Manipur including the Loi people as well as to the distant parts of the country.

Garibniwāz, the son of Charāirongbā was one of the most famous Vaiṣṇava kings of Manipur. The Cheithārol Kumbābā proves that he was initiated into Vaiṣṇavism by one Gopāl Dās Guru in the latter part of Meṣēh September-October, 1717 A.D. A large number of sculptors, artisans, and musicians migrated from Bengal and the neighbouring States to Manipur to work for the royal family and the nobles.

22. L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, CK, pp.51-52, 54 & 58. King Charāirongbā prepared the images of Pānthaobi and Lāi Waheībā (Śanāmahi) and constructed many temples for Pānthaobi.
23. See supra.
number of nobles too took initiation. Regarding Gopal Das very little information is at our disposal, except that he came to Manipur and returned to his country on Wednesday, Ingen/June-July 20, 1720 A.D. It is not definitely known to which school of Vaisnavism he belonged in his earlier period. A manuscript called Garibniwaz Laiming Loubā written during his time mentions that he was a follower of Gauḍīya Vaisnavism before he became a Rāmāndi. There are allusions in the chronicle to the existence of Nimāndi, Parmārtha-dharma and Gauḍīya sects in his reign. F. Bowers observes, "Manipuri religion apart from the vestigial elements of animism represented by Lai-haraoba, belongs to the Chaitanya sect of Vaishnavite Hinduism. In 1700 it was officially decreed the state religion by King Garibniwaz and since then has been the most powerful single influence on Manipuri life." A word of caution is needed in accepting these records. Reference to the introduction of Gauḍīya Vaisnavism as a state religion will be described in Chapter V.

The epithet 'Mahāraja' is first used as one of the royal titles by Garibniwaz. He built a temple of Kṛṣṇa on Wednesday, Thawān/July-August 22, 1722 and a temple for Kālīkā on Thursday, Lāmdā/February-March 7, 1716. On Wednesday, Phairen/January-February 11, 1725 he ordered to dig a huge tank known as

25. The MS is obtained from M. Chandra Singh a pandit of Manipur and is preserved by M.S.P., Imphal. It gives a detailed account of the initiation of King Garibniwaz into Vaisnavism.
Ningthem Pukhri at Wāngkhei Leikāl. Images of Kṛṣṇa (Vṛndāvana-chandra according to the annotation of the Cheithārol Kumbhā) and Kālikā were kept in a temple near the tank, on the last day of Sajibu/March-April, 1726. The king stopped the rearing of pigs in every house. He was the first Manipuri king to introduce the practice of burning the dead bodies according to the chronicle. And the bone-gathering ceremony was also introduced after some days. Persons who died in the battle were burnt by his order. On Sunday, February-March 20, 1724 Garibniwāz had the ceremony of burning the bones of his forefathers with great eclat on the bank of the Ningthi River. The chronicle tells us of the death of Sanāhal Murāri, son of the king and of the observance of jauhar by his two wives on Thursday, Inga/May-June 25, 1725.28

The daughter of King Garibniwāz was the first Manipuri woman to have visited Vṛndāvana.29 It became an established practice after this event for the Meitheis to undertake a journey to the Ganges. A person who could not go himself could entrust the bone of his dead relative to a pilgrim to be dropped into the Ganges.

Influence of Assamese Vaiṣṇavaism

The school of Vaiṣṇavaism followed by the king appears to have been partly influenced by the Assamese school of

28. See infra, Ch.VII (Cremation).
Vaisnavaism as the chronicle contains references to constant intercourse of the two countries. It is noted that 39 mendicants including the religious preceptor of Tekhāo (Assam) arrived Manipur on Monday, Thawān/July-August 6, 1715. A certain Manipuri Brāhman called SitaJām who went to Assam on cultural tour returned to Manipur on Monday, Kālen/ about April 13, 1713. There is a story that during the time of Garibniwāz a manuscript copy of the Bhāgavata-purāṇa was being carried from Assam to Tipperah (Tripura). It was looted by the Manipuris on the bank of the Dikhu river. In retaliation, the Tipperahs made an attack on Manipur. They were defeated by Garibniwaz. The Bhāgavata transaction and the defeat of the Tipperahs are given in the Takhelngambā. It initiated the Manipuris into the Vaisnava ideas. The king took interest in the Vaisnava Scripture. The chronicle gives us an account of the coming of some Brāhmans, several wandering monks and Vaisnava ascetics from the rest of India to Manipur. On Thursday, Kālen/April-May 3, 1730, five Brāhmans reached Manipur with a present of mahāprasād of Jagannāth of Puri for the Vaisnavas of Manipur.

30. Ibid., pp.64-65.
31. W. Yumjao Singh, Report on the Archeological Studies in Manipur, Imphal, 1935, pp.21-22; S. K. Bhuyan, Studies in Assamese Literature, Gauhati, 1962, pp.73-74. He writes "Garibniwaz, the king of Manipur is said to have taken the Bhagavat from his neighbouring state and popularised it in his kingdom."
32. L. Ibungfhal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, <i>CK</i>, 1967, p.78; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, <i>A Short History of Manipur</i>, p.45. I have omitted the name of the Brāhmanas and monks who came to Manipur in this account for reason of space. The Brāhman families that settled in Manipur are (1) Gotimayum (from Shantipur, West Bengal), (2) Anoubam (from Kanya Kubja, Uttar Pradesh), (Cont'd)
Rāmānandi Vaiṣṇavism

Side by side with the above line of Vaiṣṇavism there grew up yet another branch of Vaiṣṇavism called Rāmāndi (a corrupted form of Rāmānandi) of which Sāntidās Adhikāri was the exponent. In 1716 he came from Narsingh Tilla Akhara of Sylhet across the hills of Jirighat. Some account however gives the year of his coming as 1720 or 1728. J. Roy argues that Sylhet being the ancestral home of Caitanya, was not a stronghold of Rāmānandi cult. He contends that Varānasi was the centre of the Rāma cult and there is doubt as to whether Sāntidās came from Sylhet or any part of India. We do not, however, agree with him as we have more convincing information on the Rāmānandi cult in East Bengal from such authorities as D. C. Sen and T. Kennedy. They inform us that Rāma cult secured considerable number of adherents in Bengal at this time. It is likely that the Rāmānandi preachers from this centre or any part of Bengal might come to Manipur.

Nothing is known clearly about the real parentage and early life of Sāntidās before his association with King Garibniwāz.

(3) Hanjabam (from the same place), (4) Hidangmayum (from Sonardvippara, Bengal) and (5) Brahmcharimayum Anoubam (from Barahannagar, West Bengal). Their ancestors came to Manipur during the time of King Garibniwāz.

Vide Bāmon Khānthoklon


34. D. C. Sen, Chaitanya and His Ages, pp.36-37; T. Kennedy, The Chaitanya Movement, Calcutta, 1925, p.182. Images of Gaura and Nityai are in friendly company with Rama, Sita and others in the temples of Dacca. A Chaitanite temple was presided by a Rāmaite pujari.
He came to Manipur with two disciples, namely, Bhāgavāndās and Nārānads. The king welcomed and accommodated them in a place called Ningthou Senbā Yāreksang (a place of stay for the attendants of the king) with special care and regard. Sāntidās told the king that there was an inward voice from god Sañāmahi to call upon him to vaisnavise Manipur. He spoke against the primitive religion of Manipur. He is said to have outlined the comparative merits of the Rāmānandi over the earlier form of Vaisnavism. His persuasive influence is fully described in a book entitled Sanāmahi Laikal. The preacher holds that the worship of Śrī Rāma is the highest form. He persuaded him to change his mode of worship. A demerit of the earlier form of Vaisnavism was that the masses would not be able to follow it, which was too good for the world. The Rāma cult fitted well with the line of Vaisnavism followed by the king except on some minor points. The king at first was a stiff opponent of this new religion. The missionary was clear enough to avoid the ill-feeling of the king and his subjects. He has succeeded in influencing the king to a considerable extent. Garibniwāz accepted the gosāl and made up his mind to be converted to Rāmānandi school of Vaisnavism.

Mahārāja Garibniwāz decided to spread Rāmāndī Vaisnavism on a vast scale in Manipur. He was greatly helped in

35. N. Khelchandra Singh, Aribā Manipuri Sāhitya-gi Itihās, pp.35-36; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, op.cit., pp.134-135. The chronicles refer to the coming of Mahanta Bakirdās, another disciple of Sāntidās. He was very influential in the Burmese court. King Garibniwāz sent him to the Burmese court as plenipotentiary to the king of Manipur for the marriage of his daughter Satyamālā to the king of Burma.

36. cf. R.M. Nath, op.cit., p.91. R.M. Nath holds that Sāntidās was a follower of Caitanya. We cannot agree with him on local data.
this task by his eldest son, स्याम साइ and his brother-in-law हाओबम अकोंग सेनपाठि. On the full-moon-day, i.e. Wednesday, वृक्षाष्ट्रीय/December-January, 1729 he was invested with sacred thread by the महापुरुषा at Lilong (6 miles to the south of इम्पाल) after a bath in the river. On the full-moon-day, भद्रा/September-October, 1737 the king along with three hundred persons was invested with the sacred thread. Priest Chakra Kandari initiated the members of seven शालास into the incantation of वाईष्णववांस्म on Thursday, the full-moon of कार्तिक, 1737. The conversion of the masses took place on Sunday, इंगन/June-July 5, 1738. They were enjoined not to take or touch meat and wine after this ceremony of an oath taking into water by holding a branch of नोंगख्रांग (a kind of plant). This is called नोंगख्रांग इरुप्पा.

The king became intensely रामाइट and popularised the worship of रामा. He installed the images of रामा, लक्ष्मण, भरत, सत्रुघ्ना and सीता in the रामजी temple in an auspicious hour. The images are to be seen even today in the temple situated

37. N. Khelchandra Singh, 'Aribā Manipuri Sāhityagi Itiḥās, pp.41-42; L. Mangi Singh and L. Mani Singh, Viyaya Panchāli, Garibniyāz Čārit, Imphal, 1966, p.6. षाम साइ was a powerful personality in the history of Manipur. He was beautiful and charitable to the people. His memory is perpetuated among the Meiteis by his devotion to रामा. He was brave and as well as devoted to his father. He made important contributions to the spread of रामादी by favouring the devotees who joined the discourse of the रामचरियां. He was a believer in the सिद्धी, supernatural power of हनुमान. Tradition says that he performed penance in the महाबली temple for some years. The metal image of पञ्चमुक्खि (हनुमान) appeared before him and blessed him with miraculous powers.

by the side of Ningthem-pukhri, a large pond and a main source of water to the town. In addition to these images there are temples and images at and near the bank of Imphal river. The chief of these is the brick temple of Hanumāna at Mahābali. On Sunday, Ingā/May-June 16, 1729 A.D. a big slab of stone which was kept in the bazar was brought to Mangbā-Hanba (Mahabali temple) for preparing the statue of Hanumāna. The worship of Hanumāna at this temple was started from Wednesday, Hiyangei/October-November 11, 1729. This forest abounds in monkeys as attendants to Hanumāna. It is adjacent to the temple of Radha-Krsna at Guru Aribam-Leikāi. In 1734, he prepared a boat from a tree growing at the confluence of the Gvāi river and the Tuyai river and sailed along the river Gvāi alias Barāk for worshipping Rāma and Laksmana in commemoration of his victory over the Takhels (the invaders from Tripura).

King Garibniwāz patronised his preceptor, Śāntidās Mahanta and gave him a grant of an orange garden at Wakha near the Nomāicing hill (a hillock near the Iril river). He built a monastery for his guru. Under the spell of Śāntidās, the king struck a revolution in the sectarian ideology of Manipur. He carried on a systematic suppression of primitive religion and

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43. M. Jhulon Singh, op.cit., p.86; L. Mangi Singh and L. Mani Singh, op.cit., pp.2-4. Śāntidās is said to take a Manipuri sevādasi.
other Hindu sects. He decreed on Saturday, Kalen/April-May 10, 1726 to bury nine Umamlais (sylvan deities) under a beg tree in Mongba Hanba. On Monday, Inga/May-June 20, 1726 he broke the images of seven Umamlais including Panthoibi, Sanamahi, Soraren, Huidrom Pokpi, etc. He confiscated the sal tāngas (ornament) which adored these deities and swept away the temples. 44

Garibniwāz's Suppressive Measures

At the instance of Santidas Gosāl, the king was against the use of Meithei script, song and prayer. He introduced Bengali script and substituted Meithei songs by Bangali songs. 45 He, in a religious frenzy, collected the rare manuscripts numbering one hundred twenty. The books were burnt up by the Rāmāndī preacher with the help of the king. Six of them proved to be fire-proof. They were (1) Nonglon, (2) Pākhambā Naoyom, (3) Simkhal Naovom and (4) Yāmbi Thiren, (5) Tāoroinai Naovom and (6) Sagok. Manipur has thus been deprived of many valuable religious and historical books through Garibniwāz's fanaticism. 46

Apart from the suppressive measures taken against the non-Rāmāndī system of worship, we can find out other peculiar

44. C.K., p.75; T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, Ch. on Religion.
things associated with King Garibniwaz. In 1734, he ordered the followers of Ramandi to pay fine. By yet another decree on Monday, Ingā/May-June 2, 1736 he imposed fines on the Ramāndis. The Brāhmans were driven to the Mayāng (western country of Manipur) land and most of the princes sent into exile to Pal. He dismissed some of his sons from service. The Cheithārol Kumbaba informs us that King Garibniwaz popularised the Paramārtha system of worship (it may mean either the Nimandī; Nimbarka school of Vaiṣṇavaism or any new revolutionary religion) and got himself initiated into it on Thursday, Ingā/May-June 5, 1739. But he fined the followers of Nimandī sect on Wednesday, Kālel/April-May 21st of the same year. The Nimandīs were condemned as rebels and a great number of them, including Kṣetri Caitanya, Šālkhom Lāngmei, Khāldem Narottam, etc., were sentenced to deportation on Wednesday, Thawān/July-August 3, 1742. He told the Brāhmans that their duty is to act as the priest of the community and to broadcast the religious ideas to the people. He banished them for teaching astrology to the people. But he allowed them some concession. In 1746, he enforced a law sanctioning the inter-marriage between the Lāmik-Yengbams and the Kabaws on religious ground. The Kabaws refused to accept the order, whereupon the king banished them to Sugnu. He imprisoned his youngest son, Tolen Tombā at Sugnu. His religious policy and interference in the affairs of his subjects produced far reaching consequence in the history of Manipur.

48. Ibid., pp.77, 105-107; Kh.Kaomacha Singh, op.cit., p.73.
49. See fn. 48.
Effect of the Religious Reform of Garibniwāz

Garibniwāz was a wonderful king. He did as much good for the literature and culture of Manipur as he did for the destruction of the Purānas. His attempt to Vaisnavise the people produced wholesome literary and cultural awakenings among the people. The different religious sects and famous men connected with them also produced a body of literature. In between 1717 and 1737 some parvas of the Mahābhārata have been translated into Manipuri for the first time. Some cantos of the Rāmāvāna were also translated in between 1727-1748. Translations of different works are largely attributed to Angom Gopi, a poet of considerable ability. Volumes of such translations beautifully copied were not only kept in the royal Loisang (office of the king) but the men who had a literary test were induced to read them. The versions of the Rāmāvāna in Manipuri (Kiskindhyākanda) relied much upon the version given by Kṛttivāsa. The work is not a translation of Kṛttivāsi Rāmāvāna but an original work following his writings. Other works have been rendered into Manipuri by other poets, but most of these renderings are not word for word translations. The pandits sometimes used Sanskrit words in writing Manipuri books. The books are written in a beautiful and forceful style.50

Another point which the Manipuri authority emphasized is that the Rāmāvāna and the Mahābhārata are but a history of

rivalry between Vaisnavaism and Saivism or other cults and the ultimate victory that Vaisnavaism managed to gain other cults. The Manipuri authors owe their debt to Bengali writers like Kṛttivāsa Oja and Kāsirām Dās. Garibniwāz’s love for the Boics caused him to engage his scholars to translate them into what we know as the Manipuri versions of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*. For the first time the scope of Hindu literature became known to those who had until then no well-defined conception of its beauty and grandeur. Some *parvas* of the Manipuri version of the *Mahābhārata* and two or three cantos of the *Rāmāyana* are still extant. Some of them have been lost during the Burmese devastation of Manipur. Work is progressing at present to recover the remaining cantos of the *Rāmāyana*. Some of them are being published by the Manipur Sahitya Parisad, Imphal. So far, they are considered to be the manuscripts of the Manipuris, particularly of King Garibniwāz’s reign.

The Manipuri writers have described Rāma as an incarnation of God Nārāyana and not as a good and valiant prince. This tendency is seen in Kamba’s Tamil rendering as well as in Tulsidas’s Hindi version. Rāma in their conception is a being decidedly of a higher stature than Rāma of Valmiki. In Manipur by this time, the ideal man had grown into the very god so that the mere repetition of his name with devotion is considered as a vehicle to Heaven. The glorification of Garibniwāz with

epithets as an incarnation of god in Garibniwaz Charit is a clear proof of this idea. 52  Laksmi Charit was translated from Bengali to Manipuri. It describes the character of a good wife. The authorship of this book is attributed to Garibniwaz. 53

Another important feature of his reign was the development of historical, literary and apocalyptic works. Most of them are written in the old Manipuri script. Some of them are dedicated to him or the authorship was ascribed to the name of Garibniwaz. He was served by several maibas. It is said that when the king deprived the maibas and maibis of their chairs, they circulated a story of his Naga parentage. It is described in Ningthouron Singkak, an apocalyptic work which predicts the future. Its authorship is attributed to one of the courtiers of King Garibniwaz. This book seeks to predict the important events that would befall the country from the time of Khāgemba onwards. It speaks in riddles which are, by no means, easy to know. There are different interpretations of this prophecy. 54 Pakhambā

Nungsāron (the ascent of Heaven by the kings was composed by Nungāmbām Govindaram in his time. It contains information about

52. See fns. 50 & 51.
54. See fn. 53; R. K. Jhalajit Singh, A Short History of Manipur, pp.31-32. We know from Ningthouron Singkak that the pandits concealed some of the manuscripts under the ground when Garibniwaz tried to burn them. It further tells that from the heap of the purānas of Garibniwaz’s bonfire some of them would fly away. This was the invention of the officers of the king who were entrusted to the task of burning them. Their purpose was to free themselves from the charge of concealing the books. Some hold that Garibniwaz would easily believe the prediction.
the death of kings of Manipur. But facts are mixed with fiction and one can hardly style it as a chronicle. A literary work called Leiron (the book of flowers) was written in verse during the reign of Charāirongbā (1697-1709), the father of Garibniwāz. From this work, we know that Charāirongbā was a great warrior, an able statesman and a writer. Charāirongbā Khunkum is the work of two pandits written in 1741 during the reign of Garibniwāz. It is composed in the nature of Pañcatantra and Cānakya-siṣṭka. The work is undoubtedly an important treatise on the statecraft.

Besides above books, there were other valuable works on several aspects as well.

We have discussed above the installation of images in huge and gorgeous temples. Sculpture and architecture developed much. We are on the sure ground about the worship of gods in human form among the Manipuri Vaisnavas from this period onwards. Such a step was necessary to popularise Vaisnavism. More of image worship will be described in the following pages.

When Garibniwāz tried to introduce Rāmāndī Vaisnavism with the help of Śārtidās, there was a great opposition from the people. To quote T. C. Hodson, "at first the decree of the king received but little obedience and the opposition to the change centred round the numerous members of the royal family who were supported not unnaturally by the Maibās, the priest of the..."

56. See infra, Ch.VII.
57. Atombapu Sharma, Manipur Itihas, pp.125-126.
older religion. Religious dissent was treated with the same ruthless severity as was meted out to political opponents and wholesale banishment and execution drove the people into acceptance of the tenets of Hinduism." Many scholars among whom Khongnangthabā was prominent opposed the move. They criticized the policy of the king in digging and opening of the cremation ground. They secretly guarded their manuscripts and often concealed them under ground. Beliefs and superstitions were gradually built around them as to their opening and reading. They tried to prove that the king was not a Kṣatriya Manipuri, but of a Naga parentage.58 It is said that the followers of Khongnangthabā rewrote the purānas out of their memory for the posterity. Some purānas which were buried in the ground were taken out. In the purānas written after the reformation, the pandits employed many Sanskrit and Bengali words. Manuscripts extant to-day differ from each other in spite of having the same title and subject. The people continued the old practice of singing vernacular songs through the efforts of the pandits.59

58. L. Ibungohal Singh, Introduction to Manipur, pp. 58-60; Kh. Kaomacha Singh, Manipur Itivyitta, pp. 41-42; W. Yumjao Singh, Report on the Archeological Studies in Manipur, p. 16; T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, p. 95. In this connection, W. Yumjao Singh observes as follows: "In fact many of the existing manuscripts are somehow or other connected with this ruler. But his burning down of the previously existing books is unpardonable and it is indeed a matter of great regret that such an well-meaning ruler should have misconducted his activities which did not meet with the approval of the more elderly and wiser people of that time, and were regarded as an act befitting that of a man of a Naga culture."
The local sources tell us that the king and the Ramandi missionary were terrified by some mysterious happenings and opposition of the people. When King Garibniwāz broke the idols of primitive gods at the instance of the Gosāi, miracles happened in the country. He was grieved to see his queen and son on the point of death on account of serious illness. Fear gripped him. As advised by the māibās and māibis he founded the images of Saṇāmahi and Leimarel on Saturday, Thawan/July-August 7, 1733. The sick were miraculously cured by the grace of God.60 Once the king along his nobles went to the lake in the royal boat. They saw evil omens. At this time there was a report from the palace that the volcano of Kamā was in eruption. The story goes that Khongnāṅthābā put an end to the eruption by uttering the name of Guru Sidābā.61

In Vijaya Pancaḷī is described how Saṅtidas Adhikārī burnt down the old purāṇas and was afflicted with a kind of leprosy. Following the advice of Khongnāṅthābā, he bathed in all the holy tīrthas of Manipur. And the story goes that he was cured of his disease at last.62 Miyād narrates that he tried to throw away the goddess of Heivok hill. As a result of this act he was attacked by a disease. He realised the sin and invoked the goddess for mercy and recovery. He identified her as a manifestation of the terror aspect of Devī and worshipped her at

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60. M. Khelchandra Singh, Aribā-Manipuri Sahityāgīt Itiḥās, pp.120-121.
the temples of Heivok hill, Hiyangthang and Moirangkhom. We may consider these stories as a proof of the ritualistic potency and efficacy of the primitive religion.

The people became unsatisfied with the oppressive measures of the king and his preacher. They publicly opposed the policy of the king and conspired to kill the Ramanandi (Ramānd missionary. We have stated earlier that Ajit Sai, the son and successor of Garibniwāz took up the cause of the mālbās and harassed them (the king and his companions). Finally it appears that King Garibniwāz, Santidas Adhikāri, Kisar Sai (his son) and seventeen followers were murdered by Tolen Tombā and his party, the emissaries of Ajit Sai. The unfortunate event took place on the 26th day of Poinu/ about December, 1757 when Garibniwāz and his party returned towards Manipur from the capital of Surma. According to traditional account, Syām Sai (the eldest son who did not become king) was unable to see the tragic death of his father and jumped into the Ningthe river.

It must not however be accepted that Vaiśnavism destroyed the previous religious beliefs of Manipur. They have survived to the present day making adjustments with the new religion. The king became milder in his religious policy on account of the hostility of the public. Khongnāngthabā and Santidas gosāi tried to strike the unity between the two creeds.

63. Kh.Kaomacha Singh, op.cit., pp.41-42; Miyād MS.
Sāntidās gave the name 'Manipur' to this country - a name ever since used. He invented a theory that the Umanālāis (sylvan deities) were the deva sabhās (assembly of gods) and the king of Manipur was a descendant of Arjuna, the third Pāṇḍava.

King Garibniwāz ordered the Manipuri Brāhmans to worship some primitive gods, e.g., Sanāmahi, Yumthāl lāi, Panthoibi, and Nomsāvā. The Brāhmans of Leihaotābam family became the worshipper of Sanāmahi since this time. They worshipped this deity in the temple at Keisamthong according to Hindu rites. The king erected a small brick temple in Tolong Yumpham (modern area of the first battalion of Manipur rifles) in the first half of the 18th century and installed the images of Sanāmahi and Leimarel which he had prepared. The ḫīvaṇvās (infusing of life) ceremony of the deities was performed by Sāntidas gosāi by reciting the Rāmaṇandi Tāroka mantra. The images were worshipped in a Vaiṣṇavite garb. Some of the Umanālāis who once occupied high positions lost their importance, and were replaced by Vaiṣṇavite gods while the worship of some of them was discarded. Others were remembered once in a year. Some of the primitive festivals, like Ceirābā, Lāi-harābā, etc. were retained in the life of the people.

66. T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, pp.95-99. The information has been revealed to me by Th. Madhob Singh, a pandit of standing in Manipur.
67. See fn. 66. The point suggests strong syncretic tendencies in Manipuri religion. Further fusion of culture was achieved in the post-Garibniwāz era.
It is interesting to note the influence of Ramanandi Vaisnavism on the Manipuri mind. The Manipuris worship Rama along with his wife (Sita), brothers (Rama's brothers) and Hanumana and not Rama alone. Under the influence of Ramanandi they not only became strict vegetarians and teetotallers but they abstained from every kind of intoxicating drink or drug. The introduction of burning the dead is largely due to the influence of this cult.\(^{68}\) The Manipuri Vaisnavas painted their forehead with Ramami (shortened form of Ramanandi) sect mark (tilaka). It consists of two perpendicular line of gopichandal drawn on the forehead. They are joined by a tranverse streak at the bridge of the nose. There is a perpendicular red streak of sindur (vermilion). The devotees keep on saying the holy name of Rama. The initiatory mantra of Meithei is 'Hare Rama'. This remained the practice even after the acceptance of Gaudiya Vaisnavism.\(^{69}\) The Manipuri Vaisnavas put on special turbans on all ceremonial occasions. This practice is associated with Ramandi cult.\(^{70}\) The translations of the Epics into Manipuri became very popular with the common people in this period. We can see the influence of this cult particularly in the songs and

\(^{68}\) My inference from the QJK. Also see infra, Ch. VII (Cremation).

\(^{69}\) R. K. Jhalajit Singh, A Short History of Manipur, fn. to p.135. This information has been obtained from Amudon Sarma, an authority on Manipuri Dance.

\(^{70}\) J. Roy, History of Manipur, p.43; R. K. Sanahal Singh, Manipur Itihas, p.56.
musical instruments. King Garibniwaz by accepting Rama-worship exercised a profound influence in shaping the culture and religion of Manipur. The Ramanandi cult hastened the process of Aryanisation of Manipuri culture. The people believed in the sanctity of Bengali and Sanskrit languages and used them for religious instructions and songs.