

**RELIGION
AND
CULTURE
OF
MANIPUR**

M. Kirti Singh

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FOREWORD

Dr. Kirti Singh has done a pioneering work in the area of contemporary Manipuri religion and culture. His monumental monograph shows that in the Meitei religion and culture, there is a synthesis of the East and the West and the culture of Manipur is in more ways than one ahead of the contemporary religious connotations.

The Manipuri religion is open, universal in outlook and without any founder prophet or holy book. It synthesise the essential truths of Buddhism, Vaishnavism, Christianity and the tribal religion assimilating into one and pursuing the ultimate truth and godhood in such a way as if they belong to it as its different aspects and parts. The ancestor worship, the Burmese Buddhism and the Hindu cults have been welded together in the Meitei religion, whose aim is the realisation of God and its reflection in human beings.

The deeply philosophical Manipuri religion propounds that the indeterminate Absolute (Sidava/Hari) and God are not two distinct entities. The Absolute and God extend into polytheism and henotheism. We observe that the religion has absolute-theistic system of philosophy, which is quite a new approach and innovation in the field of contemporary metaphysics. The concepts of soul, *karma*, bondage, salvation and the socio-religious movements have been knit together in the organic system of Meitei Religion. The spiritual stream comes from the Vaishnavite school of thought and finds effulgence in Krishna-Radha *bhakti* movement. Its catholicism, humanism, positive attitude to the world, and its caste and classless form of society leaves the living faiths of the Twentieth century far behind.

Dr. Kirti Singh has highlighted the special features of Manipuri folk-dance which uplift man to a union with God. Like the tide of the oceanic waves rising high, the dancers, surcharged with the divine love, ascend for communion with God. The spiritualisation of humanity forms a cardinal part of the Manipuri culture and imparts the social life and thought a high pedestal found nowhere else.

Dr. Kirti Singh's memorable work on the Manipuri culture, philosophy and religion is of an abiding value. The book will not only serve as a valuable reference book for the post-graduate studies but will throw light to mankind searching for truth, faith and path for the realisation of God. I am sure Dr. Singh will long be remembered by posterity for floodlighting the dark alleys of Meitei religion and thought.

R.S. Srivastava

PREFACE

In the following pages, an attempt has been made to present the dominant aspects of Religion and Culture of Manipur which will open up the real Manipuri mind to all and familiarise them with finer points and provoke deeper study.

The book is divided into two parts. The first is devoted to the study of religion and philosophy and the second part strives to deal at length with culture. There are chapters on political conditions, salient features of Manipuri thought, metaphysical principles, socio-religious movements, etc., interspersed with chapters on philosophical themes and various methods of God realisation, ethics, social philosophy, comparative study of Meitei faith and contemporary Indian thought and culture, etc. Based on original sources and careful field-work, these will surely stand the readers and researchers alike in very good stead. It has been my endeavour to shed as much light as possible so far as the comparative and critical study of Manipuri faith is concerned. Though important publications such as government publications and research-project-sponsored works have appeared in the field of Manipuri culture and religion over the last decade or so, their writers have omitted to discuss metaphysical concepts on the ground that its religion is a primitive faith which is based on superstition and dogma. In this book, I have worked on the subject in a modern and pragmatic way. For the first time, the Meitei concepts of God and godhood, soul, the relation between god and soul, *karma*, different ways of salvation, etc., have been discussed in an enlightened manner.

Two chapters on the philosophy of the Meiteis in relation to classical Indian thought and contemporary Indian thought is my humble contribution and they seek to answer the needs of students of social sciences, cultural anthropology and Indology. Many opine that these concepts are the result of Hindu influence and the pre-Vaishnavite beliefs and adverse to sound philosophical concepts. In order to correct these misconceptions, I have collected the relevant points from the sacred texts and also from the day to day community and social life of my people and knit them into a system along with my own interpretation and substantiated the same with quotations and reputed opinions. Happily, some of the concepts and main features clearly show that Manipur represents the confluence of the East and the West. And this is of great importance to the students of Religion, Philosophy and Culture.

The second part is devoted to an up to date account of culture with its form and contents. After a short survey of contemporary literature, I have recounted its contribution to dance, music, drama, painting, architecture, institutions, etc. They are discussed both in their theoretical and practical pre-Vaishnavite and Vaishnavite aspects. They not only connote a religious perception but also stand as notable contribution of the Manipuri culture to Indian culture. Items of Manipur dance, polo and martial arts are significant examples in this regard.

I wish first of all to thank the authorities of Ranchi University, for allowing me to work in the University. I owe a profound debt to Dr. R.S. Srivastava, Retd. Head of the Department of Philosophy and Dean of Humanities, Ranchi University, who indicated to me the main line of research and led me to its successful completion. Dr. Srivastava has been kind enough to write a foreword to the book and enhanced its value. I am indebted to the officials of the Government of Manipur, Shri B.C. Roy, Retd. Additional Director, Shri Y. Gopal, Deputy Secretary (Education), and N. Shamu Singh, Deputy Secretary (Education), for their co-operation in granting me study leave. I must also thank many scholars

of *Meitei Paya* (Lore) with whom I discussed many aspects and doubts and who supplied me with a wealth of invaluable information from the pages of holy texts. I am also beholden to many of my friends for their secretarial and other help in preparing the final manuscript.

Kongba Uchekon,
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10 August, 1987.

DR. M. KIRTI SINGH

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations of the titles of works have been used in the footnotes of this book.

AARA	Annual Administrative Report of the Manipur Agency
AARMS	Administration Report of the Manipur State since 1907 (to 1984)
AIOC	All India Oriental Conference
CK	Cheitharol Kumbaba, ed. by late L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, Imphal, 1st edition, 1967
ERE	Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics ed. by James Hastings, Vol. II
JASB	Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
JAMJA	Journal of all Manipur Jatra/Sumang Lila Association
JMSP	Journal of Manipur Sahitya Parisat
ICHR	Indian Council for Historical Research
ICSSR	Indian Council for Social Science Research
ICPHR	Indian Council for Philosophical Research
IPC	Indian Philosophical Congress
ISCA	Indian Science Congress Association, Calcutta
ISKCON	International Society for Krishna Consciousness founded by Prabhupada A.C. Bhakti Vedanta

- MS Manuscript of Meitei Puranas written in Manipuri script
- MCIC Manipur Cultural Integration Conference
- MSU Manipur Students' Union
- SAMLMC Souvenirs issued by All Manipur Light Music Conference in 1979, 1981, etc.
- SASM Souvenir-cum-seminar papers published by Arts Society, Imphal (on contemporary Art in Manipur, 1980-83)
- SJNMDA Souvenir of Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy, Imphal, 1964

petitions to the ruler urging him to set up a legislative council, later universal legislature, to introduce a vote by ballot, formation of ministry on parliamentary lines and the fixing of the civil list at a fixed ratio to the revenues of the state. In 1939 leading ladies demonstrated to have the rice export (by the Marwari merchants) stopped.¹⁰ The elites and educated Manipuris in general were keen to criticise the subversive role of Brahman Sabha, deplorable condition of land record, slow progress in lower courts, and the revisional court of the Maharaja. By and by the same forces that produced the administrative reforms produced social reforms through H. Irabot, N. Phulo, etc. The agitations brought about the establishment of a separate chief court, setting up of an appointment board, reduction of civil list to 10 per cent of the state revenue and establishment of police stations in different parts.¹¹

Religious condition: After the fall of Kangla (old palace which is associated with the traditional sanctity of the Meiteis) at the hands of the British a new palace was constructed for the new Raja. He occupied it in 1908 as his headquarters which remained until Manipur was integrated with Indian Union. The old palace and fort were occupied by the British troops (now by 4 Assam Rifles) as a punitive measure to show their might. It is a place where the Maharajas of the state must be installed according to Meitei custom. The sentimental attachment of the Manipuris to this place is very strong. Around the ancient fort and the palace in the centre of the old palace revolved the cultural life of the people for many centuries.¹² The Kangla with the sacred tank Nungjeng Pukhri, the old palace built on it with temples of state buildings, and the ditch were declared to be the British Reserve Area as they were used for attacking the British Residency.¹³

Manipur was for the greater part of the 20th century rather in the background in connection with the question of freedom and self-respect. But Churachand's reign saw the religious and cultural integration of Manipur with the rest of India. By virtue of his right as the king of all Meiteis he claimed jurisdiction over all cultural and religious affairs. He was invested

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with full powers in customary matters for the Manipuri Hindus living outside Manipur. True to the tradition of the Hindu kings he made munificent grants to the temples of Nar Singh Tila Akhara (now in East Bengal) and Malugram in Cachar (Assam) which would denote themselves to his popularity.¹⁴ It was in his day that pilgrimage and dedication of temples became a passion with the kings, queens and the upper class people.

He made a religious pilgrimage lasting many months to *Charidham* (4 sacred places) Nabadwip, Kashi, Prayag and Vrindavan and then to Hardwar, Rameswar, Dwarka and Puri. Then he came to the Abor hill near the Mishmi river in Assam. He then took a dip in the Parsuram Kunda before his return to Manipur. The pandits of the western places offered him the title of *Bhakta Rajarsi*, *Sri Kumda Seva Vinoda*. The pair of bells which king Chandrakirti had dedicated to Govindji was damaged. He dedicated a pair of bells afresh to Lord Govinda. Churachand built a temple in the Radhakunda of Vrindavan. It is known as *Gopalji Kunja*. On the full moon day of *Mera* (September-October) 1932 he dedicated a *Maharasa* (dance of Sri Krishna) to Govindaji in this temple. The road to Radhakunda was constructed for the pilgrims under the managership of Vraja Mohan Das with the munificence of Maharaja Churachand.¹⁵ His queen, Dhanamanjari Devi, built a temple known as *Sanar Mandir* (golden temple) in Nabadwip out of her own resources. The Vaishnava Sampradaya group of Visnupriya Thakurani in Nabadwip paid a glorious tribute to him by calling him *Gourabhakti Rasarnava* in 1937. They also characterised Manipur as the second Vaikuntha.¹⁶

In 1933 the grand *puja* of Lord Pakhangba, the divine ancestor of the royal dynasty was performed under the supervision of Moirang Thabal, the great court Pandit in a befitting manner. *Mera Haochongba* (a national festival of the kings held in the month of Mera/Sept.-October) was accomplished for the purpose of feeding the hill people with rice-beer and meat. It is to be noted that it had been a kind of festival to integrate the two groups of people—the plain dwellers and the hill tribes—under the initiative and

patronage of the kings since the 18th century. It was held in the capital of Kangla in which the hill tribes came from different parts of Manipur.¹⁷ The Manipuris in the times of war and of minority of the king did not observe the customary worship of the *Umang lais* (forest gods) through *Laiharaoba* dance and music. But the British rule had never been a taboo for their rites and beliefs. Through the effort of Princess Sanatombi, eldest daughter of Maharaja Surachandra, ex-ruler of Manipur (wife of Maxwell, the then Political Agent) and timely attention of Maharaja Churachand, the traditional practices were renovated amid great enthusiasm. Important *Umanglais* (traditional gods) and royal Hindu deities of the Meiteis were invested with rent free lands called *Lairous* for their maintenance. At the instance of H.H.'s mother and grand-father, the British Political Agent allotted revenue free land and sites to temples. The pre-Vaishnavite deities were made to hold not less 6 *paris* of land (1 *pari*=2½ acres). The *paris* of land for royal Hindu deities were higher in quantity ranging from 25 *paris* to 50 *paris*. The State Government provided sufficient financial grant for the celebration of royal festivals and functions with the approval of the Darbar and Political Agent. He convened the first sitting of new organisation called Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha under his chairmanship, around 1940 for discussing problems of Manipuri Hindus, a method which was utilised for political goals later.

Brahman specialists in different branches of Sanskrit learning were appointed as *Ratna* in his Sabha. The Sabha had the exclusive right of deciding disputes in connection with *Sastric* injunctions, traditions of Manipuri Hindus and legal matters. Great orthodoxy on the part of the Sabha could not take kindly to the lower section of the people. The Darbar could not remove the untouchability and promote assimilation of the hill tribes and the *Yaihibis* (sweeper groups, scavengers). The conservative attitude of H.H. Churachand was a great menace to the social and cultural integration. They were even prevented from entering the law court and public places by his veto power. He remained by the side of the British all through his life as he always

suspected the Congress policies and the rival sections in his kingdom as possible sources of danger to his regime.¹⁸

Maharaja Churachand abdicated the throne in favour of his eldest son in September, 1941. He died in Nabadwip on November, 6, 1941.

POLITICAL HISTORY

Maharaja Bodhachandra (1941-55) : He became the ruler of Manipur ceremonially on the 15th Sajibu/March-April, 1941, on the approval of the Viceroy of India. He is the only monarch known to the whole world in the long history of Manipur as his reign almost coincided with the coming of war to Asia and in view of the strategic importance of his state during the Second World War. Manipur became the first line of communication and later a war zone. Flushed with victory against the British in East Asia, the Japanese occupied Burma, Andaman Islands and reached the vicinity of Manipur as the ally of I.N.A. (raised by the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose). The state was all but destroyed by the horrible scenes of the bloody war and consequent troubles of air operation. Japanese planes made a series of air raids on Imphal between 1942 and 1944.¹⁹ Civil administration was paralysed ; inhabitants of Imphal fled to villages for fear of life. Imphal looked like a deserted place. The I.N.A. and Japanese troops had occupied 2/3 of Manipur and Nagaland from the clutches of British imperialism. A large number of young Manipuris, hill chiefs of the Nagas and Kukis, because of their security reasons, went to the Japanese. They distributed I.N.A. leaflets; secret meetings were held. In their estimate, a happy life was promised with the quickest capture of Imphal by the Japanese. They knew the differences of complexion and character between them and the white men. The people believed and repeated what they were taught by the old *purana* saying "Nongpok Thong Hangle" (the eastern gate has been opened) by which they meant the Western rules and culture would be replaced by the Eastern rule through Japanese invasion. They started spreading propaganda about the immortality and invincibility of the Japanese. Shah Nawaz

Khan was the first to hoist I.N.A. flag in Moirang (28 miles to the south west of Imphal).

The Allied powers strengthened the defence of Imphal by means of terrible intelligence, anti-aircrafts and forces of SEAC. Some I.N.A. officers defected to the British side and gave all secrets resulting in the setback to the Japanese. There were sharp fightings in Bishenpur, Nambol Maibam Lokpaching, Palel, Kohima and Dimapur Road after which the Japanese showed signs of losing ground. They thought that once they got across the Manipur's border the Congress people in Imphal valley would help them in capturing Imphal. But things were not happening as they had expected. They were driven out of Imphal after a series of reverses. It is estimated that about 26,000 brave I.N.A. soldiers laid down their lives on the soil of Manipur and Nagaland. The Japanese left Imphal leaving thousands of their comrades dead in the battlefields. Terribly gloomy and difficult were the days as the war showed its cruelty to the people and the land.

The Maharaja co-operated loyally with the Allies in all phases of the war effort. The Indian refugees who passed through Manipur from Burma were housed in Korengei camp, entertained by the Maharaja and Maharani Iswari Devi, and many thousands of troops received the fullest help even at great trouble to the state in 1942. The morale of the people was high enough in the dark period.²⁰ It was the privilege of the Maharaja to receive Lord Mountbatten, Air Marshal John Baldwin, General W. Slim, British war officers and Indian rulers of British India. The bombardment in Imphal killed many civilians and destroyed their properties. Whatever remained after the war formed only a part of the treasures of art and letter. Victory celebration of the British was held in Imphal on the Vijaya Dasami day in 1944. They were immensely helped by Assam Relief Association. Compensation for war damages was paid to the affected people by the British Government. The war brought in great changes for the people of this land as they learnt how to adjust themselves in such a situation. Roads and bridges to enable the Allies to move their army were constructed in different parts.²¹

Remission of tribute : As an act of grace and in recognition of the steadfast loyalty displayed by Manipur state and people, the annual tribute of Rs. 50,000 payable to the British Government was remitted in perpetuity in 1945 by His Majesty, the King Emperor.²² It changed the gloomy face and misunderstanding between the British and Manipur. The scene was occupied with bright and joyous hearts of *Visnu Jagrata* (invocation to Lord Visnu). H.H. declared the 8th October of every year as a state holiday under the name of *Bodha-Leisemba* ("Renovation of Manipur during Maharaja Bodhachandra") in commemoration of this gift from His Majesty. The people of Manipur decorated the ruler with the title of *Meidingu Leisemba* (Maker of Manipur).²³

By 1947 Manipur became a part of Indian union. Manipur State Darbar was redesignated as Manipur State Council and its members were named Ministers from July 1, 1947. The inner line permit system issued by the Political Agent for the outsiders visiting the state was transferred to the Home Minister of State Council.²⁴

The Maharaja ushered in a new era in the state by his administrative reform for associating the people with the state work to the most possible extent. He announced the formation of a Constitution making committee with 17 members, 6 such members from the hill areas and 5 official members. It formed two sub-committees to draft the Constitution. The reports of them were duly passed. They obtained the approval of the Maharaja and Interim Government of India. It became an Act called the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947.²⁵ Manipur was the first native state in India to introduce Assembly election on adult franchise.

Elections were held in March, 1948. The elected Legislative Assembly met thereafter. This act would have been democratic had the person having the largest majority was appointed Chief Minister. But the Chief Minister was appointed by the H.H. in consultation with the elected ministers of the council although they were elected by the Assembly. It is clear that 90 per cent of full fledged democracy was introduced on a somewhat imperial model.²⁶

With the lapse of British paramountcy on August 15, 1947,

the treaty lapsed after 56 years. Captain F.F. Pearson, the former President of Manipur Darbar and sometime Chief Minister handed over the formal charge to Captain M.K. Priyobrata Singh, the second son of H.H. Churachand Singh. The portfolios were distributed among the ministers with the approval of Governor of Assam. The post of Political Agent was abolished and in its place a post of Union Agent (later Dewan) was created as a temporary arrangement. With the transfer of power there was a corresponding increase of responsibility for the Maharaja and his new ministry. The Maharaja became the master of hill areas which were so long administered by the President of the Darbar on his behalf. The silent departure of the British had been predicted as the unsound firing of the gunshot in the *puranas* of the Meiteis. It was implied that the British would leave the country without any gunshot.²⁷ The Maharaja celebrated Indian Independence Day by hoisting Pakhangba flag in front of the Council Hall and with ceremony of *pujas* in the old Kangla capital.

From his announcement of orders on August 28, 1947, it is known that when the questions of enforcement of Martial Law and cow slaughter during the war time came before the Government, the objectionable issues were, after a determined opposition from H.H. cancelled in the interest of the Manipuri Hindu Vaishnavas.²⁸ He heralded a modern era in the political and educational changes by recognising Manipuri as the court language of the state and dividing Imphal valley into 5 sub-divisions under S.D.Os and establishing a college called Dhanmanjari College and changing State Military Police into Manipur Rifles and opening a Chief Court.²⁹

His reign extended upto 1949 and the state for a brief period functioned as an independent kingdom with him as the ruler and his council of ministers, later only to merge either with Burma or Indian union. Many voluntary political parties were formed. Strikes, *Satyagrahas*, etc., were adopted from the Indian way of life for the first time. The movement for merger against its independent status gained momentum among such political parties as the Congress, Communists and Socialists, etc. The Congress workers of West Bengal and Assam moved the merger

of Manipur with West Bengal and Assam, the Socialists for its merger with Assam. Congress party of Manipur was in favour of merging Manipur with India or *Purvanchal* (Eastern States comprising Manipur, Tripura, Cachar and Lushai Hills).³⁰ In the last week of November, 1947, the leftist group of Manipur State Congress launched an agitation for a responsible Government of Manipur on non-violent lines as the state council fell short of their demand. In August 1948, the Mao Nagas demanded the merger of Mao area with the Naga Hills. In the same year Manipur Kishan Sabha under H. Irabot Singh started agitation for cession of north-eastern part of Manipur from Manipur and establishment of an independent Government with headquarter in Nongda.³¹ In addition to their agitation in the valley areas, the Communist leaders went to Rangoon to meet the Burmese leaders for inclusion of Manipur in Burma.³² Only ruling local party, namely, Praja Santi Sabha, was opposed to the integration of Manipur with India. The Maharaja went to Shillong in September, 1949, for clarification of pending election cases. Shri Sri Prakash, the then Governor of Assam, forced him to merge Manipur with India as the fulfilment of Indian Government desire.

Maharaja Bodhachandra signed Merger Agreement of Manipur with India in Shillong the undue pressure of the then Home Minister, Sardar Patel. He was given an annual pension of three lakhs of rupees from noon of October 15, 1949.³³

The Constitution Act, 1947, became inoperative, Legislative Assembly was dissolved, Council of Ministers dismissed, the chief court abolished by order of the Government of India.

It raises certain legal questions as to why the then Assembly accepted the order of dissolution although the Maharaja signed the merger agreement without getting the opportunity of consulting his council of ministers and the Assembly. The Maharaja was fully assured of the betterment of the people by the free India's Government and the people hoped then that they would get a political set up not inferior to the one they had already enjoyed up to the date of merger. But the unceremonious abolition of the hard earned full-fledged

Assembly had produced some adverse effect on the people. The present history of Manipur is the history of the struggle of the people, both of hills and plains, for restoration of Assembly and statehood as their legitimate claim.

Maharaja Bodhachandra died on December 9, 1955. The Rulership was given to his second son, Okendrajit, by his second Rani, Kamalabati Devi, on the recommendation of the Chief Commissioner. A case of dispute for the successorship was instituted by the sons and near relatives of the deceased Maharaja. A high judicial enquiry was appointed with the Judicial Commissioner of Manipur by the Home Ministry of India. The judicial officer expressed his desire to receive all applications from all the interested people having a right to the *gaddi* of ruler. There were as many as nine candidates including the sons, brothers of Maharaja Bodhachandra, some Rajkumars and Ningthouja clan on the ground that they were the descendants of the ancient line of princes. The judicial court started examining them along with witnesses which were presented to it regarding the customs, traditions and manner of the Manipuris.

It took sometime for the order of the Government of India to come after receiving the judicial report. The recognition of Okendrajit was upheld. After the abolition of the privy purses of the rulers, he became a citizen of Manipur and the chairman of Sri Govindaji Temple Board.

Religious and customary affairs: Like his father, Maharaja Bodhachandra and his Darbar ruled the kingdom with only the least interference from the British authority, that is, the Political Agent and the Government of Assam. The Manipuri ruler is the head of two major religious creeds—Pre-Vaisnavism and Vaisnavism of Bengal (as it appeared in the state). The ancient deities have been honoured as the Hindu deities since the 18th century. The Manipuri king insisted that every god in Meitei calendar should be celebrated with a public ceremony. There was not much distinction between the religious and secular functions. The people had spiritual and temporal allegiance to the king in an unavoidable way. The Governor of Assam had been conscious enough to dissuade the ruler from the purely religious course of action as it would mean

nearly one day in three as holiday. The Darbar made allotments of funds for the state in connection with the celebration of the following festivals³⁴—(1) Chandan Jatra, (2) Nar Singh Janma, (3) Jalakeli, (4) Ratha Yatra, (5) Radhastami, (6) Bamon Janma, (7) Durga Puja, (8) Sri Panchami, (9) Sivaratri, (10) Rama Navami, (11) Charak Puja, (Meitei Cheiraoba, (12) Varuni, (13) Dolyatra (Yaosang), (14) Pakhangba Chenghongba, (15) Sanamahi Chenghongba (16) Nityainanda Chenghongba (17) Kali Puja, (18) Pakhangba Leikatpa (offering of flowers to Pakhangba, the originator of royal dynasty and (19) Lai Haraoba (20) Krishna Janma. It is to be noted that Hindu festivals are observed in a modified way and a day later as determined by their calendar. Some of them were exclusively conducted by the court *maibas* and *maibis* of the court. The Maharaja's approval was necessary for all cases covering disputes, social and religious irregularities and admitting outsiders into Meitei community except the Muslims and the Yaithibis (scavengers). The court Pandits and physicians conducted the annual worship of great gods on behalf of the Maharaja and the kingdom as customary functions.³⁵ There were various taboos connected with the person of the ruler. He was not permitted to go north on Tuesday which was considered inauspicious for travel. Some of the hill tops and sacred groves were not visited by him as the presiding deities were inimical to the royal family. The effigy of snake god Pakhangba was worshipped by the king in the royal temple; the image was never allowed to be moved in a western direction, because to do so would have implied retreating from Burma, the traditional enemy. The king thought that it was his duty to safeguard the trust which the people entrusted 2000 years ago unto Pakhangba who happened to be the founder of Ningthouja (royal) dynasty. The kings safeguarded the sacred trust with honour and full consciousness.³⁶

Maharaja Bodhachandra (when he was the Yubaraj) was exiled to Banaras for about three years and one month (1934-37) for his action against his father by Churachand with the consent of the British Government of India.³⁷ In his exiled period, he drew inspiration from a Hindu monk

and led a pious life according to the Vedic method. He became a devotee of Lord Viswanath as is evident from his poems written there. One will be struck by the way of life he lived as King of Manipur in later years. His long, black hair and *jata* (coil of hair on the head) and use of Banarasi cotton cloth of soft and thin texture reminded certain features of *sadhus* in the holy city.³⁸ He was a fine composer of poems. In fact, his *Singel Nachom* (collection of fine poems) full of literary qualities appeared in a book form before he became the ruler.³⁹ He himself too was a *pung* player (drummer) of considerable merit. True to pious generation of Vaishnava rulers he acted as the main singer of *Kirtans*, *Manoharsahi* type of songs in connection with the state functions and sacred days of his favourite people.

During the period of Second World War he is credited with having brought the idol of royal deity Sri Govindaji to the safer places (Khongman and Uchekon), and keeping the daily devotional service of the Lord of the universe intact.⁴⁰

Under orthodox Hindu influence important state functions were usually marked with *pujas*, *Sankirtans* and chanting of the *slokas* of *Srimad Bhagavat*. Pure Manipuri games of great interest such as polo, foot hockey, boat race, wrestling (*Mukna*) and dances and cycle polo were played; various other activities were also carried out. The ministers were obliged to take oath in the name of the *Bhagavat* before Sri Govindaji. The ruler continued to be the authority in giving national awards like *Khamen chatpa* (printed silk *dhoti*), *Sana Khuji* (gold bangle), *tal* (*jari* beads and sequences) to the deserving persons, appointing persons in his court and conferring titles on them.⁴¹ He also undertook a pilgrimage to the hill villages of different tribes who were neither Manipuri nor Hindus.⁴² They enjoyed his protection and were required to obtain his recognition in their affairs. Some of them had begun to embrace Christianity offered to them by the missionaries with the consent of the British. The Muslims of Manipur valley did not look as active in religion as in the politics. The *Meitei Marups* had started a number of propaganda activities by the time of merger agreement.

✓ The Maharaja was regarded as the incarnation of God Visnu

or Pakhangba in Manipuri belief. Most of the office-holders were the princes nearer to the throne; near relations of the ruler were also regarded as divine.⁴³ The customary and religious rights of the ruler were enshrined in the Manipur State Constitutional Act, 1947. Article 8 says, "The Maharaja's prerogative (a) All family matters which are the Maharaja's sole concern as head of the ruling family, all matters which are his sole concern as the Defender of Faith and all matters connected with Titles, Honours and palace ceremonial shall be deemed to fall within the Maharaja's personal prerogative and in such matters the Maharaja shall exercise full discretion subject to the provisions of the Constitution and the laws of the state. The Maharaja's prerogative shall not, however, be taken to compromise any matter wherein the legitimate interests of the state administration or civil right sustainable in a court of law is involved. It will be within the prerogative of the Maharaja to remit punishment and pardon to offenders subject to the provisions of the Manipur State Court Act provided that this prerogative shall not prejudice the right of any individual to confirmation; (b) It shall be prerogative of the Maharaja and Maharaja's first wife that neither may be made answerable to law nor subject to any legal proceeding in the State Court. Their persons and property shall be inviolable."

The relation between the Maharaja/the Rajkumar of ruling house and the people was governed by *Thougallon* (court manners and language).⁴⁴ This use was a courtesy which contributed to the social solidarity and a charm all its own to the Raja's regime. It is one of the aspects of Bhakti Yoga. Formalities like touching the foot, prostration, covering the women's head with a piece of cloth, etc., came into vogue by this time. The use of separate vocabulary lent colour and dignity to the ruling king and princes. Manipur has the unique distinction of having given right to such constitution and court manners.⁴⁵ The dignity of the Maharaja was also guaranteed by the popular council vide Resolution No 2 (b) of June 22, 1949.⁴⁵ The merger agreement gives the ruler to enjoy the authority as follows: (2) "H.H. the Maharaja shall continue to enjoy personal rights, privileges, dignities, titles, authority

over religious observances, customs, rights, ceremonies and institutions of the same in the state which he would have enjoyed had this agreement not been made". (6) "The Dominion Government guarantees the succession according to law and customs to the Gadi of the State and to H.H. the Maharaja's rights in charge of the same in the State".⁴⁶

But the merger agreement and World War II gave the ex-Maharaja and the people a chance of change, change in social outlook, way of life, change for a new ideal—ideal of equality and justice—hailed by the modern mind. The people who were orthodox before the war were radically changed. Inter-dining, going to hotels, new dresses, cinema, theatre, etc., have increased. Band party has become an essential part of socio-cultural life such as marriage, ball dance and *Laiharaoba*.⁴⁷ But as for the prestige and influence of the ruler, it rested wholly on the political power and once it was taken away, his eclipse was inevitable. Under Congress influence, attempts were made by some interested groups to disown his religious rights and authorities over the *Ningthou Lai* (gods of the king whose *seva* is done by him for all Manipuris) and rites. The rulers in the administration by this time violated the agreement of 1949 in their actions and decisions. They held that the old time rights lapsed with the accession of the State to Indian Union. The Deputy Commissioner instead of referring the matter to the ex-Maharaja undertook to fix the date of *Moirang Laiharaoba*. The Police Superintendent spoke to the gathering of Moirang to forgo all rights and titles with a view to carve out a society of equals. The D.C. and the Officer of Police attending the festival ignored Maharaja's ceremonious visit and did not show the simplest courtesy of greeting that he could expect of them. The Congress agitators began to spread the news that the ink of the agreement was dry. The Maharaja made complaints to the Governor of Assam over the head of local authorities in Manipur for not according him the courtesies that were due and proper. But the new rulers ignored even to reply to his petitions.⁴⁸

It takes time to change the traditional state. The old institu-

tions and customary court titles were never abolished as they offered opportunities to satisfy the religious needs of the people or to provide the posts nearer to custom and religion. They retain some status till today. Under his able assistance and encouragement, the H.H.'s *pandit loisang* continued to be the authority to shed light on the history of the clans, hierarchy of the clans, concept of common seat and common pipe smoking.

Important events of his reign were entered in the royal chronicle and *Cheitharol Kumbaba* under his order and every page of it was authenticated by his seal. His *loisang* (office) prepared the sacred compilation which has now ceased to be so.⁴⁹

Maharaja Bodhachandra began to live the typical life of a pious and orthodox Vaishnava, the life of a *yogi* who renounced the mundane pursuits and devoted himself solely to spiritual quests. He sought solace through pious works and prayer though he was not consulted by the new rulers in later life. He retired to the sacred hill of Nongmaiching (Vindyagiri as its Hindu name) which is traditionally associated with the cult of Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi (Siva and Durga).⁵⁰ On 10th Wednesday, January-February (Phairen), 1944, the *Jivanyas* ceremony of Goloknath and Raseswari took place in the palace on a grand scale. The idols were carved out of the *Champaka* and jackfruit tree (grown on Kaina Hill) by his order. On 22 Wakching, December-January 1948 he beatified the sanctuary of Nongmaiching and with his worship of Siva evolved the sanctity of this hill. He dedicated a brick temple to Mahadeva on the top of the Nongmaiching hill on 28th Wednesday, *Lamda* (Feb.-March, 1947) a stone temple in Gouranagar, on 15 *Phairel*, 1954, (foothill of the same hill) and another at Khalong on 7th Sunday, Ingel/June-July, 1955.⁵¹ Roads, tanks, *kundas* like *Visnu Pada Ashram*, *Visnu Kunda Sarobar*, *Narada Kunda*, *Saraswati*, *Laksmi Kundas*, etc., were renovated in Nongmaiching, Kabru Hills which were sacred to the Meiteis.⁵² With due *sankalpa* he arranged the hearing of sacred Vaishnava texts in the hall of Sri Govindaji. In the function which lasted for one (from Ist Sajibu, 1953 to 12

Sajibu/March-April, 1954) year, texts like *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Vijay Panchali*, *Vayu Puran*, *Laksman Digvijoy*, *Govinda Lilamrita*, *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, *Radhamadhadatya*, *Govinda Itihash*, etc., were discoursed in the traditional manner. One person recited the musical metre of the texts according to *Raga* and *Ragini* while another translated the passages and the ideas contained in Manipuri. There were no writings in Manipuri in these themes by his time. He patronised this form of art.

The Maharaja, as the sole authority, presented the participants with coveted rewards and conferred on them suitable titles.⁵³ It was on 18 Friday *Hiyangei*, 1955, just 8 days before his death that the Maharaja performed the memorable *Mahakirtan* of Khallong and on 21 Monday he performed royal feeding of the people with 8 types of *palas*. He died a sudden death on 26 of the same month.⁵⁴

He was in constant touch with the Manipuris living in Hojai, Cachar, Vrindavan, etc. On his way to Shillong in *Hiyangei*/Oct.-Nov., 1951, the Meiteis living in 42 villages of Hojai (Assam) requested him to establish religious and customary courts like *Cheirap* (civil court), *Garod* (military court), *Brahmasabha* in that area on the model of his ancient courts. He appointed the head of the *Brahmasabha* and deputed the officials of his court to introduce the system of introducing four *panas* (divisions) and set up customary departments so that they might look after their customary affairs.⁵⁵ The Meiteis in one respect or another turned their feet towards him even after the integration of the state to get their custom and belief stamped with his approval as a pre-requisite towards their practice. So far as the common old people were concerned they did not know much of the administrative and religious changes. In conformity with the pious ideal, a well-to-do man used to instal a temple, a congregation hall, etc., to organise *Sankirtan* and visit holy places in his life-time. They made several promises to various deities in the form of dress, ornaments, furniture for temples, in the event of their wishes being fulfilled. It is customary for a high status family to promise Sri Govinda that in the event of fulfilment of its wish, it would organise a *Rasa*

dance as a mark of gratitude to Him and also that his or her son would play the role of Krishna/Radha in the profound *Rasa* dance. Sometimes a pious man had a small temple built in a corner of his house. He offered the food which he prepared in a separate kitchen to the favourite deity inside the temple and he alone took the *prasad* (rice and vegetable products alone forming a variety free from fish) at the altar. Sometimes a Brahman is requisitioned for the *seva* of the deity on payment of paddy/salary. Such was the emotional pattern of the time. With the confirmed Vaishnavas they are still popular.

Thus the analysis of the time of Maharaja Bodhachandra enables us to have a glimpse of the generation gap, to compare the situation of the one prevailed on the eve of the war and the merger agreement with the new developments in all fields.

They are involved in making a synthesis between the old and new culture and making some phenomenal developments.

ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES SINCE 1947

Manipur became a part C State under a Chief Commissioner. The annual allowance of Rs. 6270 payable to Manipur for Kabaw valley (a part of Manipur ceded to Burma)⁵⁶ was continued by the British Government and the Government of free India up to 1958. The former Maharajas (H.H. Churachand and H.H. Bodhachandra) urged upon the chamber of princes, Government of India and the British authorities for suitable measures for the restoration of the valley to Manipur.⁵⁷ A delegation met the Defence Minister and Sardar Patel who refused flatly to open the issue afresh.⁵⁸ Under the Chief Commissioner all Central acts had been extended in Manipur.

In 1950-51 an advisory form of Government was introduced. Socialist party in alliance with some local parties organised an agitation for installation of Assembly against this advisory Government in 1954. In 1957 following the recommendation of S.R.C. Report, a territorial council of 30 elected members and two nominated members replaced the advisory rule. The whole state was agitated from time to time for the restora-

tion of an Assembly. The Naga hostiles' activity under A.Z. Phizo was also fairly widespread in the Naga inhabited areas of Manipur. The belief in the formation of a separate state had been nicely given expression to by Pan Manipur Youth League, Meitei State Committee, United Natural Liberation Front, Revolutionary Government of Manipur, Kanglei League and political organisations of the hill people. In 1963 a Legislative Assembly of 30 elected members and three nominated members was restored under the Union Territories Act. They had been functioning for some months. It had to be dissolved on October 16, 1969, on account of the unstable party position and the President's rule was introduced. Manipur was inaugurated as a full-fledged state on 21 January, 1972, by Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, in fulfilment of the North Eastern Areas Act, 1971. There are 60 members in the Assembly directly elected by the people. Out of these 19 seats are reserved for the scheduled tribes. With the attainment of statehood Manipur has once again come to its own. Manipur has contributed its quota of two seats in the Lok Sabha and one seat in the Rajya Sabha. One seat in the Lok Sabha is reserved for the scheduled tribes. In joining the mainstream of India and the civilised world, Manipur is marching ahead with other states and people of India.⁵⁹

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Vide the full text of the *Sanad* extracted from Sir Robert Reid, *History of Frontier Areas bordering on Assam*. pp. 71-77.
2. *CK*. pp. 495-500; see also foot note-3.
3. From October 1919 the Political Agent of Manipur transferred the hill areas to the President of Manipur State Darbar who controlled them without any authority from the Maharaja and his Darbar. The system continued even after the participation of the native state of Manipur in the Indian federation under the Government of India Act, 1935 and till the formal handing over the hill areas to the Maharaja of Manipur on August 10, 1947.
4. *A.A.R.M.A.* : 1905-7. Being a keen sportsman he won many medals during his stay in Ajmer. He also joined Imperial Cadet Corps.
5. Extracted from the rules for the management of the State of Manipur.

6. *War Diary* by Pandit Mutua Jhulan, Ex-Habildar, Imphal, 1943, contains detailed picture of this.
7. Political Agent's Diary concerning Kuki Rebellion, 1917-18.
8. Vide the *Sanad* issued by Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy and Governor General in India, dated Delhi, the 1st January, 1918.
9. The meagre resource of the State could not meet Maharaja's Civil List amounting more than a lakh of rupees every year and the annual tribute of Rs. 50,000.
10. *AARMS*. 1939-40, pp. 1-2. The Marwaris are here mentioned as foreign merchants by the P.A.: *AARMS*, 1940-41, p. 3; Interview with Rajni Devi, who played a leading role in *Nupilal* (Women Gherao/War). Also Infra chapter on Social Philosophy of the Manipuri Faith, Chapter—VI.
11. The author's observation.
12. Concerning the ancient capital of Manipur (Kangla) as the ritualistic and archaeological site the following are quite good—(1) Files of Kangla in Manipur Secretariat Library, (2) Recent Archaeological advances in Manipur presented by the author at the 69th session of Indian Science Congress Association held at Mysore University from January 3 to 8, 1982; Kangla Amasung Kangla Pat (Manipuri), an article by Th. Netrajit dated June 3, 1892.
13. Pandit Mutua Jhulan, *Vijaya Panchali*, Imphal, 1943, pp.—160-162.
14. Vide files in connection with the petition of the Manipuri Hindus of Malugram to H.H. Churachand and Darbar Resolution on the maintenance grant to temples of Nar Singh Zilla Akhara, Sylhet (East Bengal) and Radhakunda (U.P.).
15. R.K. Sanahal Singh, *Manipur Itihas*, Imphal, 1947, pp. 146-147.
16. See foot note 15.
17. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, pp. 611-612. All the persons who participated in the royal festival were suitably rewarded and separate posts appointed to discharge the different customary functions of his office. This was a great incident for the Meitei people who had been disturbed for some years by the British authority after their victory in the War of 1891.
18. Vide Infra, Chapter—III, Section on the Loi and Yaithibis, Chapter—VIII, Section on the comparative study of Gandhiji with Manipuri Faith. Also the author's paper "The Scheduled Castes of Manipur with special reference to the Loi Community" presented and discussed at the 71st Session of ISCA held at Ranchi University, 1984. H.H. Maharaja Churachand Singh did not approve the resolution of the Darbar allowing the Yaithibis to embrace Manipuri Vaishnavism. For the rules of the *mangba* (degradation) and purification approved by the Darbar vide No. 1 of June 22, 1938.
19. Evan, Lt. General Geoffrey and James Anthony Brellt, *Imphal* London, 1962. p. 39; *A.A.R. Manipur State*; 1943-44, pp. 11-12. In

- the holy sayings Manipur is called *Hantre Hunpham* which means the place where the ball will be tossed in centre on the field. The fight means World War II.
20. *Hindustan Standard*, November 5, 1945.
 21. *A.A.R.M.S.*—1944-46, pp. 2-9, Singh, S. Gouhari, *Manipur and Second World War, Imphal*, 1981, pp.—24-28 (Verses 118, 66 & 70).
 22. Loc. Cit :
 23. H.H. Memorandum No. 816-P(II)—(VII) D/412-45 addressed to the Governor of Assam. The Darbar resolution No. 3 of 12-12-45 approved the inclusion of "Bodha Leisemba" in the holiday list for permanent remission of tribute. Maharaja Bodhachandra wanted to institute an order of the Holy *shaka* of Manipur, with two classes, one gold, onesilver. A list of recipients (leading warriors of united forces and leaders of Manipur during the fighting in Manipur) was drawn up. But he was not allowed to go ahead with his plan by the British.
 24. Files in the Secretariat Library.
 25. Records—*New Constitution of Manipur State*, 1947-48, File No. 8.
 26. Loc. Cit. : The author's estimate.
 27. The sayings often made by Meitei saints as recorded in the sacred *Puyas/manuscripts*.
 28. See Infra. Ch. VIII. Section on cow killing and Vinobaj's teaching.
 29. *A.A.R.M.S.* 1946-47, 47-48. Manipur had the experience of strike by the public servants for the first time.
 30. Memorandum submitted by the different political parties to the Government of India and the Governor of Assam. At the suggestion of Congress Party, Dr. P.C. Ghose, Chief Minister of West Bengal, visited Manipur and addressed the people at Imphal Pologround.
 31. *History of Manipur Police*, Police Centenary 1961, Imphal, pp. 25-28.
 32. Extracts from Burmese newspaper : *The Guide Daily*, dated 18th November 1946 received from D.I.G., C.I.D. Dr. Layden (Leiren), leader of the Communist Party, interviewed U. Tham Pet, proprietor of the shave-mijent non-Film Company, in Imphal and spoke against the British and the Maharajah. The Mandalay correspondent of the paper reports the arrival of some Manipuri leaders in Mandalay with a view to go to Rangoon to interview Burmese leader, Bogyyoke Aungsun, for merger of Manipur with Burma as in the old days. For the activity of H. Irabot vide chapter VI.
 33. Vide the merger agreement signed between the Maharaja of Manipur and the Dominion Government of India. As is evident from the public meetings resolutions and reaction from different quarters and newspapers. It was only the Manipur State Congress (and no other political parties) which was in favour of merger with India even before independence inspite of the absence of this tone in the election manifesto of 1948. Maharaja Bodhachandra was popularly called bubble king for the short duration of his regime.

34. Lt. General Sir Geoffrey Evan op. cit., pp. 14-15, Darbar Resolution on Pujahs, dated 19-6-46.
35. Dr. M. Kirti Singh, *Religious Developments in Manipur in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Imphal, 1981, Chapter VII. Also his paper "Manipuri System of Astrology and Astronomy" presented at the 30th session of All India Oriental Conference, 1980.
36. Vide Ch. VIII in connection with the comparative study of Manipuri Faith with Gandhiji's Philosophy. Rulers according to their practice consider that all their powers and properties are God Pakhangba's (Visnu) and that they are agents for a brief period. They have to utilise them properly and take care not to use them for their own benefit.
37. *AARMS*, 1934-35, 36-37 pp. 2-4. each. Vide the files of Maharaj Kumar Bodhachandra during his exile in Kashi. *Cheitharole Kumbaba*, pp. 615-623.
38. See footnote 36.
39. The author personally possessed a copy of the said book. The origin of cycle-polo also is traced to him during his period of Yubarajaship vide *CK*, pp. 608, 664.
40. *CK*, p. 635. Uchekon is author's place of stay. It is also called Makha Konung on account of the temporary stay of Sri Govindaji and the Royal family during the turmoils of World War.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 586-593, 638-650. Relevant passages of the text reveals the same tendency.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 646-647, 656, the strong tradition of the hill tribes testify to it.
43. The ms. called *Phamlol* throws interesting light in this connection.
44. Captain E.W. Dun, *Gazetteers of Manipur*, Calcutta, 1886. Section on manners and courtesy, Parijat, *Meitei Sahitya*, Imphal pp. 5-11.
45. The constitution is a product of the time. The idea that king is the incarnation of god and none can live in a monarchless state is deeply rooted in the mind of the people.
46. *Manipur State Constitution Act*, 1947.
47. N. Tombi Singh, *Manipur and the Mainstream*, Imphal, 1975, section on Four Generations at a glance, pp. 120-179.
48. Sri Rawal Amar Singh, the new Chief Commissioner's order No. 001/CC dated the 15th Oct., 1949. H.H.'s letters of May 16, 24 and 29 addressed to Sri Prakash, Governor of Assam, and his successor, Jairamdas Daulatram, on the above subject.
49. *CK*, Imphal, 1967 pp. 665, 667, 669.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 683.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 641, 652, 674, 680-690.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 660-661.
53. Vide Infra Ch. IX section (A) in connection with the culture of Manipuri Dance.

54. *CK* p. 691.
55. Vide Infra Part II of the same chapter. Also chapter IX Section B.
56. The Agreement between the British Government and the Burmese Government dated the 25th January, 1834.
57. The author says that Maharaja Churachand's and Maharaja Bodhachandra's objections to the cession of Kabaw valley to the Burmese on the 7th March, 1933 and from 1947 to 1953 are coupled with the demand of Pan Manipur Youth League. The case filed by H.H. Bodhachandra and proposal to go to London is weakened by the resolution of Council of Ministers and a note submitted by Sawbwa of Thandut State dated 20th November, 1921. In this context Ibohal Singh's *The History of Manipur*, pp. 326-327 may be consulted.
58. Sardar Baldev Singh agreed to take up action on defence grounds but Sardar Patel, the Deputy Prime Minister, held that India had a good neighbour in Burma. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, handed over the same to Burma in 1954 against the wishes of the people. The members of Pan Manipur Youth League are observing Kabaw Valley Remembrance Day every year in strong protest against the unjust action of the Government of India. The final boundary demarcation between India and Burma is yet to take place. From the tour diaries of the cultural integration team it became known that the Burmese entered the Indian boundary forcibly and physically occupied the villages of Indian territory and boundary pillars No 64-68. For details vide *Regional Integration*, quarterly journal, September, 1982, pp. 1-9.
59. This remark has remained the author's credo substantially from the beginning till the end of the present book.

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