

A STUDY ON THE HISTORICAL LITERARY WORKS OF MANIPUR IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY A.D.

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ABSTRACT

The early literary aspects which originated in the form of oral literary tradition such as hymns, ritual songs and stories gradually developed into written forms with the introduction of scripts or alphabets in the State as in the case of other contemporary literatures of India. However, with the advent of Hinduism in the State during the early part of the 18th century, the new faith made tremendous impact on social and cultural life of the Manipuris. This new phenomenon was well manifested in Manipuri literature and the traditional concept of Manipuri literature began identifying itself with the mainstream of Indian literature. A number of literary creations were made during this period by the writers and scholars of Manipur under the royal patronage. Some of the literary works based on the historical events of Manipur in the 18th and 19th centuries were Samsok Ngamba, Takhel Ngamba, Khahi Ngamba, Ouwa Ngamba etc.

Keywords: Scripts, alphabets, literature, main stream, Sanskrit, royal patronage.

Full Paper:

Introduction: The Bhakti movement originated in Bengal by the 16th century A.D. after the birth of Lord Chaitanya. The wave of the movement gradually spread in all the eastern parts of India thereby resulting in giving a strong impact on the literary traditions of these regions. When the movement reached Manipur, a hilly state in north eastern corner of India from Bengal, it took about one hundred fifty years (Jhalajit,1977). Consequently, Hinduism acted as a prime mover in the growth and development of Medieval Manipuri literature (Jhalajit,1998).

The period from 1709 to 1819 was the time when great ideas started to enter in Manipur from other parts of India: King Garibniwaz (1709-1748) ascended the throne of Manipur when the Shan influence was completely disappearing. In this era, Manipuri literature had completely merged into the mainstream of Indian literature. During the rule of King Bhagyachandra or Jai Singh (1759-1798), Vaishnavism of Bengal was again made religion of Manipur.(Manihar,2013). The successors of king Jai Singh were also the Patron of Gaudiya School of vaishnavism and he himself was also a dedicated worshipper of Lord Krishna. He composed the three Rasa forms (classical dance) and also set up the idols of Radha and Krishna (Gangmumei,1991). Bengali Kirtans were popular during this period. Religious sentiment, royal patronage and effort of the

Brahmins gave the Bengali language an important place in Manipur. This in turn brought the medieval Bengali literature to Manipur. In this way, Manipur, during the 18th and 19th centuries reached artistic perfection in the field of art, culture, sculpture, architecture, etc. Such developments are therefore reflected in the literary works of the same period.

Methods and methodology:

My research work is descriptive and analytical in nature. Both primary as well as secondary sources such as books, journals, etc and primary sources like MSS or the ancient Manipuri manuscripts had been used while writing this research work for obtaining a scientific conclusion.

Discussion:

Historical Literary Works:

Literary works based on the historical events of Manipur in the 18th and 19th centuries – *Samsok Ngamba*, *Takhel Ngamba*, *Khahi Ngamba*, *Ouwa Ngamba*, *Shamu Phaba amasung Govinda Nirupon*, *Chingthangkhomba Maharaj Ganga Chatpa*, *Gambir Singh Nonggaba*, *Changdrakirti Jila Changba*, etc. are worth mentioning.

Samsok Ngamba (Conquest of Samsok), a historical work was the creation of the joint authors, namely Laishram Aroi and Yumnam Atibar. In *Samsok Ngamba*, the authors described as to how king Garibniwaz planned to avenge the Burmese king for his ill treatment towards his former's sister, Chakpa Makhao Ngambi by accepting the proposal of the Burmese king for the hand of another Meitei princess Tamphasana. The Meitei king proposed the Burmese to receive the bride on the bank of Ningthee (Chindwin) river. The well planned Manipuri forces in the guise of women attendants of the bride suddenly attacked the Burmese and thus they were completely routed by the Manipuri forces. Further the forces invaded Samsok, a part of Eastern Burma and conquered it.

Though *Samsok Ngamba* was composed in the 18th century, the language used in this book was free from other words of Indo-Aryan languages. In this work, the writer gave a clear-cut description of the events included in the story and achievements of king Garibniwaz with the help of impressive and striking similes and imageries. The diction of *Samsok Ngamba* was closer to prose.

Takhel Ngamba (Conquest of Tripura), a historical account of the conquest of Tripuris by King Garibniwaz is a literary work of the 18th century created by Nunggangbam Govindaram. The book gave a detailed account of the invasion of Manipur by the combined forces of Tripura (Takhel) and Awa (Burma). This historical

account narrated the heroic deeds of Meitei king Garbniwaz with the help of his fearless and courageous Meitei warriors in defeating both the Burmese and the Tripuris.(MSS)

IN *Takhel Ngamba*, unlike *Samsok Ngamba*, the poet used a mixture of Bengali and Sanskrit words in addition to archaic Manipuri. As the book was the product of such a period when the Hindu Brahmanical religion was fully developed in the country, the reflection of the Hinduised Manipuri society like the performance of the Hindu religious rites, chanting of the rituals and obeisance to Hindu deities were clearly visible in *Takhel Ngamba*. Such practices were hardly found in *Samsok Ngamba*. Historically, both the books are of great significance.

A notable work of nineteenth century is *Chingthangkhomba Maharaj Ganga Chatpa* (Marahaja Chingthangkhomba's sojourn to Ganga), a combine effort of three writers – Nabachandra Wangkhei, Hari Charan Thounapaton and Wahengbam Madhavram, during the reign of king Labanayachandra (1798-1800A.D.). The three scholars took up the episodes relating to king Bhagyachandra's abdication of the throne of Manipur, his journey on pilgrimage to Nabadwip and his death at Murshidabad during the course of the journey. (Sanahal,1964). The three writers compiled the work with the help of their students, viz. Haricharan Khangenba, Biramani Louremba, Khagendra Yimnaba, and Khongchon Aheiba. (Khelchandra,2004).

In this book, the writers clearly described the glories of king Chingthangkhomba(Bhagyachandra or Jai Singh), his virtuousness, intelligence, generosity, devotion to Lord Krishna, etc. According to *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the journey of King Chingthangkhomba on pilgrimage to Nabdwip took place on Monday, 20th of Fairen, 1798. (Iboonghal and Khelchandra, 2012). The diction was archaic but the poet used a mixture of Indo-Aryan words. In this book, the writers clearly mentioned about the politico-administrative systems and religious practices prevalent in the same work.

Ouwa Ngamba a literary creation of the nineteenth century was a vivid description of events relating to the expulsion of the Burmese forces from the country by Gambhir Singh during the course of the Seven Years Devastation(1819-1826 A.D.) According to *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the book *Ouwa Ngamba* was written by Khumukcham Pandit, Changkham Chaobaton, Sarangthem Surpananda and Thoudam Chaobaton under the royal order of Maharaja Chandrakirti in 1971.(Iboonghal and Khelchandra,op.cit) The book clearly depicted the heroism of Gambhir Singh, his diplomatic skill, and relentless efforts to kick out the Burmese from the soil of Manipur. The book was of immense historical value. The book also referred to the raising of Manipur Levy consisting of 500 Manipuri soldiers well equipped with arm and ammunitions provided by British (Amubi,1970) thereby resulting in the final expulsion

of the Burmese beyond the borders of this country. Like other contemporary works, the text was not written in old archaic and the author also used Indo-Aryan words.

Another important text based on the historical events is *Chandrakirti Jila Changba* (an account of Chandrakirti's visit to Cachar). The book was written by four scribes- Yambem Angaton, Irungbam Pabung, Khundrakpam Nungnang, Khomdram Leishang Lalup commencing on Friday, 27th *Sajibu* 1876. under the instructions of two pundits, viz., Sarangthem Sarupananda and Thoudam Chaobaton assisted by Khundrakpam Jaga Singh and Yumlembam Pena Khongba Pakhanglakpa. They were engaged by Khumujamba Pandit, head of the *Pandit Loishang* under the royal order of King Chandrakirti. (Khelchandra, op.cit)

The event relating to King Chandrakirti's visit to *Fulertor* in Cachar (locally known as Jila) in August 1874 on the invitation of the then British Viceroy and Governor General of India, Lord Northbrooke were colourfully described in this text. King Chandrakirti along with his nobles, courtiers, attendants, and other officials left for Cachar in the month of *Thawan* 1874 and after a long march, the Meitei king and his party reached Lakhipur. There, the Meitei king Chandrakirti was received with solemnity. The poet described the reception as follows: "After halting the night at Lakhipur, two thousand mighty and valorous British troops with sparkling belts around their waists, equipments on their backs and bayonets blazing like lightning waited for the king. The Meitei king skirted on the right by his son Kulachandra, the Wangkheirakpa and on the left by another son Pheijaosana, the Samuhanjaba marched amidst the rows of soldiers like Soraren, god of Heaven walking among the celestial beings".(Chandrakirti Jila Changba:MSS)

In Cachar, king Chandrakirti had a conference with the Viceroy held on board the Viceroy's yacht and accordingly presents were exchanged between the two, followed by discussions and entertainments in a congenial atmosphere.(Chandrakirti Jila Changba,op.cit)

The poets used old Manipuri in addition to Indo-Aryan words like Sanskrit and Bengali in the vocabulary of the text. In this work the authors attempted to illustrate the greatness of king Chandrakirti, and his deep devotion to Shri Govindaji as a devoted Vaishnava ruler. The fact that the sapling of Vaishnavism planted in this country during the reign of King Charairongba became a fully-grown up tree in King Chandrakirti's time is revealed in *Chandrakirti Jila Changba*. The same account is still being sung in the form of ballad or *Khongjom Prava* in Manipur.

Conclusion: In the historical literary works of the 18th and 19th century, not only the historical but also the political cultural and religious aspects of Manipur during the same period are clearly reflected. Abundant historical information about the concerned rulers of each biography are provided by these literary sources. In Samsok Ngamba and

Takhel Ngamba, the military achievements of King Garibniwaz (1709-1748), his heroic deeds of conquering Samsok, a part of Burma and Takhel (Tripura) in a very critical hour of history are clearly reflected. The historical biographies like Ouwa Namba (Conquest of the Burmese) clearly sketched the heroism of Gambhir Singh, his diplomatic talents and his ceaseless efforts to kick out the Burmese from the soil of Manipur. The diplomatic skill of king Chandrakirti has also clearly been described in the historical work Chandrakirti Jila Changba. Besides, the reflections of a fully Hinduised Manipuri society of 18th and 19th centuries are clearly visible in the performance of other cultural and religious aspects as revealed in the books under study. In the historical works like Chingthangkomba Ganga Chatpa, the author, instead of sketching Chingthangkomba as a heroic and valorous king, he preferred to portray the king as a Rajarshi, a saintly King, a devoted ruler and complete devotee of Lord Krishna. Such aspects involving in the history of Manipuri societies during the 18th and 19th centuries are clearly reflected in the style, theme, stories, etc of the above mentioned literary works.

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