

CHAPTER - 4

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Vaishnavism is one of the dominant forms of Hinduism in India. It generally centers round the worship of Lord Vishnu. In Vaishnava religion, Lord Vishnu is regarded as the Supreme God and preserver of the Hindu Gods Trinity so called Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar and his ten incarnations along with Rama and Lord Krishna. In Hindu Gods trinity, Brahma is regarded as creator, Vishnu is preserver and Maheswar as destroyer of the universe.¹ So, they are the highest gods of Hindu religion representing the triple functions. It is referred in Puranic texts about the belief of the followers of Vaishnava religion in the supremacy of Lord Vishnu which stands for many incarnations (*avatars*) which are not similar to the deities of Hindu religion. Thus, Vaishnavism is the largest Hindu denomination which has numerous forms.² According to the traditions of Hinduism, Lord Vishnu is worshipped along with his two associated *avatars*, namely Rama and Krishna who are the supreme objects of devotion which leads to the development of various sects as well.³ The Hindu people believe that all gods are *avatars* (incarnations) or manifestations of Brahma, the Supreme Being. But their beliefs and practices indicate that the concept of Bhakti and Bhakti Yoga are primarily based on the Upanishads, and are also associated with the Vedas and Puranic texts, such as the Bhagavad Gita, Vishnu Purana, Padma Purana, Bhagavata Purana, etc.⁴ According to the Indian mythology, Shri Krishna is incarnated in each *Yug* (every 1000 years) and played different roles that charmed even the devils as well as the living beings of the universe.⁵

In India, the growth and development of Vaishnavism can be traced back rightly to the Vedic period. The Aryans in Vedic period were the worshippers of nature gods, such as Shiva, Indra, Varuna, Surya, etc. Their system of worship was mainly the sacrifice of life to these gods. This ritual was done especially by the priests, alleged Brahmans and therefore the religion of the Aryans now begins to be called Brahmanism. Brahmanism is an aged-old religious tradition of India which helps us in understanding the Indian philosophy and religion. With the passage of time, there occurred intermix of ideals between Brahmans and the native people of the Indus valley. This however, led to the formation of a new set of beliefs and practices and accordingly, the religion came to be popularly called as Hinduism in India. In Hindu religion, the people generally believed in numerous gods and goddess but Brahma remained as their chief god. The other gods and goddess are considered to be the different faces of Brahma god.⁶ Next to Brahma god, there are two important gods, namely Vishnu and Maheswar that occupied a façade place in Hinduism. Later on, Vishnu became prime Vedic god who gained its popularity amongst the Hindus.⁷ The Vaishnava religion is actually known by the name of one God that is, Lord Vishnu only who is considered as a source of avatars. However, the Narayana cult is also absorbed into the fold of Vaishnava religion and after that, its connection to the Vedic tradition had been strengthened. In the form of Tantric Vaishnavism so called Pancharatras, Narayana is considered as its founder. Tantric Vaishnavism is the earliest form of Vaishnava sects along with Bhagavatas which is the name especially given to the followers of Vasudeva and Lord Krishna. The adherents of this sect worshipped Narayana believing in the notion of *Vyuhās*, a doctrine equivalent to that of the avatars.⁸

It is said that in every age, Lord Vishnu made many incarnations with a view to protect the pious and to destroy the sinners as well as to establish righteousness on earth.⁹ However, his incarnation in some Puranas appears to be varied in number. But according to the belief of the people in India, there are ten most prominent incarnations of Lord Vishnu. These are given below.¹⁰

1. Matsya or the Fish incarnation
2. Kurma or the Tortoise
3. Varaha or the Boar
4. Nara-simha or the man-lion
5. Vamana or the Dwarf
6. Parasu-rama or Rama with the axe
7. Rama, the son of Dasaratha
8. Krishna
9. Budha
10. Kalki or Kalkin

As regards the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu, it is widely observed that the god Vishnu in conformity with his character of a universal “Pervader” discharges his functions into the first three descents by pervading the bodies of animals. The first three incarnations (Matsya, Kurma and Varaha) however, contain a reference to the tradition of a general inundation. Vishnu in his fourth descent takes the form of a half-man and half-animal. Perhaps, this combination may be intended as a kind of intermediate link to connect the deity with higher forms. From half a man, the transition is to a complete man, but the divine essence on passing into human forms commences with a dwarf-the smallest type of humanity. Then, it advances to mighty heroes, sent into the world to deliver mankind from the oppression of tyrants-

represented as evil demons, whose power increases with increase of corruption and depravity during the four ages. The eighth is the highest and so to speak culminating incarnation, for Krishna is delivered to be not a part of Vishnu's essence, but a complete manifestation of Vishnu himself. The ninth may be passed over as a mere device on the part of the Brahmins to account for the existence of Buddhism. The tenth and final incarnation, which seems to be revealed, will surpass all the others in importance. Its evil and wickedness are to be entirely rooted out, and the age of purity resorted. In this connected series of what to us appear exceedingly of the Hindu idea of metempsychosis. Just as the souls of men, regarded as emanations from the deity pass into stones, plants and animals or rise to the bodies of higher beings, so portions of the essence of Vishnu pass through regular stages of embodied existence of the maintenance of the order of the universe.¹¹

The distinctive feature of the Vaishnava cult was the rise of Bhakti as being the heart of worship, an emotional service of love and devotion to the God.¹² The influence of Vaishnavism was gradually developed in southern India under the guidance of Vaishnava saints popularly known as Alvars.¹³ The Alvars devoted to the Vaishnava religion and composed numerous devotional songs in Tamil language mostly in the praise of either Lord Vishnu or his incarnations.¹⁴ In this way, Vaishnavism was flourished in Southern India due to the measures of twelve Alvars saints who gave the messages of Vaishnavism to the native people through their devotional hymns. The temples where the Alvar saints made visits are known as *Divya Desams* at present and their hymns are collectively known as *Divya Prabandhas*. This task was done by the saints, namely Nathamuni, Ramanuja and Yamunacharya. It is stated that from the South, the flame of Bhakti movement reached to the north.¹⁵ After that, from the 14th to 16th century CE Vaishnavism spread

in North India through Vaishnava movements under venerated luminaries, like Nimbarka, Ramananda, Kabir, Nanak Vallabha, and Chaitanya. Another important feature of Vaishnavism is found in the Pancharatra religion, the form of Tantric Vaishnavism mentioned in the Mahabharata epic. However, the main teachings of Vaishnavism are found in the Vedas, Upanishads, Agamas, Epics and the Puranic text.¹⁶ All these texts usually provide materials in supporting the tenets of Vaishnavism. Therefore, due to the influence of Bhakti movement, the practices of Vaishnava gradually increased in popularity in India.

In Manipur, the emergence of Vaishnava religion took place in the 15th century CE during the reign of king Kyamba (1467-1508 CE). Before the advent of Vaishnavism in the valley of Manipur, the Meiteis were the followers of their own traditional religion. They have their distinct language, script and culture, etc. As per the religion of Manipur is concerned, it can be divided into two parts- pre-Vaishnavite and Vaishnavite. In the pre-Vaishnavite period, the Meiteis followed their traditional religion throughout many centuries. In their traditional religion, they worshiped their own indigenous gods and goddesses.¹⁷ Their system of worship was mainly ancestor worship and the cult of *Sanamahi* and *Pakhangba*.¹⁸ But, in the Vaishnavite period, the Meiteis worshipped Hindu God Vishnu in the form of Rama and Krishna which influenced the concept of origin and polity of the Manipuri society. Thus, after the dawn of Vaishnavism, a new form of religion was gradually developed in Manipur.

In Manipur, the concept of Vaishnavism came when there was an influx of various groups of people especially the Brahmins came from different parts of India in successive waves during the reign of king Kyamba.¹⁹ The accounts of the advent of a number of Brahmins are found in a book called *Bamon Khunthoklon* (migration of the Brahmins). They were given shelter and patronage by the king. In the course of

time, they were matrimonially and linguistically absorbed into the Meitei society.²⁰ Accordingly, new family names were given to them. Many Brahmin priests were employed by the king for assorted works in religious affairs, especially in the performance of rites and rituals. Along with this they also took a major role in the process for spread of the ideas of Hinduism in Manipur. Gradually, they began to build images of Hindu deities and also made efforts to the king and the people about the importance of the rites and philosophy of Vaishnavism. In fact, the migration of Brahmins in Manipur is considered as a root of the growth and development of Vaishnavism particularly from the period of 15th century CE.²¹ Moreover, they also started to manipulate the influences of Sanskrit on the Manipuri's way of life. The visiting Brahmins used to get acquaintance with the king or the queen or other members of the royal family.²²

The immigration of Brahmins during the reign of Kyamba may be regarded as a great landmark in the history of development of Vaishnavism in Manipur. Their appearance and settlement in Manipur was continued upto the close of the 19th century CE.²³ Another notable aspect of king Kyamba was the beginning of Vishnu worship in Manipur. It is recorded in the royal chronicle that Kyamba (erstwhile called as Thangwan Ningthouba), king of Manipur, and Chaopha Khekhomba, king of Pong conquered Kyang Kyambat (a Shan kingdom in Kabaw Valley) with their joint forces.²⁴ The combined forces defeated Kyang and then a grand celebration was organized. The royal chronicle of Manipur also shows the distinctive picture of their celebration of victory. Further, it is mentioned that after this victory, Thangwan Ningthouba assumed the title Kyamba (conqueror of kyang).²⁵ As a part of their celebration, they swap presents, and king Kyamba received a little stone image of Vishnu from the Pong king as a present.²⁶ After receiving the gift, king Kyamba

consulted with Brahmins who identified it to be the image of Vishnu. It is stated that king Kyamba built a temple at Bishnupur and the image of Vishnu was installed in this temple which is popularly known as Vishnu temple.²⁷ However, on the basis of the evidence of royal chronicle, Cheitharol Kumbaba, R.K. Sanahal points out that a temple was constructed by Ngangom Chingsomba, known as *Ngangom Phura* (*Ngangom* temple) and he dedicated this temple to God during the reign of king Kyamba. After that, the image of Vishnu was installed in this temple. The lineage of the Brahmins who looked after the temple came to be known as “*Phurailatpam*” worshipper of the God of the temple. The view of P. Gunindro also appears to be the same with R.K. Sanahal. Thus, the Vishnu worship was introduced in Manipur.²⁸ The Brahmins were well acquainted about the rites and rituals of the worship of Vishnu. Therefore, they were requisitioned for the service of Vishnu worship. In this way, the regular worship of Vishnu was begun in Manipur but king Kyamba was not formally initiated into Vaishnavism.²⁹ However, R.K. Jhalajit Singh quoted that from 1470 CE, Manipur was on the way to become the easternmost citadel of Vaishnavism. It was because of a great Vaishnavite movement that swept all over India in the 15th to 17th centuries CE. During these periods, the saints like Ramananda, Vallabhacharya, Chaitanya and others preached Vaishnavism in different parts of India. In Assam too, the Neo-Vaishnavite movement started under the initiative of Srimanta Sankardev in the beginning of 16th century CE. This religion gives devotion to oneness of God, Lord Vishnu or Krishna. However, this system of worship neither included the Radha-Krishna cult nor represented the idol and dual form of worship which was very common in the system of worship in Manipur.

Manipur although, not influenced by the Neo-Vaishnava religion it did not escape from the impact of Vaishnavite movement as a part of India naturally.³⁰ It may

be mentioned that during the reign of king Kyamba, the worship of Vishnu was started in Manipur. The practice of worshipping Vishnu during his reign however, marked as a growth of Hinduism in the valley of Manipur in the 15th century CE. The successive rulers of Kyamba continued this Vishnu worship as royal deity.³¹ Regarding this view, Gangumei Kabui opines that “since the 15th century CE, Vishnu worship was patronized by the king of Manipur”. Therefore the Vaishnava rites and rituals became popular in Manipur from the 15th century CE. L. Ibungohal Singh states that it is historically recognized that modern form of Vaishnavism was professed by king Kyamba and his subjects in about 1467 CE.³² But it is important to note that initially the influence of Vaishnava philosophy was very limited and confined to a section of the royal family.³³ R.K. Jhalajit Singh observes that, the arrival of Brahmins enriched the cultural life of the kingdom. Their arrival and permanent settlement continued upto the close of the 19th century CE.³⁴ During the reign of king Khagemba, Vishnu was also worshiped. In the religious history of Manipur, the worship of Vishnu was continued in various stages. Although the worship of Vishnu was initiated yet the kings of Manipur were not formally converted into Vaishnavism till the reign of Charairongba (1697-1709 CE).³⁵

There are three distinct stages for the development of different schools of Vaishnavism in Manipur. These schools are namely Nimandi, Ramanandi and Goudiya Vaishnavism appeared in different periods each displacing its predecessor in the favour of the ruling monarchs.³⁶ Vaishnava cult of Hinduism flourished during the period extending from the latter half of the 15th century CE to 19th century CE.³⁷ The rise of Vaishnavism which was continued to flourish during the reign of king Kyamba, but it became a state religion during the reign of king Garibniwaz. In the

18th and 19th century CE, the complete picture of Hinduism was developed in Manipur under the patronage of ruling monarchs.

In the religious history of Manipur, Charairongba (1697-1709 CE) was the first king who formally initiated into Nimandi cult of Vaishnavism under the guidance of guru Krishnacharya from Sweta Ganga near Puri, Orissa.³⁸ After his conversion into Vaishnavism, the cultural contact between the Meities and the people of the different parts of India took place.³⁹ The school of Vaishnavism of which the king baptized was the worship of Lord Krishna as the supreme deity along with Radha established by Nimbarka and the name of this cult was called Nimandi or Nimbarka School.⁴⁰ Nimbarka made progress on this school in the 12th century CE and he was also the follower of Ramanuja whose depiction to qualified monism brought Vaishnavism to limelight.⁴¹ According to R.G. Bhandarkar, Nimbarka kept closer than did Ramanuja to the basic doctrines of Bhakti as characterized by love rather than meditation and by his emphasis upon self-surrender by which love for God is generated. His view seems to be different from the earlier saint, Nimbarka dignified Krishna and Radha as the deities to whom alone worship is to be given.⁴² It is stated that Nimandi cult was successfully flourished in northern India.

King Charairongba was totally influenced by the ideals and philosophy of Nimbarka School. In Nimbarka's philosophy, the worship of Radha and Krishna, the two important Hindu deities became very popular because of the impact of the basic doctrines of Bhakti. His concept of Bhakti in connection with the worship of Radha and Krishna greatly helped in the growth and development of Vaishnavism.⁴³ With the spread of the Vaishnavite doctrines of Hinduism in Manipur, its influence was further increased during the period of the said king.

Charairongba was the first king of Manipur who was not only initiated into Vaishnavism but he was also given a Sanskrit name, Pitamber Singh, heralding the first significant evident of sanskritisation.⁴⁴ According to Saroj Nalini Paratt, “with the accession of Charairongba we pass to the period in which Hinduism in one or other of its forms became the dominant religion of Manipur largely through the support and patronage of the reigning monarchs.” K.B. Singh also supports the view of S.N.Paratt and states that “there is not very clear evidence of the influence Hinduism, before the time of Charairongba.”⁴⁵ During the reign of Charairongba, there was a little attempt to impose Hinduism upon the people as a whole. However, the king formally took the sacred thread but he did not attempt to establish Hinduism as a state religion.⁴⁶ Saroj Nalini Paratt observes that “there is no explicit reference to Hinduism in the years immediately before 1704 CE.”⁴⁷ Although, Charairongba was a distinguished Hindu king of Manipur yet he was definitely not a religious fanatic by any stretch of imagination and he did not pursue even any such policy or measure which might dent on the Sanamahi or any other religions followed by his subjects. For that matter, there are yet other indigenous gods and goddesses that are concurrently in vogue along with Sanamahi. However, the Brahmins of that period tried to suppress not only the ancient religion but also everything related to the past culture and traditions of Manipur.⁴⁸ Therefore, the reign of Charairongba is the narrow ridge of an important historical watershed.⁴⁹ King Charairongba and his family were initiated into Nimandi cult of Vaishnavism, but little progress was made among the common people. The regular flow of Brahmin immigrants to Manipur developed during his reign.⁵⁰ He issued land grants to his Brahmin guru for their settlement and extended his patronage to Vaishnava sect of Hinduism which is further flourished.⁵¹ Therefore,

the period of king Charairongba represents a turning point in the religious history of Manipur.

The school of Vaishnavism of which the king Charairongba belonged had laid the emphasis on the worship of Shri Krishna as the supreme deity. In order to popularize the cult of Shri Krishna, he even constructed a temple of Shri Krishna at Brahmapur Guru Aribam Leikai in Imphal. The daily worship of Krishna was associated with the singing of devotional song, a form of *kirtan* introduced during his reign.⁵² The image of the temple worshipped by the guru of the king is still adored by his descendants who are known as Guru Aribam Brahmins. This temple is still in existence having excellent state of preservation and a secret place of worship for the Vaishnavite Meiteis.⁵³ The numismatic evidence also supports the popularity of Krishna cult during the reign of king Charairongba. The bell-metal coin issued by the king Charairongba containing two lines on the obverse in Nagari script referring to “*Shri*” and “*Krishna*”.⁵⁴

According to Gangumei Kabui, the reign of Charairongba is a turning point in the history of Manipur.⁵⁵ During the period of king Charairongba, not only the Vaishnava form of Hinduism was prevalent, but also the cult of Mother-Goddess became popular during his reign. In fact, some Brahmins of his time were not only the devotees of the Vaishnava faith but also advocated in the worship of Kali, the female deity.⁵⁶ Therefore, the royal chronicle records refer to the construction of many temples including Kali during his reign, which has been marked as the adoption of this new faith of Vaishnavism in Manipur.⁵⁷ Besides this, the worship of Panthoibi, the greatest goddess in the Meitei pantheon was continued along with the Hindu deities, like Vishnu, Durga and Kali. He was not a fanatic inspite of being a devout Hindu. He even continued to look after the gods and goddesses of traditional

religion.⁵⁸ The liberal king Charairongba, alias Pitamber Singh used to allow unhindered and enormously free worship of all the ancient traditional deities and unimpeded practice of all the associated religious rituals and precepts.⁵⁹

After the reign of king Charairongba, Vaishnavism was highly developed in the reign of his son king Pamheiba alias Garibniwaz (1709-1748 CE). His reign was also marked as the appearance of a new school of Vaishnavism in Manipur so called the Ramanandi School.⁶⁰ It was during this period that the full-fledged effort of Hinduism started in Manipur.⁶¹ According to royal chronicle, Cheitharol Kumbaba, Garibniwaz was initiated into Vaishnavism by Guru Gopal Das in 1717 CE. It is said that in Manipur, there were thirty-nine *Vairagis* arrived during the reign of king Gariniwaz. It is believed that Gopal Das might be one of the members of the *Vairagis*.⁶² However, the royal chronicle mentioned his departure of Manipur in the year 1720 CE. Thereafter, a new religious preacher by the name of Shanti Das Gosai of Sylhet arrived at Manipur along with his two followers, Bhagavan Das and Narayan Das.⁶³ With the arrival of Shanti Das during his period, another school of Vaishnavism called the Ramanandi School was emerged in Manipur.⁶⁴ In Ramanandi School, Lord Ram was worshipped along with Sita. It is to be noted here that Ramananda was a great exponent of Vaishnavism, conceived the worship of Ram and Sita, pertaining to the 14th century CE. Those who accepted this form of Vaishnavism usually became the followers of his School. Ramananda was also the follower of Ramanuja.⁶⁵ The influence of Ramanandi School in Manipur was increased under the initiative of Shanti Das Gosai. He also became the guru of king Garibniwaz and then forced the latter to accept and spread the messages of Ramanandi cult to the people of Manipur. As a result, the Ramanandi School was strengthened and thereby replaced

that of Nimbarka School. Hence, the king Garibniwaz proclaimed Ramanandi cult as the state religion and strong measures were taken to impose it upon the masses.⁶⁶

Regarding the religious policy of king Garibniwaz, T.C. Hodson is of the opinion that “To the royal will of Pamheiba, the monarch in whose reign the fortunes of the state reached their zenith, Hinduism owes its present position as the official religion of the state.”⁶⁷ It is to be noted that Ramanandi cult gradually subjugated the traditional religion under the royal patronage and many strict measures were taken against those who violated the Hindu dietary laws. Shanti Das carried a systematic suppression of primitive religion of the Meiteis.⁶⁸ According to his assistance, king Garibniwaz ordered to collect all the *puyas* (the ancient text written in old Manipuri language) and piled up like a small hillock in front of *Kangla Uttara* and were burnt to ashes. This burning of *puyas* dealing with a miscellany of subjects was the most important event during the reign of Garibniwaz. Thus, the unfortunate event came to be known as *Puya Meithaba* (burning of Ancient text) in the history of Manipur. N. Khelchandra would specify to the extent of saying that the burning of ancient books in the first half of the 18th century CE has been an unfortunate heart rending event in the history of Manipuri literature.⁶⁹ Since then, Manipur has been deprived of many valuable antique religious and historical books through Garibniwaz’s fanaticism. Atombapu Sharma, a renowned Manipuri scholar cites in his book *Pakhangba* that Guru Shanti Das burnt all the religious books of the Meiteis to root out the Meitei religion. Then he said that just like the burning of the books, the Meiteis had to cremate the dead. In fact, the attempt could be interpreted as a design to destroy all evidences of the ancient civilization of Manipur.⁷⁰ Therefore, it will not be an exaggeration to say that king Garibniwaz was a destroyer than a protector of old faith and a guardian of new faith.⁷¹ In view of the rapid progress of Vaishnavism, the

scholars of traditional faith, Lourembam Khongnangthaba and his followers tried to discontinue the wave of Vaishnavism, but their accounts ends with a tragic conclusion.⁷²

Another significant task of Hindu missionaries and king was to boost up the popularity of Hinduism in Manipur. So, in order to materialize his desire, king Garibniwaz made a series of effort to impose the idea of new religion upon the people and punishment was given to those individuals and groups who refused to accept it. Apart from this, an attempt was also made to destroy all the important deities and sites of traditional religion as well as to replace it by Hindu names.⁷³ Besides this, the king on the advice of his preceptor destroyed the images of *Umanglais* (sylvan deities) and other important deities, like *Lainingthou*, *Panthoibi*, *Laiwahaiba*, *Soraren*, *Hoidonpokpi*, etc. This incident was generally known as “*Sanamahi Kolu Yeikhaiba*” (destruction of the images of *Sanamahi*). All the images were buried at *Mongbahanba Umang* (*Mongbahanba* forest) and then a new stone image of Hanuman was installed at this place but the image was made from the huge slab of stone which was erected at market place. Accordingly the name of the place was changed from *Mongbahanba* to *Mahabali*.⁷⁴ The temple was inaugurated in 1729 CE and the style of the temple is similar with the Bengal hut type. This temple is in a good shape and still draws a huge crowd of devotees during religious festivals.⁷⁵

As regards the religious policy of king Garibniwaz, T.C. Hodson further quotes, “At first the decree of the king received but little obedience and the opposition to the change centered on the several members of the royal family who were supported not unnaturally by the Maibas, the priest of the older religion. Religious descent was treated with the same ruthless severity as was meted out to political opponents and wholesale banishment was execution drove the people into acceptance

of the tenets of Hinduism.”⁷⁶ R.K. Jhalajit Singh also agrees with Hodson and states that Vaishnavism encountered strong opposition from the adherents of the old religion.⁷⁷ The arrival of Shanti Das was noteworthy in the history of Manipur as the socio-cultural and religious life of the Meiteis was totally changed due to his religious activities. The Vaishnavism in its travel from Bengal to Manipur borrowed many local elements, and was associated itself with pre-Vaishnavite gods but it was the policy of the kings of Manipur to unite the conflicting interests of ancient religion and Vaishnavism. Although there was a mutual compromise yet the primitive gods were amalgamated with Hindu gods.⁷⁸ For instances, the royal deity Pakhangba became Vishnu, *Nongpokningthou* became Shiva, *Panthoibi* to Parvati or Durga, *Imoinu* to Laxmi, etc.⁷⁹ It may also be added that a number of traditional festivals were identified with Hindu festivals.⁸⁰

The period of Garibniwaz was a very creative epoch in Manipur’s history. Manipur had attained the zenith of her glory in every aspects of life of the country. Prof. Gangumei Kabui stated that “Yet no king in Manipur’s history was so controversial than Garibniwaz, perhaps due to the highly embittered religious controversies of his times in which he was personally involved and resultant persistent efforts of his religious detractor to malign him.”⁸¹ His reign was mostly remarkable because of his new religious policy which brought about a complete change in the social life of Meiteis. In this way, he made a successful plan to materialize the new religion in Manipur.⁸² According to royal chronicle, Cheitharol kumbaba, as a part of new religious tradition, king Garibniwaz and his relatives followed to wear a sacred thread on their body. It is recorded that on the full moon day of *Wakching* (December/January), Shanti Das and king Garibniwaz took bath at confluence of Imphal and Iril River at Lilong. Thereafter, the king put sacred religious thread on his

body. This was a very remarkable event partly for a beginning of Vaishnavism in Manipur.⁸³ After that, the transformation of socio-religious system began to take place. For this reason, Shanti Das always tried to maintain a cordial relationship with the members of royal family.

The emergence of caste system in Manipuri society occurred due to the impact of Vaishnavism. Earlier, the Manipuri society was a casteless society but after the adoption of Vaishnavism, it took a new shape wherein the division of social groups cropped up. As a result, the royal group was declared as *Khatriyas*. Very interestingly, the Brahmins also formed a separate group having occupied a high position in the Manipuri society.⁸⁴ King Garibniwaz along with his people of seven clans strictly followed the caste rules of the Hindus who are taken as a legacy of the Brahmins who were dominating the social and religious prospect of Manipur at that time.⁸⁵ According to Gangumei Kabui, another feature of Garibniwaz's sanskritisation process was the emergence of a princely group known as the Rajkumars who were the children of the wives and concubines of the king.⁸⁶ With the strong assistance of Vaishnavism, the Manipuri wives started performing the self immolation at the death of their husbands. The chronicle refers to many *Sati* burnings voluntarily performed by the wives of princes, Brahmins and court nobles. The first recorded case of sati burning was in 1726 CE. In the Manipuri society, the wives of upper class followed the custom of *sati* as the new religion had inculcated a strong sense of Hindu womanhood.⁸⁷ This suggests that Manipuri society was gradually adapted to Hindu culture. In fact, Vaishnavism brought a great change in every aspects of social, political and religious life of the people. T.C. Hodson also pointed out that the traditional social customs of the Meiteis was subjugated by the Hindu practices.⁸⁸ Another memorable achievement of king Garibniwaz was the adaptation of the entire

Ramayana in Manipuri language. As a devotee of Ram, he built a temple known as Ramji Prabhu at Wangkhei near the bank of a great pond name *Ningthem Pukhri*.⁸⁹ The popularity of Ramanandi cult in Manipur and the worship of Rama as a main deity during the reign of king Garibniwaz can also be proved by the numismatic evidences. In some of the coins issued by him bearing the words “*Jaya Rama*” and “*Rama*”. Thus, the complete form of Ramanandi cult was seen during the reign of Garibniwaz.

With the growth and development of Hinduism, Manipur had developed cultural contact with the other Hindu states. Many members of the royal family began to visit the holy places or shrines of Hinduism. Vaishnavism was popularized in the land of Manipur under the royal patronage of king Garibniwaz. His initiation into Ramanandi cult greatly broadened the horizon of the spiritual perspective of the common Manipuri people.⁹⁰ Thus, after the conversion into fold of Hinduism, the old kingdom of the Meiteis was renamed as Manipur and the king of Manipur was known as *Manipureswar*. After that, the kingdom was also identified as the Manipur of the Mahabharata, ruled by Babrubahana, son of Arjuna by his Manipuri wife princes Chitrangada.⁹¹ Therefore, the reign of Garibniwaz marked a drastic socio-political transformation in the history of Manipur.

After the king Garibniwaz, another school of Vaishnavism was developed in Manipur known as Goudiya Vaishnavism or Bengal school of Vaishnavism. This religious concept and practice was initiated during the reign of Chingthangkomba alias Bheigyachandra. His period ushered in a new era in the history of the development of Goudiya Vaishnavism in Manipur and it replaced the earlier school of Ramanandi. Due to his deep religious devotion to Vaishnavism, he came to be known as Bheigyachandra (Royal Saint).⁹² Several Vaishnava missionaries were associated

with the school of Chaitanya as well as the followers of Madhavacharya sect of Vaishnavism who visited Manipur. In due course of time, the king became familiar with the concept of worship of Lord Krishna based on bhakti cult.⁹³ In or about 1777 CE, the king and his subjects began to worship Radha and Krishna under the influence of Chaitanya School.⁹⁴ During the period of king Bheigyachandra, the religious concept and practices of Goudiya Vaishnavism was propagated by five religious monks. In Goudiya Vaishnavism, Lord Krishna is regarded as a supreme deity. However, the king Bheigyachandra and his subjects were initiated into Goudiya Vaishnavism under the guidance of Shri Rup Parmananda Thakur.⁹⁵ This process of conversion brought about changes in the socio-cultural and religious life of Manipuri people.⁹⁶ The most remarkable event during the reign of Bheigyachandra was the installation of the image of Govindaji in 1776 CE as well as the taming of the mad elephant in Assam.⁹⁷ This is the most important event of the establishment and consolidation of Goudiya Vaishnavism in Manipur. Thereafter, the growth and development of Goudiya Vaishnavism in Manipur took place extensively.

Bheigyachandra was the 54th king of Manipur. He ruled Manipur twice, firstly from 1759 to 1762 CE and second from 1763 to 1798 CE. The royal chronicle of Manipur recorded that he ascended the throne in 1759 CE.⁹⁸ There occurred many internal discrepancies when Bheigyachandra was coronated as the king of Manipur. The maternal uncle of Bheigyachandra, Khellei Nongang Telheiba (king of Moirang), revolted against him with the support of Burmese and defeated him. King Bheigyachandra was exile in Cachar and then took refuge in the kingdom of Tekhao. King Rajyeswar Singh of Tekhao cordially received the king of Manipur.⁹⁹ When he was in Tekhao, a great momentous event took place which fetches a massive change in the artistic and cultural field of Manipur. At that time, the maternal uncle of king

Bheigyachandra, Khelhei Nongnang Telheiba (Khelemba) was the king of Manipur. After that, he sent a letter to the Tekhao king mentioning that ‘the person, who took sheltering in your kingdom disguised as the king of Manipur was a rebel leader, plotting against the true king. The rebel leader should not be spared and thus he must be killed immediately. However, the letter created doubt in the mind of the Tekhao king. Then, the king of Tekhao consulted with the members of his royal courts and took the decision to test the king of Manipur. According to their decision the king of Manipur should tame with wild elephant in public place.¹⁰⁰

According to the order of the Tekhao king, Bheigyachandra agreed to tame the wild elephant. Being helpless, he set aside Shri Govinda in his mind and prayed him whole night. Thereafter, Shri Govinda appeared to him and addressed his devotee king Bheigyachandra, don’t be sad and desperate. I will make sure that the elephant does not harm you. The elephant will lift you on its back, and my devotee’s name and glory will be shown. After that, you will regain your kingdom. Bheigyachandra fell to his lord and pleaded to him: O Lord! Please be the king of Manipur. I being, your servant will spend the rest of my life in your service. On devotee’s words, Shri Govinda told Bheigyachandra, just look at my appearance, when you got back the throne in your kingdom, you will find me in the form of a jackfruit tree at the *Kaina* hill.¹⁰¹ Then, you have to make an idol of me out of the jackfruit tree and performed a Ras dance which was dedicated to me. Then, Shri Govinda showed the form of Ras dance in Bheigyachandra’s dream.¹⁰² This story makes us to believe that king Bheigyachandra was totally dedicated to God, and owing to his self confidence, he was able to proof his potential superiority of a king.

Due to the order of the king of Tekhao, the preparation was ready. Citizens and officials sat on the scaffolds, ready to witness the landscape of the king of

Manipur how to tame the wild elephant. King Bheigyachandra got equipped that he put *chandan* and wear “*Khamen Chatpa pheijom*” and “*Lamthang Khuthat*”, “*Ningam-Samjin*” and fully decorated with gold ornaments. After performing a puja, he reached the spot. Thus, after receiving the orders of the Tekhao king, Bheigyachandra appeared at the ground where the elephant was kept. Being deeply reciting the name of Shri Govinda in his mind he approached the elephant. On seeing the approach of a human being, the wild elephant changed its behaviour. The elephant kneeled down on his legs and keeping the king on its back, it traipses on a pageant in front of the assembled citizens. Then the crowd shouted that the king of Manipur became the victory.¹⁰³ When king Bheigyachandra descended from the elephant, the king of Tekhao received him reverently. The king of Tekhao, along with his ministers and officials paid respects to king Bheigyachandra and proclaimed him as the devout king of Manipur who was also then bestowed with the title, Jay Singh.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, due to his self experience, king Bheigyachandra became a staunch devotee of Lord Krishna.

Thereafter, with the help of Tekhao king Rajyeswar Singh, king Bheigyachandra defeated Awa in 1767 CE and regained his kingdom. The king built a palace in Sangaitel, and started ruling the land. In 1768 CE, in the month of *Sajibu* (April), the king shifted his palace to Sangaiprou.¹⁰⁵ In appreciation for the help extended to him at the time of war, king Bheigyachandra potted relationship with the king of Tekhao by giving the daughter Shija Phongdalokpi (Kuranganayani) of his elder brother Gourshyam in marriage to him.¹⁰⁶ It is recorded in the Cheitharol Kumbaba that this matrimonial alliance marked the beginning of a period of close relationship between Manipur and Assam. Kurangnayani has occupied an important

place in the history of Assam.¹⁰⁷ Due to her wits and courage, she saves the throne of Tekhao from the hands of its enemies.

However, Bheigyachandra became the king of Manipur for some time. Two years after his return to Manipur in 1769 CE, the Burmese again invaded Manipur. Bheigyachandra once again went on exile in Tekhao. But, he tried to liberate his kingdom from the hands of Burmese rule. During this period, the hill tribes of Manipur helped him a lot. Then, he was capable to gather an army comprising of hill tribes and invaded the land of the Meiteis.¹⁰⁸ He was successful in his assignment and in 1775 CE, on Saturday, the 19th day of *Phairen* (January/February), Bheigyachandra established his palace at Lammangdong and started to ruling his kingdom. The reason behind his decision to rule in Lammangdong was that he would be in a better position to see approaching enemy forces from vantage point on the top of the Lammangdong hill.¹⁰⁹ This landmark still existed near C.I. College that witnesses the palace of Bheigyachandra. Due to his strength and bravery, he rescued his kingdom from the hands of his enemies. After that, the political situation in this land was gradually become stabilized. Then, he paid his attention towards the developmental activity for the land.¹¹⁰

After regaining his kingdom, he started to rule in Manipur. Due to his heavy administrative duties, Bheigyachandra forgot his promise offered to Shri Govindaji while he was in Assam. There is of course, a disgraceful story about the remembrance of his promise. One day, a servant came before the king Bheigyachandra and told that a tribal widow had downcast a Kshatriya boy. On the king's order the tribal widow was brought to his palace and asked her to tell about the story. With due prayers, the widow told the story that her eight year old son goes daily to graze the cowherd. Whenever she is going to give the lunch to her cowherd son, one little boy always call

her and ask her to give his lunch as he was very hungry. So, being a mother, she forgot everything and felt love for him. His deeds enamored her well.¹¹¹ This story makes us to believe that how Lord Krishna tried to denote his identity.

In the next day when she fell ill, her son came and told her that he would like to go for herding the cattle. Then, she told that being ill she might not be able to bring his lunch. The son suddenly replied that he does not want the lunch pack as another friend always comes in the grazing field and they together herd the cattle. He brings food for both of them and those are very delicious items, like butter cheese, *laddo*, *peda* and *ksheer*. Then, her mother asked about his friends' location and the son replied that his friend never agrees to accompany him upto his place. When they returned together and reached the spot where a big jackfruit tree grows, he stops and disappears after a few seconds. On that day her son brought some *ksheer* in his return and gave it to his sick mother, telling her that his cowherd friend had told him that if she had eaten the *ksheer* her sickness would have gone like a miracle.¹¹²

As usual, in the next day the women brought the lunch for her son but forgot to bring the share of the other boy. On her way she met the little boy and asked her to give his share because he was very hungry, she gave him the lunch packet and hurried towards the place where her son was herding the cattle. To her astonishment, she found the boy with her son sharing the lunch. Smelling the fragrance, he ran away. After narrating the story the widow wept bitterly. The king felt the smell of Shri Govinda's bodily fragrance (*Angagandha*), and the events of which occurred erstwhile in concerning with the devotion and care of Shri Govinda suddenly came to his mind. Then the king with a keen interest, insisted the widow to tell about the boy's appearance. The widow also began to describe about the boy – the colour of the green lotus by complexion, a flute on his hand, peacock feathered crown on the hand.

He wears golden attire and the feet were adorned fully with *Nupur* (anklet). On hearing all those words the king demanded to spell out the name of the boy and eager to hear the name, the king chanted the name of Shri Govinda. In order to quiet down the impatience of the king she was ready to tell the name and started – “Oh! Maharaj! If I tell his name, I’ll never be able to see him again. But, your majesty’s excitement and sorrows compelled me to tell his name. Then, she notifies that, he is called by his mother Jashoda as ‘Kanu’, Nilamani of Braja, “Shri Govinda” as well as “Gopal of Braja” by the Gopis. On hearing the names of his lord, the king fainted in the middle of the court. After a short while, he became conscious and remembered his promise to Shri Govindaji which he failed to keep.

On the night of the same day, Shri Krishna gave his *darshan* to the king in his dream and reminded him– “O king! You are forgetting me due to your royal splendors– I have been waiting for you in the form of a jackfruit tree in Kaina hills. Shri Krishna further asked him to make a statue in the exact form which was revealed to him in his dream. Then, he asked him to perform a Ras dance deriving the Ras played at Brindavan with Srimati Radhika in order to get nirvana from the worldly attachments by witnessing the sacred Ras dance.” After telling these words Shri Govinda suddenly disappeared. This fairy story had greatly influenced the minds of the people and gave a clear path for the establishment and consolidation of Goudiya Vaishnavism. It is further then shows that during the reign of King Bheigyachandra, the influence of Radha-Krishna cult on the Meitei society took a complete form.

For the purpose of installation of a statue as per the advice of Sri Lord Krishna, the king consulted with all the scholars about how to fell the tree. After that, in the next day, king Bheigyachandra went to the Kaina hill in search of jackfruit tree. After identifying the tree in Kaina, it was decided that on an auspicious day, the tree

would be cut down. Accordingly, after performing the Puja, on the auspicious day of Wednesday, the 22nd day of *Lamta*, Pangambam Oma Singh struck the jackfruit tree with his axe. An endless stream of blood trickled down when the axe hit the trunk. Then, they immediately reported to the king. King Bheigyachandra asked Langoi Lukhoi, a royal Meitei scholar about the incident. Langoi Lukhoi told that the jackfruit tree itself is the example of being the great grandfather of the royal kings, and hence, in order to prevent further blood to flow from it, a piece of cloth from the turban of the king should tie and then only, it will stop bleeding. He also asked the king to beg pardon for his actions. According to his advice, the king took a piece of cloth from his turban and tied to the tree and expressed his deep regret for his wrong deeds. The tree then stopped bleeding and the king asked Langoi Lukhoi for further action as well. Then, the royal Meitei scholar told him to root out the tree itself instead of cutting it.¹¹³ After this event Kaina became one of the important sacred places of the Manipuri Vaishnavas.

According to the advice of the royal scholars, they made prayers with their respective rituals by offering the Hindu rituals with the beginning of blowing conch shells, and doing *aarti* in honour of the tree which is blended with his lord. The tree was uprooted and then dropped into the *Lisam Lok*. They discussed as to how the tree would be carried to the palace of king. Thereafter, the tree was finally carried to the river through *Langdum Santrok*, where it was left to be floated down. After a brief journey down the way, just before it reached Lilong, the tree was sunk. The people were tried to bring it on the surface but they were not able to move it. Besides this, their attempt to lift it up with the help of the elephant from the royal palace also became failure.

Then the people reported the matter to the king Bheigyachandra and accordingly, the king arrived at the location and lay prostrate on the ground by offering the rites and rituals. After that, the tree was drag and brought to the palace. The place where the tree was sunk came to be known as *Urup*, and the place of its performance of *aarti* is called as *Arapti*. Therefore, *Urup* and *Arapti* are today considered as places of pilgrimage. Finally, the tree was arrived at Lilong, and it was lifted out of the river *Leisang*. When it reached Langthabal, the people offered flowers and fruits. At present, the place where offerings are made that has been developed into a market known as *Heijingang keithel*, which is located near the Manipur University campus. This story thus clearly reveals that Lord Krishna was emerged in the minds of the people of Manipur, and thereby, the popularity of Krishna cult was developed in Manipur.

Very interestingly, the jackfruit tree was cut into seven pieces. Of these pieces, Chiyatpam Lokhon carved out seven idols. The names of these idols were given below.¹¹⁴

- Shri Shri Vijay Govinda – The statue was carved in the year 1776 CE, and was worshipped at Shri Shri Govindaji temple of Sagolband.
- Shri Shri Govinda – The statue was worshipped at Shri Govindaji temple of Manipur palace complex after having carved in the year 1776 CE.
- Shri Shri Gopinath – worshipped at Shri Gopinath temple located at Ningthoukhong (Bishenpur) whose idol was carved in 1776 CE.
- Shri Shri Madan Mohan - carved in 1776 CE and is worshipped at Shri Shri Madan Mohan temple firstly at Uripok Panchai Maning, and then, presently at Oinam Thingal Singjamei.

- Shri Shri Nityananda – The statue was carved in 1794 CE and worshipped at Khwai Lalambung, Nagamapal Imphal west.
- Shri Shri Anuprabhu – worshipped at Nabadwip of West Bengal after having carved in 1794 CE. This idol was brought to Nabadwip by the princess Bimbabati, daughter of king Bheigyachandra (Bimbabati also known as Shija Laidibi who dedicated her life to Shri Govindaji) and worshipped there by the princess herself.
- Shri Shri Abdeitya Prabhu – This temple is located at Lamangdong of Bishnupur district, which was carved in 1798 CE.

The installation of Shri Govindaji's statue played a significant role in the development of Hinduism in Manipur. Lord Krishna is called as Govindaji by Meitei community. The installation of Shri Govindaji was followed by the establishment of a wooden statue of Rasheswari.¹¹⁵ In the establishment of Rasheswari's statue, initially the process of sculpting her idol was failed in spite of careful efforts.¹¹⁶ But, the statue was successfully completed under the efforts of seven people. These seven people were Kshetri Panem Nanda Singh, Konsaba Chakrapani, Konsaba Anindram, Konsaba Khelemba, Konsaba Haojou, Konsaba Samurok, Konsaba Yoiba. However, the king gave them rewards for their successful efforts.¹¹⁷ It needs to mention here that the statue of Rasheswari is still in existence and worshipped along with the statue of Govindaji in the present temple of Shri Shri Govindaji.¹¹⁸

King Bheigyachandra was not only a lover of art but also a prominent artist.¹¹⁹ During his reign, Ras dance, the famous religious dance was introduced in the practice of devotion and art marvelously blended under his own supervision. Therefore, the introduction of Ras dance in Manipur was another important feature of

Goudiya Vaishnavism.¹²⁰ It is mentioned that the composition of Ras dance was revealed through the dream of king Bheigyachandra. He introduced the different styles of Ras dance and gave it into different forms with diverse names, i.e, Maharas, Kunjaras and Basantaras. It is widely observed that the style and the composition of a new form of dance so called Ras dance is a combination of traditional Meitei and Hindu forms of dance.¹²¹ Maharas, the first form of Ras dance was dedicated to Shri Govindaji at Ras mandal of Langthabal (now Canchipur) on *Mera Purnima* (full moon day of September/October) and was introduced it to the public (devotees) at the palace Canchipur (Langthabal) in 1779 CE. This dance lasted for five days and in this dance, the chief queen and other members of the royal family also took part.¹²² Very interesting is that, Prince Bimbabati, daughter of king Bheigyachandra performed the role of Radha. Afterwards, she dedicated her whole life as a devotee of lord Krishna. The Ras dance had its origin in the revelation of king Bheigyachandra, and it was really the finest product of Manipuri culture.¹²³

The Ras dance which is the embodiment of classical Manipuri dance expresses the inspirational and transcendental love of Krishna and Radha as well as the Gopi's devotion to the lord Krishna. Dance is a meditation or a kind of devotion to God. It draws people towards a realm of bhakti. It envelops the spectators with a spiritual vibe with its harmonious and graceful movements. Generally, Ras dance is performed in an enclosed space in front of the temple throughout the night and watched with a deep sense of dedication by the devotees of lord Krishna. The rhythmic movements of the participants are restrained and attractive with exquisite customs created a giant impact on devotees. The world famous Ras dance depicts the story of Shri Krishna's divine love sports with the Gopis of Vrindavan.¹²⁴ As a result, Bheigyachandra's reign certainly witnessed as an era of religious transformation and cultural synthesis.

Manipuri dance and music also felt the impact of Vaishnavism.¹²⁵ He also introduced a new style of *Kirtan* known as *Nata Sankirtan* (singing the devotional song of the Vaishnavism) which signifies the highest form of surrender worship and ecstatic prayer, enabling the devotees to have a direct communion with Shri Krishna. *Nata Sankirtan* is performed in every rite and ritual related to every stages of life. Therefore, since the period of king Bheigyachandra, the *Nata Sankirtan* tradition has continued throughout the valley of Manipur.¹²⁶ That is why, Gangumei Kabui said, the Manipuris worshipped God through dance and music.¹²⁷ The contribution of the Manipuri Vaishnavas to music and dance through *kirtan* and Ras are widely recognized in Manipur. When the entire state adopted Gaudiya Vaishnavism as a primary religion, *Nata Sankirtana* and Ras dance became the basic medium of communication.¹²⁸ They are the powerful cultural media favouring the mass education and Hinduisation of Meitei population, without which the Hinduism would not have been popularized at all among the masses of Manipur valley.

King Bheigyachandra added pioneering extent of conformity to the new religion to draw the curiosity of the general public. When the king dedicated himself to the new religion, his subjects also took it and it was the main motive for the expansion of this religion in the state. The cult of devoting Lord Krishna started from the reign of king Bheigyachandra's great grandfather. However, the culture of devotion to Lord Krishna took a more specific form, especially during the reign of king Bheigyachandra.¹²⁹ The fact is that a new stimulation was given to the artistic culture and traditions of Manipur during his reign. However, the contribution of Manipur in the evolution of Hindu culture is noticeable through her art and culture.¹³⁰ Thus, it is clearly evident that from the 18th century CE onwards, the Manipuri culture was totally adapted into a Vaishnava culture.

During the period of king Bheigyachandra, the School of Gaudiya Vaishnavism became a dominant institution in Manipur. The fact is that the king Bheigyachandra adopted Gaudiya Vaishnavism as a state religion and consequently, its popularity was extended to all over his kingdom. Owing to the gradual expansion of Goudiya Vaishnavism, Radha-Krishna cult became the dominant form of religion in Manipur. Therefore, the reign of king Bheigyachandra (1759-1798 CE) in the 18th century CE is called the golden age in the history of Manipur. Notably, at present the system prevalent in Manipur valley can be taken as a legacy of syncretised form of Hinduism that evolved during his time.

During the reign of King Kyamba in Manipur, the worship of Vishnu was introduced, and the prayer offered to Lord Vishnu in the form of Sankirtana was started. His descendents also became the followers of Hinduism.¹³¹ It may be mentioned that after the reign of king Bheigyachandra, Hinduism made further progress under the great kings, like Gambhir Singh and his son Chandrakirti Singh who ruled upto 1886 CE.¹³² The reign of king Chaurajit was very remarkable as he constructed the temples of Govindaji and Navaratna. The construction of these temples clearly indicates that he was also the follower of Hinduism.¹³³ During the reign of King Gambhir Singh also, the images of Jagannath, Balaram, and Subhadra were also installed for the first time in Manipur. All these images are still worshipped in the Shri Govindaji temple of palace compound at Imphal. Another achievement of King Gambhir Singh was the introduction of *Ratha-Yatra* festival in Manipur. He was also a devotee of Shri Krishna and formulated a dance-drama called *Sanjenba* (tending of cows) depicting the heroic activities of Shri Krishna and Balaram while tending cows. But, the main theme is drawn from the Tenth chapter of the Shri Math-Bhagavat.¹³⁴ The worship of Hindu gods and goddesses was continued during the

time of his successors. In the year 1846 CE, Maharaja Nara Singh built a temple at Kangla, and it was dedicated to Shri Govindaji.¹³⁵ During the reign of Maharaja Chandrakirti too, a new form of Ras dance called as Nitya Ras was introduced and the *Nata Sankirtan* was grown widely in Manipur valley.¹³⁶ The reign of king Churachand was also witnessed as a great advancement in arts and culture of Manipur. During his reign, the temple of Govindaji was inaugurated in the new palace.¹³⁷ Besides this, during the reign of Churachand, Divya Ras, another form of Ras dance was also introduced and the popularity of Hinduism became stable in the valley of Manipur.¹³⁸

However, during the reign of king Labyanachandra an attempt was made to revive the traditional religion and get rid of the imported faith. The royal chronicle, Cheitharol Kumbaba records the restoration of the sacred places which had been destroyed earlier. A statue or image of *Pakhangba* was made.¹³⁹ The revival was however short-lived due to the assassination of king Labyanachandra. But, after his death, there was no further attempt to devastate Hinduism in Manipur. The uneasy co-existence of the two faiths which had characterized the preceding century became stabilized into a certain pattern, acceptable to both sides.¹⁴⁰

As stated earlier, the process of Hindu colonization in Manipur was started during the period of king Kyamba, but it was successfully continued upto 19th century CE. The whole picture of the Meitei society was completely transformed into a Hindu way of life.¹⁴¹ By the end of the 19th century CE, Hinduism reached the zenith of its progress in Manipur. It also had far-reaching impacts on the indigenous religion, language, culture, art and architecture of the contemporary Meitei society.¹⁴²

Thus, the growth and development of Radha-Krishna Cult in Manipur had been occurred through successive centuries under the patronage of royal monarchs. From the 15th century CE, the influence of Vaishnavism in Manipur was gradually developed during the reign of king Kyamba. His successors continued to follow the traditions of Vaishnavism. After having adopted this religion as a state religion, its influence was extended widely in the valley of Manipur during the 18th and 19th century CE. Consequently, the indigenous religious system was totally replaced by Hindu cult. In this way, the Radha-Krishna cult became the most prominent religion of Manipur and its practice is still in existence.

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