

Editorial

Monday, October 15, 2018

The state of the states

This very day the state under the third best Chief Minister in the country is reeling under the 'General Strike' called by a committee of representatives of armed proscribed groups. This is also the very state where professors and students of the university are being paraded with hands cuffed for dissent and raising their voice against perceived wrongdoings. In contrast to the declaration of making Manipur a disturbance-free state by the new government especially when it comes to the overwhelming number of disruptions and disturbances in the daily routine of the people of the state due to blockades, bandhs and general strikes for the past many years, the restrictions and disturbances on the lives of the general public is on the rise, and the thought of the condition of the other states ranked lower in the poll can only present an alarming mental picture. Surprisingly, unlike the last instance of general strike which was called just a few days back, the state government has remained silent and refrained from issuing diktats for punitive action against those who does not turn up for work. And unlike last time when the shops and commercial institutions were forced open using security personnel, almost all the shops and business establishments remains closed and the streets bore a deserted look. For the representatives of the people who set out with evident grit and declared objectives of bringing change and positive development in the state by focusing on inclusive progress and thereby turning the system around for the good of the state has for all practical purpose been tweaked by the very system to conform to its functions and ways. Sad to say there are more disturbances and disruptions on the horizon, and if the present reactive manner of functioning is not rectified in time, we are all in for a long haul of chaotic and uncertain days- probably months. The unmistakable restrictions and unshakable instructions from the higher echelons of power at the centre that contradicts the aspirations and expectations of the people of the state has become the unspoken spanner in the works, and a symbol of relay-administration the people are increasingly worked up about.

The people of the state is not concerned about the ranking or popularity of its leaders based on results culled by people from outside the state who collects figures put up by government agencies and departments which are often in contradiction with the reality on the ground. What the public has been searching for are leaders who can rise beyond vote bank politics and make a firm stand on issues to resonate with the aspirations of the people he represents, and at the same time are the ones to control and lead the people towards knowledge and restraint in matters which have emotional undertones. What the state need is a set of leaders who can relay the true aspirations and provide studied suggestions to the powers at the centre so that decisions acceptable to the people of the state as a whole are made. But for that to become a reality, those in power must learn to look beyond the obvious and take a long, hard look at the future to come up with plans and policies that will initiate inclusive progress. Turns out, that is easier said than done- at least for the time being.

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Gaudiya Vaishnavism : An Integrating force in the Amalgamation of Meitei Nation

By : Manindra Konsam, Editor, Sanathong Monthly

**INTRODUCTION:** The present day Manipur with a geographical area of 22,327 sq. Km. is a land of hills and valley. The hills almost occupied ninth-tenths of its total area. The valley being one-tenths is only about 2,000 Sq. Km. of stretching plains in the centre of surrounding hill ranges in all sides. The surrounding hill ranges bordered to divide mainland India in the northwest and Myanmar in the southeast. It also lies almost in the halfway between the trijunctions of India-Burma-China. As such, the valley and the surrounding hill ranges of Manipur naturally became an important station of migration and trade route between South Asia and South East Asia. Alongside, it also became a cradle of civilization for various remarkable groups of people who came in search of land for better living and glory. So, the history of Manipur is the story of evolutionary amalgamation of varied cultures and societies and shaping of an unique cultural tradition for an integrated society which was befittingly essential for a nation building. Archeological evidences proved that the land of the present day Manipur had experiences of paleolithic, neolithic, ancient and medieval cultures which have affinity with the Hoabinhian and are of non-Hindu origin. However, in the courses of amalgamation history of Manipur which started from 33 A. D., by the turns of the 19th c. A. D.; Gaudiya Vaishnavism of the Hindu emerged as the main integrating force especially among the groups of people so amalgamated and known under one nomenclature : Meitei, the major community of Manipur. Now, this paper, from a journalistic point of views, is trying to overview the evolution courses of history of Manipur where the Gaudiya Vaishnavism of Hindu religion became an integrating force in the amalgamation process of the Meitei Nation : Manipur. For the purpose, the following brief factual accounts of history are taken for a logical conclusion on the topic of this paper. Two-Day National Seminar on CULTURAL-RELIGIOUS TRANSITION AMONG THE NATIVE COMMUNITIES OF NORTHEAST INDIA 9th-10th September 2018 at Central Hall, Dhanamanjuri University, Imphal Jointly Organised by : INDIA FOUNDATION, New Delhi; Department of Social Work, Indian Gandhi National Tribal University, Regional Campus, Manipur; & Centre for Manipur Studies, Manipur University. Gaudiya Vaishnavism: An Integrating force in the Amalgamation of Meitei Nation - Manindra Konsam, Editor, Sanathong Monthly NOTE: The English in this article is subject to corrections and improvement as the writer is not habitual of writing in English. - The writer.

**-1- LAND and PEOPLE of MANIPUR:** The history of Manipur started from 33 A. D. and according to its history there was no any group of people known as Meitei on the earth till the beginning of its history. Historically it can be concluded that the present days Meiteis are the descendants of the migrating people from the parts of South East Asia which in the course of time intermingled with number of ethnic groups from south Asia like India, China, etc. These ethnic groups on successive migration waves made their settlements at the different parts of the valley and hills of Manipur and established their independent principalities with distinctive dialects, folk religion, culture and traditions and definite territorial boundaries. Number of

such groups and their independent principalities are mentioned in the recorded history of Manipur, viz. Angom, Khaaba, Ngaanba, Luwaang, Khuman, Moiraang, Mangaang, Chenglei, Haorok Konthou, Heirem Khunjaan, Thaanga Kambong, Haokhaa Lokkhaa, Selloi Langmai, Maanting Maraang, Lera Khongnaang, Chakpa, Sektaa, etc.

**2. EMERGENCE of MEITEI and MEITEI KINGDOM:** At the start of the recorded history of Manipur, i.e. in 33 A.D., a group of men comprising drawn from different groups, led by one Nongda Lairen Paakhangba, a man from the Angom invaded and devastated the group of Khaaba who occupied Kangla and its nearby adjoining areas as their principality. After the Khaaba, Nongda Lairen Paakhangba established seat of power at the Kangla for his group which later became to be known as the Meitei and started process of amalgamation to build a Meitei nation by subduing different groups with annexation expansion of Meitei power and territory which became to be known as Poirai Meitei Leibaak (the land of Meitei). The amalgamation process so started since the time of Nongda Lairen Paakhangba continued by his subsequent lineal successors and completed during the reign of Meitei King Chingthangkomba (1763-1798) by totally bringing the principality of Moiraang, a group of people with distinctively rich cultural heritages completely into the Meitei kingdom and Meitei fold.

**3. Process of CULTURAL INTEGRATION in the AMALGAMATION of the MEITEI NATION:** Historically and logically, it can be concluded that the group of people led by Nongda Lairen Paakhangba who devastated the Khaabas from Kangla and established seat of power for his group had no any compact cultural tradition for a common bonding amongst themselves as they were comprised with men from different groups (whose descendants became to be known as the Ningthouja group in the seven clan lineage system developed in later period). As such, the group started blending of different culture in the proximity to suite for the amalgamated Meitei power and society to come. For such conclusion, the followings may be cited as example-1. Paanthoibi the daughter of Lairen Tauronai of Mangaang and his wife Lainaamung Naamungbi was betrothed and married off to Taram Khoinchua, the son of Khaaba king Shokchroomba. But -3- Paanthoibi eloped from her husband's house and stayed with her lover Angouba Khongjaamba Nongpok Ningthou, the king of Langmai Cheeng. After Paanthoibi left the house of Khaaba, her father in-law Khaaba Shokchroomba became aware of her extraordinary spiritual qualities and started worshipping Paanthoibi's belongings which were left by her in Khaaba's house. Later he invited his ex daughter in-law with her husband Nongpok Ningthou and for the first time celebrated Lai Haraoba.

**II. Yielding to instigation from a queen, Hongnem Punshiba, the king of Luwaang divorced and sent off the youngest of his nine queens, Khayoirol Ngaanu Thumbi of Khuman with her infant son Senba Mimaaba to her paternal house. With turns of events, after attaining manhood, the son obliging his mother's wish and advice brought Imoinu, the Goddess of Luwaang to the Khuman. Then after, during the reign of Meitei king Meidingu Chalaamba (1545-1562 A.D.), obliging his mother Nongbaallon Haochongambi's suggestion**

brought Goddess Imoinu to the Poirai Meitei Leibaak. From the above two episodes, it is known that both the Goddess Panthoibi and Imoinu was not concern as of the Meitei before. Goddess Panthoibi had been the only concern of the Khaabas till the time Nongda Lairen Paakhangba devastated and brought the Khaabas under the Meitei power. But after the Khaabas becoming a part of the Meitei power, Goddess Panthoibi became a common Goddess of the amalgamated Meitei power. Likewise, Goddess Imoinu was also the only concern of the Luwaang and Khuman till the reign of Meidingu Chalaamba and thus became a common bonding Goddess for the entire amalgamated Meitei power. As such, an initiation of an evolution of a common bonding of cultural tradition for the integrated Meitei power can be seen since the beginning of the amalgamation of the Meitei Nation. However, in the process of the common cultural evolution for the amalgamated Meitei power, there are historical evidences that shows: the Meitei also developed their own distinctive culture different from the other groups they subdued and amalgamated to their own power. For such insertion, the followings may be considered:-1. Meidingu Ningthoukhomba (1432-1467 A.D.) wanted to attack and subdue the Moiraang but hesitated as both the powerful Khuman and Kabo were allies of Moiraang. Whereas the Kabo was friendly with the Meitei but the Khuman remained a great adversary. So, the Meitei king planned a conspiracy with the Chief of Andro to make allies with the Kabo to attack Moiraang. The Chief of Andro was sent to Kabo for requesting help for Meitei to attack Moiraang. Meanwhile a night, Meitei secretly attacked Kabo and beheaded Kabo queen and placed the head atop the palace gate of the Kabo. The Meitei attackers on their return left scattering meal leftovers wrapped in lotus leaves to mislead them as Moiraang as it was a customary tradition of the Moiraang of wrapping their meal packages (Chayom) -4-in lotus leaves, whereas the Meitei wrapped their's in Leihouraa (plantain leaves of edible banana) and the Khuman in Changbi Laa (leaves of wild plantain).

**II. Meidingu Nongyin Phaaba (1523-1524 A.D.)** ascended at the tender age of 10 yr. after his father Meidingu Lamkyamba (1512-1523 A.D.). Taking advantage of the Meitei king's young age, Angom King Angoupaamba Kyamba forcibly married the young king's queen mother Channingphaabi. One day the Angom king came to the royal court adoring Urekshak Chaashangba (painted feather of white Heron) on his head which was a customary to the Meitei but not of the Angom. So the Meitei queen mother protested the nature of the Angom king and consequently got killed along with her young king son. On the other hand, it is also a well known fact that all the different groups of people (regardless of smaller groups that merged to one or another bigger group) amalgamated to the Meitei power and integrated through common cultural bondings in many ways, still continued to enjoyed their own distinctive ways of folk culture and traditions. Each group had their own distinctive patterns and colours of costumes and ornaments that could show the identity of the group they belong. They had day to day habits and ritualistic practices different from one another. For example:-1.

Meidingu Yaanglou Keiphaaba (969-984 A.D.) introduced the pattern of embroidering Khoi (a curve design) in the border of the Meitei womens' Phaneak Mayek Naibi (stripe-sarong) which was adopted by all the groups amalgamated to the Meitei power. However that was done in different colours of distinctive stripe-sarong to identify the women wearer of the respective group she belongs. Such as :

a. Ningthoujaa (Meitei) : Thambal machu phaneak (indigo and red stripe).

b. Khaaba-Ngaanba : Chingonglei phaneak (golden and black stripe).

c. Angom : Langhou phaneak (black and white stripe).

d. Chenglei (sharaang Leishaang and Haorok Konthou) : Loiraang phaneak (reddish and white stripe).

e. Luwang : Hgok phaneak (sky-blue and black strip).

f. Khuman : Kumjingbi phaneak (dark blue and whitish stripe).

g. Moiraang : Hangampal phaneak (yellow and reddish stripe).

(Those trend of wearing distinctive colours stripe-sarong by the Meitei women conforming to their respective groups continued till the Great World War II. But after the War, Meitei women started trendsetting to wear any kind of stripe-sarong as they like and continues to be still in vogue.

**II. The Chakpas of Manipur is a strong group of people who came and settled in this land since early days. Their main settlement areas with their religious practices which had affinity to the Tantric culture of Mahayana Buddhist were in and around the present day Bishnupur (Lamaangdong). They were defeated and -5-brought within the Meitei power during the reign of Meidingu Kongyaamba (1324-1335 A.D.). But they continued to remain with their customary practices and distinctive dialect. As such, The Chairen, subdued and brought within the Meitei power during the reign of Meidingu Telheiba (1335-1355 A.D.) also remained retaining their customary practices; whereas the Heirem Khunjaan, subdued at the same time with the Chairen got completely merged to the Meitei fold. In addition to the above circumstances, alien groups with their distinctive cultural traditions started settling within the amalgamated Meitei power either by means of forced exclusive settlements as war captives or by migration from both the east and west. So, by the turns of the early 18th c. A.D., it may easily be conceived the hard earned amalgamated Meitei Power and Nation might surely had faced a chaotic social order. By the turn of the 18th c. A.D., the small valley of Manipur, though it housed the seat of power of the amalgamated Meitei Nation, had numbers of different cultural colours which were not rightly befitful for a nation. Other than the amalgamated groups of the Meitei Power and Nation, the valley had housed- Takhel (Tripuri) Vaishnav Hindu village (later to be mingled with Chinese), Mayaang (Cachari) Vaishnav Hindu village, Mayaang Kaalishaa (later Bishnupriya) Shaakta Hindu villages, Khraamran (Burmese) Buddhist village, Kameng (Burmese Karen) Buddhist village, Muslim villages and in between Brahmins from different parts of India with their different Hindu school of thoughts. In such chaotic combinations of different cultures in a small land like Manipur valley where the seat of power for the amalgamated Meitei power and Nation lies, why a Meitei king would not like to adopt a state religion to bring common cultural traditions for his amalgamated subjects for integration as one?**

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