

CHAPTER-5

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Religion played a vital role in bringing about the socio-cultural change in Manipur. It embodies a system of beliefs and practices found in every culture and binds all its members in a symbolic social order through codes of conduct (bonds of solidarity).¹ The main feature of socio-cultural change in the history of Manipur was the influence of external forces i.e. the coming of Hinduism and Sanskritisation process that had been taken place under the successive rulers of Manipur.² As a result of it, Manipur took a new shape in the field of socio-cultural life from the 15th century CE onwards. Hinduism being the most popular and flourishing religion in Manipur left an indelible impact on the contemporary society and culture of Meiteis in the valley of Manipur. Accordingly, the socio-cultural and religious system of Manipur was integrated with the Hindu traditions.³

The growth and development of Hindu religion in Manipur may be classified into four sections. At first, contact with Vaishnavism in the form of Vishnu worship in the middle of the 15th century CE. Secondly, the development of Nimandi and Ramanandi cult in the 18th century CE. Thirdly, the introduction of Goudiya cult during the reign of king Bheigyachandra, and fourthly, the development of religious authoritative power of Brahma Sabha in the 19th and 20th century CE.⁴ It is important to note that the popularity of Hindu religion was widely extended in the valley of Manipur when it was adopted as a state religion in the 18th century CE.

The development of Hinduism in Manipur was a long continuous process. It may be mentioned here that before the adoption of Hinduism, the Meiteis being the dominant community of Manipur, have followed their own traditional religion since time immemorial. They were associated with their belief in Supreme Being, duality of sky god and earth Mother goddess, ancestral deities, natural phenomenon and *Saroi* (the evil spirits). But the most important fact is the adoption of Hinduism by the kings of Manipur which became a turning point in the socio-religious history of Manipur. With the emergence of Hinduism, the process of sanskritisation was begun and subsequently, it resulted on renouncing of the traditional religion of Meities.⁵ Many important sources, like epigraphic, numismatics, etc., also establishes the facts of adoption of Hindu religion by Manipuri people and its process of sanskritisation towards the beginning of the 18th century CE.⁶

The reign of king Kyamba in Manipur was treated as an important landmark in the history of the development of Hinduism in Manipur. The immigration of Brahmins in Manipur from different parts of India began during his reign.⁷ Under the royal patronage, they began to settle in Manipur valley and carried on their proselytizing activities. The propagation of their Hindu religion and culture was very extensive which paved the way for the rise and growth of Hinduism in Manipur. So, from this point of view his period may be treated as an important landmark in the history of the development of Hinduism in Manipur.⁸ Another significant aspect of king Kyamba's period was the beginning of influence of the Hinduism through the form of Vishnu worship. Thus, the reign of king Kyamba (1467-1508 CE), witnessed not only the immigration of Brahmins to Manipur but also the beginning of Vishnu worship. As regards the beginning of Vishnu worship, it is stated that king Kyamba received a small image of Vishnu as a gift from Chaopha Khekhomba of Pong and

also built a Vishnu temple at Vishnupur in which the image of Vishnu was installed. Thereafter, the regular worship of Vishnu was begun in Manipur.⁹ In this way, Kyamba's worship of Vishnu showed the way for the rise of Vaishnavism in Manipur. Although king Kyamba worshipped Vishnu regularly, yet he was not formally initiated to Vaishnavism.¹⁰ But, the act of worshipping Vishnu at the very beginning is very significant for the rise of Brahmin group in the social hierarchy of the state. Although the king was not converted to Hinduism, yet the effort of the ruler clearly indicates the inclination of royal patronage to the Brahmins.¹¹ It is to be noted that the worship of Vishnu received under the patronage of king Kyamba, but the fact is that it was confined only to the royal family. However, no Meitei king was yet formally initiated into the Vaishnava forms of Hinduism till we come across king Charairongba (1697-1709 CE).¹²

With the accession of Charairongba to the throne of Manipur in 1697 CE, the influence of Hindu religion on the community of Manipur was increased. The fact is that he was the first king of Manipur to be formally initiated into Nimandi cult (worship of Krishna) of Vaishnavism by one Brahmin, named Krishnacharya alias Rai Banamali from Sweta Ganga, Puri. Since then, he became the guru of the king and his descendents were later on known as guru Aribam.¹³ After being converted to Vaishnavism, his name was changed to Pitambar Singh. For the reverence to his guru, Pitambar Singh issued land grants for the settlement and maintenance.¹⁴ When Vaishnavism was adopted by king Charairongba, the socio-cultural life of the Meiteis began to change. As the hold of the new religion increased, the Meiteis were drawn towards various aspects of Hindu culture. This was especially brought and introduced by the Brahmin immigrants but it was implemented in the Meitei royalty.¹⁵ With the regular flow of Brahmin immigrants to Manipur, the socio- religious and cultural life

of the Meiteis was gradually changed. In course of time, they were absorbed into Meitei society and progressively recognized their identity in the state.¹⁶

However, king Charairongba did not make any attempt to impose Hinduism upon the people as a whole. The king himself formally initiated into Nimandi cult but did not endeavor to ascertain Hinduism as the state religion, nor did he neglect the worship of the traditional *lai* (deities). Although, he was converted to Vaishnavism, yet he did not totally break off from traditional religion.¹⁷ It is to be noted here that king Charairongba belonged to the school of Vaishnavism, which was the worship of Shri Krishna (an incarnation of Vishnu), as the supreme deity as influenced by Nimbarka School.¹⁸ As a devotee of Lord Krishna and to popularize his principles, king Charairongba constructed a Krishna temple at Brahmapur Guru Aribam Leikai, Imphal in 1707 CE and dedicated it to Shri Krishna. The construction of the Krishna temple was one of the most notable contributions of king Charairongba to Manipuri culture.¹⁹ With the spread of Vaishnavite doctrines, Hinduism started making progress during the time of the said king.

During the reign of king Charairongba, Nimbarka cult was prevalent in Manipur, but we cannot deny the popularity of the cult of Mother-goddess during his time.²⁰ It was followed by the construction of the temple of Kali or Kalika. During his time, the goddess Kali was worshipped by a large section of the Meiteis. On the other hand, he also constructed the temple of *Laiwahaiba* (*Sanamahi*). From these evidences, it can be widely observed that although Charairongba formally converted to Hinduism yet he never made any attempt to force the people to practice the Hindu religious rite.²¹ However, during his reign, *Panthoibi* the goddess of the Meitei pantheon was worshipped along with the Hindu deities. With the gradual development of Hindu religion among the common masses, the identification of the local deities

along with the divinities of the Hindu pantheon began. It was due to the co-existence of Hindu religion with indigenous, one can prove that the temples dedicated to both the indigenous and Hindu gods and goddesses were built almost simultaneously during his reign.²²

The adoption of Hinduism by the kings of Manipur occupies an important place in the socio-religious history of Manipur. There are many important sources to reconstruct the history of the adoption of Hinduism by the royal family members, like epigraphic, art and architectures. Even, the numismatics also establishes the facts of the adoption of Hindu religion.²³ Since the dawn of the 18th century CE, the socio-cultural and religious life of the Meiteis of Manipur was totally changed under the influence of Hinduism.²⁴ Therefore, from the point of the development of the religious history, it can widely be observed that king Charairongba's reign was very significant as his conversion to Hinduism as well as his great patronizing attitude to the new religion had produced a great positive impact for the consolidation of Hindu colonialism in Manipur.²⁵

The development of Hinduism which had continued to flourish since the time of king Kyamba reached further height during the reign of King Pamheiba popularly known by his Hindu name Garibniwaz in 1709-1748 CE.²⁶ When Garibniwaz ascended to the throne of Manipur, the history of Hinduism in Manipur took a new form.²⁷ During his reign Hinduism was declared as a state religion, it marked the opening of a new era in socio-religious spheres of Manipur.²⁸ Therefore, the reign of Garibniwaz was very important especially for the transitional period in the religious history of Manipur. It needs to mention here that at first his religious policy formed a death-blow to the traditional religious practices, and secondly, it laid the foundation for complete transformation of social life of the Manipuri people under the influence

of Hindu culture.²⁹ Like his father Charairongba, the king Garibniwaz was also initiated into Vaishnavism in the year 1717 CE by guru Gopal Das. The religious zeal of a new convert was demonstrated by the king in the construction of a number of temples dedicated to Lord Krishna and Kalika.³⁰ Then Guru Gopal Das, having initiated the king, returned to his place after three years.³¹ After the departure of Guru Gopal Das, the new Vaishnava preacher Shanti Das who belonged to Ramanandi School came to Manipur.³² The arrival of Shanti Das Gosai, a religious preacher in Manipur was a great landmark in the whole process of religious and social changes of the Meiteis.³³ It was due to the persistent efforts made by Shanti Das Gosai, that the king Garibniwaz was initiated into the fold of Ramanandi cult. But, the subsequent forced conversion had far reaching effects in the socio-cultural and religious life of the Meiteis.³⁴ However, the followers of Ramanandi cult worshipped Rama as the principal deity.³⁵

King Garibniwaz under the instigation of Shanti Das became a religious fanatic and launched an onslaught against the traditional Meitei religion. His fanatic religious policy lies on the forcible conversion of the unwilling people of the land to the new cult. Under his policy, the socio-cultural and religious system of the Meitei people was drastically changed.³⁶ It is believed that king Garibniwaz followed Vaishnavism for about 20 years. During his period, a successful attempt was made to popularize this new religious concept of Ramanandi cult among the people along with “Bhagavat”, a sacred religious book of Hinduism. The whole religious transformation was developed only after the coming of Shanti Das. The fact is that he advised the king to issue royal diction for the introduction of many changes in the socio-religious practices of the people.³⁷ A change of religion brings about the fundamental transformation of the society and its culture, and it was thus, the adoption of

Hinduism by king Garibniwaz that the subsequent imposition on the masses resulted into the process of sanskritisation.³⁸ The most important measures for sanskritisation of the Meitei social life was to make Hinduism a firm roots in the soil of Manipur. The ancient text *Sanamahi Laikan* states that the process of sanskritisation took place in a very systematic way. For example, all the traditional abodes of the Meitei deities were destroyed in 1723 CE and more than one hundred *puyas* were also burnt by the king in collusion with his preceptor in 1723 CE.³⁹

Burning of *Puyas* (archaic annals)

Another important event during the reign of Garibniwaz was the burning of the archaic annals and all other ancient texts written in old Manipuri scripts. As a part of his Hindu colonization process, Shanti Das inspired the king to destroy all *puyas* for burning.⁴⁰ Accordingly, all the books were collected by the order of the king and burnt them ceremoniously. This unfortunate event came to be popularly known as “*Puya Meithba*” (burning of the *puyas*) in the history of Manipur till today.⁴¹ However, it is said that Lourembam Khongnangthaba who was a great court scholar of that period put a strong protest against the introduction of new changes in society but the king was not ready to accept his verdict.⁴²

Destruction of traditional deities

The destruction of the abodes of traditional deities occupies an important place in the religious history of Manipur. These events generally took place during the periods of king Garibniwaz and his preceptor.⁴³ The preceptor Shanti Das considered that the worship of *Umanglais* (sylvan deities) along with the performance of rituals before their presiding deities was the essential part of the traditional religion. In Manipur, since the early days, these deities used to be worshipped as protectors and

guardians of the Meitei community. Therefore, these deities formed an inherent and composite hierarchy in the Meitei society. According to the advice and instigation of Shanti Das, the king Garibniwaz was determined to destroy all temples and abodes of *Umanglais* as well as other deities. Accordingly, in 1723 CE, he destroyed all the temples of sylvan deities. Then, after three years in 1726 CE, all the images of *Umanglais* were collected and buried at *Mongbahanba*.⁴⁴ However, it may be mentioned that the king established a stone image of Hanuman at this place in order to demolish the religious identity of *Mongbahanba*. The temple of Hanuman was inaugurated on 11th Wednesday of the month of *Hiyangei* (October/November) and the name of this place was also changed from *Mongbahanba* to *Mahabali*.⁴⁵ It is a fact that Shanti Das carried out his continue efforts to destroy the importance of the abode of traditional religion. Through these actions, he tried to consolidate the influence of the Ramanandi cult in Manipur.⁴⁶ According to tradition which was quoted by some historians that while Shanti Das was continued his efforts to destroy the traditional deities, some kind of unnatural incidents happened that forced him to stop all kinds of his action related to a religious colonizing process. It is also mentioned that while he made an attempt to destroy the abode of Goddess Heibok *ching* (Heibok hill), the deity itself came out in the form of human body and tried to kill him. He was shocked of seeing such type of unnatural powers of the local deities. Afterward, he stopped his entire attempts and suggested the king to protect and preserve the indigenous deity. Having realized the power of the local deities, primarily the goddess, he identified them as the symbol of power (Shakti) and addressed them as “Devi” under the Hindu religious concept.⁴⁷ On the suggestion of Shanti Das, king Garibniwaz also began to preserve the traditional deities and a temple was dedicated to Durga by king Garibniwaz at Heibok hill. Later on, this temple was known as *Hiyangthang Lairembi*

and one of the famous seats of Durga worship which is still practiced in Manipur. As a matter of fact, both the Shakti and Vaishnava form of Hinduism flourished in Manipur during the time of the said king.⁴⁸ Besides this, king Garibniwaz constructed the temple and image of *Sanamahi* in 1729 CE. The temple of *Sanamahi*, which was destroyed earlier, was also restored in 1733 CE.⁴⁹

Indeed, the advent of Shanti Das in Manipur valley was a great transformation in the socio-religious life of the Meities. For his colonization process, he asked the king and his close relatives to wear a religious thread (one of the sixteen samskars of the Hindus from the birth to death) on their body. Accordingly, the ceremony was performed firstly during the reign of king Charairongba in 1704 CE after his initiation to Hinduism. Nevertheless, the king Garibniwaz also took the sacred thread in 1729 CE during his reign.⁵⁰ This particular occasion was marked as the beginning of the consolidation of Hinduism in Manipur. As a mark to promote and foster the new religion, king Garibniwaz constructed the temple of *Rama* and *Sita* in 1729 CE on the bank of a Royal Pond locally known as *Ningthem Pukhri* at Wangkhei Leikai. The images are still worshipped in the temple called Ramji Prabhu.⁵¹ Therefore, the reign of Garibniwaz is very remarkable for the departure of an age-old faith as well as for the dominance of Hinduism over the indigenous religion.⁵²

The main impact of Hinduisation process in Manipur was on the socio-cultural identity of the Meiteis. It was principally through the cultural assignment of the Brahmins that the origin and myth of the Meiteis was re-narrated with elements from Hindu mythology. It had started with renaming of the state viz; *Kangleipak* to Manipur and the king was also known as '*Manipureswar*'.⁵³ Then, another theory establishes of having a relationship between the members of the royal blood of Manipur and Babrubahan son of Arjun, the great hero of Mahabharata. The name

'*Ningthem*' the traditional title given to the king was changed to 'Maharaja'.⁵⁴ Thus, the king's dynasty which was founded by Nongda Lairen Pakhangba was declared equivalent to *Surya Vansa* or Sun dynasty of Ramchandra of Ramayana. In fact, the kings of Manipur after their conversion to Hinduism, they were given Hindu names and declared them as *Khatriyas*.⁵⁵

Identification of Meitei deities as Hindu deities

Due to the growing influence of Hinduism, the traditional Meitei custom underwent considerable changes.⁵⁶ As a result of mass conversion into Hinduism, their indigenous ancestral deities were also identified with the Hindu deities. For instance, *Pakhangba* was identified as Vishnu and *Imoinu* as Laxmi. Apart from it, *Nongpok Ningthou* and *Panthoibi* were identical with Siva and Durga respectively.⁵⁷ Moreover, some indigenous rites and ceremonies were also incorporated into the Hindu culture. Some of the primitive gods and goddesses were revered by the Meities as secondary deities.⁵⁸ In this way, the settlement between the primitive religion and Hinduism was strengthened. According to J. Shakespear, Manipur figured as a Hindu state and Hinduism was the state religion, and along the side of Hinduism, the worship of indigenous gods and goddesses of non-Hindu cults was continued. In Manipur, the evolution of Hinduism was slow but it was achieved by a compromise with ancient faith. Keeping this in view, S.K. Chatterji also affirms that, "Manipuri Hinduism gradually became a synthesis of the old Meitei religion with gods and goddesses and myths, its own legends and traditions, social customs and usages, priests and ceremonials and of Brahmanical Hinduism with its special worship of Radha and Krishna."⁵⁹

Hinduism left a great impact on various aspects of the life and culture of the Meiteis in the valley of Manipur.⁶⁰ Introduction of social stratification in their society was also another development feature of the emergence of Hinduism in Manipur. It may be mentioned that the Meitei society before the conversion to Hinduism was a casteless society, but after the conversion, there developed a classification in the society. The royal group was declared as *Kshatriyas*. The Brahmins formed a separate group and non-Hindus became a separate entity outside the Meitei society.⁶¹ Then, the introduction of Hindu term '*Rajkumar*' which was addressed to all the members of the royal blood was a distinctive evidence of the practice of social stratification. It was mainly the handiwork of Shanti Das, the preceptor.⁶² Thus, the Meitei society was virtually transformed into a Hindu society.

Another important feature of the Hindu religious practices in Manipur was the introduction of '*Sati*' system. According to royal chronicle Cheitharol Kumbaba, the *Sati* system was firstly performed, when prince Murari (son of Garibniwaz) died in 1726 CE. His two wives performed *Sati* by burning themselves to death in the funeral pyre of her dead prince.⁶³ From that time, this practice was confined among the upper class sections of the society and it was continued many years. For example, in 1733 CE, when Sapam Khwairakpa died, his wife committed to the *Sati* system. Besides this, the two wives of Wahengbam Nongthouba also followed the practice of *Sati* after her husband's death in 1735 CE as well as the two wives of Keirungba Thanogai practiced it when he died in 1737 CE.⁶⁴ Thus, the practice of rising *Sati* system in Meitei society indicates that the Meiteis were the adherent of Hindu culture.

The process of Hinduisation in Manipur was dramatic in the sense that, the casteless Manipuri society was systematically assimilated to the Hindu social fold. Accordingly, a new social order of purity and pollution was emerged into the region.⁶⁵

As a result of the expansion of Hindu culture in Manipur, several social changes took place in the Meitei society. The influence of Hinduism went a comprehensive way in transforming the contemporary social and religious system of Manipur. Whatever the customs, the rites and ceremonies as well as the festivals were observed and performed were in conformity with the Hindu ideals and practices during the period. Therefore, T.C. Hodson has also pointed out that the traditional social customs, ritual and ceremonies of the Meiteis were greatly modified after the adoption of Hindu practices.⁶⁶

Identification of Meitei *salais* with Hindu Gotras

The Meitei social structure was basically consisted of seven *salais* or clans. When the Meiteis were converted into Hinduism in the 18th century CE, the seven *salais*/clans of the Meitei were assigned into respective Hindu gotras.⁶⁷ According to *Sanamahi Laikan*,⁶⁸ a religious text of Manipur recorded the introduction of gotras and their identification with the *salais* of the Meitei society.

<i>Yek/Salai</i>	Gotras
Ningthouja/Mangang	Shandilya
Luwang	Kashyap
Khuman	Madhugalya
Angom	Kaushika
Moirang	Atreya/Angiras
Kha-Nganba	Gautam
Sarang-leisangthem	Bhardwaj

The Brahmin priests used these gotra names during the life cycle rituals connected with birth, death and marriage ceremonies. They played an important role in the socio-cultural and religious life of the Meitei society.

Identification of Meitei festivals with Hindu festivals

The identification of traditional festivals with Hindu festivals was also another important aspect in the sanskritization process of Shanti Das.⁶⁹ It is to be added here that a number of traditional festivals were modified or identified with concurrent Hindu festivals.⁷⁰ The archaic text *Sanamahi Laikan*,⁷¹ points out the names of those Manipuri festivals as modified or identified with the Hindu counterpart. These are given below:

- The annual boat race festival, traditionally known as *Heigru-Hidongba* regularly held in the month of *Hiyangei* (November) was renamed as Jal-Yatra.
- The festival of mass holy-dip in the Lilong Sahoupat in the month of *Wakching* (January) traditionally known as *Ayang Yoiren Iruppa* was reinstated by Snan Yatra.
- The festival of *Waira Tenkap*, traditionally held in the month of *Phairen* (February) was redesignated as Kirtan of Lord Ram.
- The traditional festival of *Kongba Leithong Phatpa*, usually held in the month of *Sajibu* (March) was reidentified with Vishnu Sankranti.
- The regular festival of *Ahong Khongching*, then usually held in the month of *Ingel* (July) was substituted by Ratha-Yatra.

- The ancient festival of offering feast to one's ancestors in the month of *Langban* (September) known as *Tara Chanou Katpa*, became known as Priti Lok Tarpan.
- The regular worship of *Nung-oibi* in the month of *Mera* (October) was substituted by Dasnan Kwak-tanba or Dussereh.
- Tasting of newly harvested rice known as *Chanou Huichintu* held in the month of *Langban* (October) was replaced by Govardhan Puja.

Along with the substitution of all the traditional festivals with the Hindu festivals, various changes also appeared in the Meitei culture. Due to the contact with the Hindu society, a regular pilgrimage in the Hindu holy places was made.⁷² Many members of the royal family began to visit on several holy shrines of Hindus under the guidance of Brahmin priest. The practice of merging the forehead bones/funeral ash of the cremated person in the river Ganga was also followed. This process is still practice in Meitei society.⁷³ As a result of this new religious phenomenon, a strong influence of Hindu way of life began to enter without any restriction into the Meitei society.

In Meitei society, another changes brought by the Hinduism was on the life circle rites and ceremonies associated with the various stages of life.⁷⁴ T.C. Hodson has also pointed out the modification of the traditional social customs, rites, rituals and ceremonies after the adoption of Hindu practices.⁷⁵ Before the process of the sanskritisation in Manipur, the Meities had their own distinctive feature on certain rite, rituals and ceremonies.⁷⁶ The performance of various rites and rituals as a means of spiritualizing human life is a trait shared by the Meiteis.⁷⁷ In the disposal of death body, *Sakok Lamlen Puya* (old traditional text) refers that, prior to the process of

Hinduisation, there were four methods of disposal of the death body, viz; *Nungshitki Potloi* (air cremation), *Eshingi potloi* (water cremation), *Leipakki Potloi* (buried) and the *Meigi Potloi* (fire cremation). All these methods were based on their nature of death but the most common method adopted was the normal nature of death which was buried.⁷⁸ The evidences of buried system are clearly shown by the archeological findings. However, due to the Hinduisation process, the cremation of the death body was made as the customary method in the Meitei society. It is further mentioned that the fire cremation system was introduced in 1724 CE, i.e. during the reign of king Garibniwaz.⁷⁹ Then, the purification ceremony or *Shradha* is also performed in accordance with Hindu rites.⁸⁰ Along with these, the Brahmins started taking over most of the rites and rituals related to birth, and marriage ceremony by replacing these rites and rituals in order to minimize the role and function of the traditional *Maiba* and *Maibi* (priest and priestess).⁸¹ The fact is that, due to the influence of Vaishnavism, the traditional rites and rituals were modified and largely expanded by the addition of Hindu elements.⁸² This is followed by the adoption of birth ritual ceremony of the Hindus, viz; *Swasthi Puja* (birth ritual), *nama-karan* (naming ceremony) along with *anna-prasanna* or *cha-umba* (food giving ceremony), *chura-karan* (hair-shaving ceremony) and *upanayana* (initiation of sacred thread). The birth ritual of *Swasthi Puja* is held on sixth day of a child's birth and it is traditionally known as *Tarukni Ipan Thaba*.⁸³ The marriage ceremonies were performed in accordance with both the Hindu and traditional rites.⁸⁴ Sanskrit language was used as incantation, but Meitei Hindus do not arrange *Yajna* (sacrifice) for marriage, and hold Sankirtan as a part and parcel of the Vaishnavite Hindus. The Meitei Hindus have also modified the *satpathi* (seven steps) in the form of circumambulation of the groom seven times by the bride and put white garland each other.⁸⁵ There were restrictions

imposed on marriage between the families of same gotra or *Salai* was evidently the impact of Hinduism. Marriage within the same caste, sanctity of the gotra and the freedom granted to Brahmins in the society are also considered to be the legacy of Hinduism.⁸⁶ Thus, the Meitei society was gradually adapted with Hindu culture.

Literary development

The introduction of Hinduism in Manipur also resulted on a great literary progress which was witnessed during the 18th and 19th century CE.⁸⁷ The influence of Sanskrit and Bengali language on Manipuri literature was preponderant. This can be seen that many texts were composed during the period of 18th and 19th century CE. Most of the Sanskrit texts were translated into Manipuri. Angom Gopi, one of the renowned scholars and the court poet of king Garibniwaz translated Kritibas's Ramayana and Gangadas's Mahabharata into Manipuri.⁸⁸ The reign of Jay Singh alias Bheigyachandra is also marked by the enrichment of Manipuri literature. The literary works composed in his reign were *Janmejaya Sarpa Yajna*, *Ashwamedha Yajna* and *Ashtakal Lila*.⁸⁹ He also introduced the art of *Lairik Theeba-Haiba* (recitation and interpretation of religious scripture of Mahabharata and Ramayana).⁹⁰ Due to the development of cultural contact with Bengal, the Meitei society was influenced by Bengali language and literature.⁹¹ It is also mentioned that during the time of king Chourajit, the Bhagavad Gita was rendered into Manipuri. Dharani Samhita, a Sanskrit text was also compiled during the reign of King Gambhir Singh.⁹²

The rich Manipuri literature proved to be a potent force for the propagation and popularization of the Hindu religion and culture. The local writers were also attracted towards producing those kinds of literature which focused mainly on Hindu religion and culture. The primary objective behind the composition of these literatures

was to create awareness among the people about the richness of the Hindu culture as well as for preserving and promoting the newly introduced Vaishnava form of Hinduism.⁹³ With the recognition of the Sanskrit literature, Manipur fell in line with the Hindu culture. It became fully integrated with India through its Vaishnava form of Hinduism, rich literature, art and culture and so on. The integration of Manipur with India is noticed only from religious and cultural points of view. The old myths and legends of the Manipuris after their Hinduisation also got associated with Brahmanical legends, which resulted on the production of various Manipuri Purana in Sanskrit and Manipuri. The traditions also recorded the reconciliation of Brahmanical and Puranic literature with the Manipuri or Meitei traditions, legends and folklore.⁹⁴ It may be mentioned here that particularly the Vaishnavite literature proved to be very helpful in promoting the further growth of Hinduism.

Influence of Bengali Culture

The Hindu missionaries of Bengal played an active role in the introduction of Bengali language and literature. They not only preached the doctrines of Vaishnavism but also exercised their linguistic influence on the potentates and populace.⁹⁵ It has been rightly pointed out that from the middle part of the 18th century CE, the sanskritization had been strongly entrenched in Manipur. It appears in the form of change in dress, food habits, and the adoption of Bengali as the medium of religious transaction either in singing of hymns or writings. Some of the local chronicles and other works were composed in Manipuri language by using that script. The people in fact, started using Hindu names (especially Sanskrit and Bengali) of persons, localities, hills, rivers, etc.⁹⁶ It is worthwhile to mention here that the Meiteis not only encouraged the use of this language but also translated the Sanskrit and Bengali books into Manipuri after acquiring the knowledge of these languages. The tradition

of acquiring knowledge of Sanskrit and translating some ancient Indian texts into Manipuri and English languages was handed down from generation to generation in some Meitei families. The native Sanskrit scholars have made substantial contribution to the enrichment of the knowledge of people of the land regarding the history and culture of India through their translated works.⁹⁷ Therefore, the adoption of Bengal school of Vaishnavism and replacement of ancient Meitei scripts by Bengali scripts had facilitated the promotion of cultural impact over Manipur.⁹⁸

The sanskritisation process influenced in the style of dress mainly to the male member of the Meitei society and they began to use '*dhoti*' locally called '*pheijom*' and '*kurta*' called '*pumyat*'. Using of Bengali language was considered as a sign of educated people. The caste system was also totally absorbed in the Meitei society.⁹⁹ In the Meitei society, the descendants of the king who is popularly known as '*Ningthemcha*' (members of the royal blood) were respected and the Brahmins were regarded as upper caste people. So, the common people began to address '*Ningthemcha*' as '*Sanakhya*' like '*Eigya*' to Brahmins. Thus, the attempt of the Hindu religious preachers to make Manipur as a sanskritized society was completed in the 18th century CE.¹⁰⁰

As stated earlier, the process of socio-religious and cultural integration of Manipur with India began during the reign of Garibniwaz but it was consolidated by his grandson Bheigyachandra. The reign of Bheigyachandra not only saw the emergence of a new syncretic religion but also the introduction of new forms of dance and song. Manipur has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the evolution of Hindu culture in India through her dance and music.¹⁰¹ It is a fact that right from the primitive age, the people of Manipur worshipped gods and goddesses through dance and music. Therefore, dance is a part and parcel of the cultural life of the

people of Manipur.¹⁰² Manipur during the reign of Maharaja Bheigyachandra, a kind of religious dance known as Ras dance was introduced. However, the Ras dance which was introduced by Bheigyachandra is popularly known as Manipuri Ras. This form of dance is primarily based on Srimad Bhagavatam. The sequence and lyrics of Ras dance was formulated by the king himself in a state of divine bliss even while the image of Lord Krishna was being sculptured. It has grown in stature and popularity throughout the country, and became one of the best known schools of dance.¹⁰³

There are five different forms of Ras dance that developed in Manipur, namely Maharas, Kunjaras, Basantaras, Nityaras and Divaras. The Maharas, Kunjaras and Basantaras were emerged during the reign of King Bheigyachandra.¹⁰⁴ Another two forms of Ras dance was introduced by the successors of king Bheigyachandra. Nityaras was introduced during the reign of king Chandrakirti, and the Divaras was also produced during the period of Churachand Maharaja.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the tradition of Ras dance grew extremely in the hands of succeeding rulers. The first and the foremost of the Ras dance is Maharas which was firstly dedicated on the occasion of the installation ceremony of Shri Govindaji at Canchipur palace.¹⁰⁶ The following are the different forms of Ras dances performed in specific seasons and on specific days.

- Maharas - This form of dance is played on the full moon day of the month of *Hiyangei* (October/November). In this dance, *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* (Sambhog) and *Vrindavan Pareng* (Vrindavan Varnan) are performed.
- Kunjaras - This dance form is played on the day of full moon in the month of *Mera* (September/October). Only the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* (Sambhog) is performed in this dance.

- Basantaras – This is played only on the full moon day of *Sajibu* (April). *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* (Sambhog) and *Khurumba Pareng* (Jugal Prarthana) are performed in this form of dance.
- Nityaras – This form of dance is also played in every month of the year except the month *Mera* or *Sharad* season and the month *Sajibu* (April) of *Basanta* season. *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* (Sambhog), *Vrindavan Pareng* (Vrindavan Varnan) and *Khurumba Pareng* (Jugal Prarthana) are performed in this dance.
- Divaras – This dance is played on any auspicious day throughout the year during day time. It is specially played during the month of spring season. Only the *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* (Sambhog) is performed.¹⁰⁷

In the Ras dance, *Bhangi Pareng Achouba* is obligatory and kept frequently to be a customary rule of the classical dance and the composition remains as a similar since its commencement.¹⁰⁸ The central appearance and philosophy of the *Bhangi pareng* is solely to develop a divine figure of Lord Krishna to draw up a religious compulsion towards the *Tribhanga Murti* and exceedingly form as a Lord. In performing the Ras dance, the image of the statue of Lord Krishna is placed at the *Ras mandal*.¹⁰⁹ According to Indian tradition, dance is a dedication, an offering and prayer. The dancer dissolves his/her individuality in rhythm and music and makes the body an instrument.¹¹⁰ The Ras dance is expressive and have exceedingly elegant and graceful movements coupled with light and soft steps in which the heels practically never touches the ground. This highly stylized form of dance has sublimity, fragility and fascination. The movements are very grandeur and beautiful. The *Mudra's* or hand movements in Manipuri dance are quite different from other classical dance

forms.¹¹¹ The distinctive feature of Manipuri dance is that, it constantly encircled by the expression of request, prayer, surrender and gesture. The expressions of the face plow faintly downwards in a humble position are always seen in the beginning and at the end of the Manipuri dance. These modest movements and attitude are considered to be the most important because the Manipuri dances are performed only for the conciliation of the Almighty God.¹¹²

Under the process of Hinduisation, there were many Hindu religious festivals introduced in Manipur. These religious festivals have played a major role in the enrichment of cultural identity.¹¹³ Among them, mention may be made of Holi, Janmasthan, Ratha-Yatra, Durga Puja, Diwali, Baruni, Sarasswati Puja, etc. All these festivals are still being celebrated in Manipur by the Meitei Hindus.¹¹⁴

Holi

Holi is also one of the religious festivals of India. This festival is celebrated in the remembrance of the love plays of Krishna and Radha and their playful of colours. In Mathura, Vrindavan, Gokul and Barsana, Holi is a two week long festival featuring play of colours, folk songs and folk dances as well as staging the various aspects of love story of Radha and Krishna. The Holi festival is also known as the festival of colours. In Bengal, this festival is called as Dol Jatra or the festival of swing. Idol of Radha and Krishna are placed on swings and the devotees swing the idols by taking turns.¹¹⁵

In Manipur too, this festival is celebrated widely. It is a five-day festival, commencing on the full moon day of *Lamda* (March). The traditional and age-old *Yaosang* festival of Manipur was amalgamated with Holi in the 18th century CE with the introduction of Vaishnavism.¹¹⁶ In the olden days, during the period of this

festival, a folk dance popularly known as *Thabal Chongba* was performed in the moonlight. *Thabal* usually stands for moonlight and *Chongba* means dance, i.e., dancing in the moonlight. In this dance, a singer with *dholak* used to sing the folk songs and then followed by the participants. But, in the modern age, the system was totally changed. The artificial lights are used for lightening and musical band parties have replaced the traditional *dholak*. It continued till late hours of night and is performed for about fifteen days in different localities.¹¹⁷ However, the entire depiction of the festival is woven into the worship of Lord Krishna and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, also known as Lord Gouranga. Another significant feature of this festival is the groups of devotees who were gathered at the Shri Shri Govindaji temple and Shri Shri Vijoy Govindaji temple where various cultural activities are performed. The devotees having dressed in the traditional white and yellow turban present their songs and dance in front of the temple.¹¹⁸ The celebration of Holi festival in Manipur is virtually different from what other communities celebrated.

Janmasthanami

Janmasthanami is one of the most popular festivals celebrated widely in India. This festival is also observed in Manipur on the eight day of the new moon in the month of *Thawan* (July/August). The legend of the birth and deliverance of the child Krishna from the hands of king Kamsa of Mathura is accepted in Manipur and celebrated during the festival.¹¹⁹ This festival is celebrated in Manipur with enthusiasm and devotion. The devotees keep fasting on this day and use to visit temples. All the temples are usually crowded to hear the Brahmins reciting the stories of the birth and life of Lord Krishna.¹²⁰

Ratha-Yatra

Ratha-Yatra is also one of the important festivals of India. In Manipur, this festival is known as *Kang Chingba* which was introduced during the reign of Gambhir Singh.¹²¹ Ratha-Yatra (*Kang Chingba*) of Manipur closely follows the pattern of the Puri festival, and is held at the second new moon of *Inga* (June/July) until the tenth day.¹²² There is some evidence of the worship of Jaganatha during the 2nd half of the 18th century CE and today many Manipuri temples contain images of this deity. The worship of Krishna under the form of Jaganatha was widely popular in Bengal and so, it is assumed that the deity entered into Manipur from Orissa via Bengal. The Ratha (Chariot) is four wheeled and large enough to bear the idol and four attendants.¹²³ The pattern of the Manipuri Ratha is unique. The whole structure rests on a square box like foundation from which tall wooden posts were elevated to support the upper portion which looks like the top of a traditional Manipuri temple.¹²⁴ The chariot is suitably decorated on all sides with many Hindu deities like, Hanuman, Vishnu, Krishna, etc. and covered with a canopy. The images of Krishna, Balaram and sometimes Subhadra are also placed on the chariot. The devotees perform *Sankirtana* before the idols are taken to the chariot.¹²⁵ They themselves draw the chariot and offer *Barti*, flowers and fruits whenever the chariot halts. *Barti* is a popular offering which is thought especially acceptable to the deities. The offerings are made through chanting the music of the *pung* (Manipuri drum), *jhal* (large crymbals), bells and the conch. The *barti* is partially burnt and then used to mark on the foreheads of the worshippers. It is then put in the doors of the houses as a prophylactic against evil spirits. In the evening, all sorts of cultural and religious functions and the festival communal feasting take place in the *mandapas*.¹²⁶ This is followed by the serving of *khichri* (a dish of rice and pulses) and lotus leaves are commonly used for serving it.

The principal song sung during the night congregation is the *Dasa Avatar* in Sanskrit especially composed by the noted poet Sri Jaidev. As the outcome of this festival, a beautiful style of *Nat-Cholom* known as the *Khubal-Eshei*, which literally means clapping song is presented by troupes of singers. This consists of the singing and dancing of certain episodes from the life of Krishna.¹²⁷ However, T.C. Hodson, observes that it is difficult to estimate the definite effect of Hinduism on the civilization of the people, to the outward observers they seem to have adopted only the festivals, the outward ritual, the casts mark and the exclusiveness of Hinduism, while all heedless of its spirit and innermost essential. In fact, the observances are only for appearance's sake not the promptings of the heart.¹²⁸

Durga Puja

The festival of Durga Puja is one of the principal religious festivals of Hindus in India.¹²⁹ This festival is started in Manipur from the reign of king Chandrakirti in the 19th century CE and celebrated in *Mera* (October). Durga Puja is worshipped at several places in *mandapa* and in public places in the entire valley of Manipur but the main centre where the Durga Puja worshipped in the *Hiyangthang Lairembi* at Hiyangthang is about 10 km from Imphal. The *mandapas* are fully decorated and the Brahmins recite the stories of Puranas.¹³⁰ This festival is celebrated with full of cultural activities and continued for four days. In Manipur, the last day of the Durga puja is observed as *Kwak Tanba* or *Kwak Yatra* similar to *Dussehra* ceremony which represents the victory of good over evil.¹³¹ *Kwak Tanba* seems to mean the chasing of the crow (*Kwak*=crow and *tanba* = to chase or pursue).¹³² Thus from the 19th century CE onwards the Durga Puja festival was performed on a large scale with a maximum degree of festive mood.¹³³

Diwali

Diwali festival or festival of lights is one of the great festivals celebrated with great enthusiasm in India.¹³⁴ This festival is also begun to celebrate in Manipur after the Sanskritization process. It is performed in the honour of Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth. The temples, houses, shops and public places are illuminated with *diyas* and candles. Fruits, flowers and sweets are also offered to the Goddess Lakshmi.¹³⁵

Baruni

The Baruni festival is celebrated on the thirteenth day of the later month of *Lamda* (March). It was introduced during the reign of king Chandrakirti in 19th century CE.¹³⁶ The main feature of *Baruni* is the worship of Lord Shiva. The place of pilgrimage is Nongmaiching hill lies on the eastern part of the Manipur Valley.¹³⁷ It is a tradition to take dip in the Chingoi stream prior to climbing the hill. The hill is climbed up during the night by the northward route and follow the opposite side route while descending. The phallic stone of Shiva is worshipped in this hill and the pilgrims present their offerings to the Shiva linga. *Kirtans* are also performed in the temple.¹³⁸

Saraswati Puja

Saraswati Puja, the goddess of learning is one of the most important religious festivals of the Hindu religion. Due to the influence of Hinduism, this festival became a very popular religious festival in Manipur. It is mentioned that Saraswati Puja was firstly introduced at Johnstone School, which was established in the name of Sir James Johnstone, then the political agent of Manipur from 1885-1886 CE. From that period, this festival is celebrated consecutively in Manipur till present day.¹³⁹ But, the nature of the worship of this festival is organized with full of festive mood and the entertainment activities.

Emergence of Brahma Sabha

The emergence of Brahma Sabha has a significant place in the religious history of Manipur. It is a high apex body of the Brahmin group which played a very important role in the growth and development of Hinduism. It is stated that during the period of king Bheigyachandra, the process of the rise of Brahmin authoritarianism was completed with positive result and thereby they dominated the whole social life of the Meitei state. However, it is to be noted that the emergence of Brahmin group as an important social group was consisted of composite of the total population of Manipur. This new trend of development may be observed as the main base for the establishment of 'Brahma Sabha' in Manipur.¹⁴⁰

In Manipur, before the installation of the image of Govinda in the year 1776 CE the religious institution was under the control of '*Hidang*'. But just after the installation of Shri Govinda, the whole administrative structure of the institution was changed. From the practice of individual headship, the administration of Brahma Sabha was given the responsibility of five positions. This was known as '*Pancha Ratan*' (Five Ratan). Their names were (i) *Bidyalankar*, (ii) *Bidyanidhi*, (iii) *Bidyasunder*, (iv) *Bachaspati* and (v) *Bebyastthakari*. Along with the change of administrative structure, this institution gradually began to involve not only in the religious matters but also in the socio-cultural life of the Manipuri people. Through their serious efforts, the sanskritization process became very effective.¹⁴¹ The Brahma Sabha encouraged to establishing Hindu temples and *mandapa* in each village, and also suggested the method of Hindu rites and rituals in the temple.¹⁴²

The status and position of Brahma Sabha was improved during the reign of king Chourjeet (1803-1813 CE) and the number of members was increased from five

to nine. Then, a new religious department known as '*Naba Ratan*' (Nine Jems) was established. The names of this position were (i) *Bebasthakari*, (ii) *Bachaspati*, (iii) *Bidyalangkar*, (iv) *Bidyanidhi*, (v) *Bidyasunder*, (vi) *Bidyabagesh*, (vii) *Tarkalangkr*, (viii) *Bamon Hanjaba* and (ix) *Bomon Hidang*. But, during the period of Gambhir Singh (1825-1834 CE) the name of this religious department was usually known as 'Brahma Sabha'.¹⁴³ In the royal chronicle, Cheitharol Kumbaba, the existence of the name 'Brahma Sabha' is mentioned in connection with a particular religious function.¹⁴⁴ It is also said that the further consolidation of the religious principles and practices of Hinduism was made during the reign of King Chandrakirti Singh in the 19th century CE. During his reign, Meitei Puran "Bijoy Panchali" a book containing a number of fabricated theories composed in Bengali is mainly devised for the sanskritisation of the Meiteis.¹⁴⁵ He further developed a religious book called '*Wayel Lairik*' which was written during the period of king Bheigyachandra for the Meitei Hindu people. The name of the book was "*Byabasthanbarna*". The whole religious activities and any type of religious disputes were solved through this book.¹⁴⁶

The most remarkable contribution of the Sabha was the introduction of the concept of seclusion in Meitei society. The local people called it '*Mangba* and '*Sengba*' (unclean and clean). But, the Brahma Sabha's main objective was to control the religious laws which were binding upon the people particularly Meitei Hindu.¹⁴⁷ According to their religious rules, inter mixing between different ethnic groups was prohibited. In fact, their religious laws make an attempt to create disunity among different groups of people in the society. It is also mentioned that the common people were not allowed to marry girls from Brahmin community whereas the latter's boys can marry girls from the common people after performing a particular religious rites. Such type of action of the Sabha has laid a foundation for the growth of disunity

among the common people. Therefore, the Meitei Hindu people were not allowed to mix up with them. If an individual violated this rule he was declared ostracized by the Brahma Sabha. Such type of isolation policy adopted by Brahma Sabha had created a serious social problem in the state. Fear psychosis was developed among the minds of the people. They were not able to work freely.¹⁴⁸ Ultimately they became a prisoner under these draconian religious laws of the Brahma Sabha. The leaders of this organization however, became the most powerful persons in the social and religious life of the state under the active patronage of the king. Even the king himself paid high respect to them. It is mentioned that the king also addressed to three leaders of the Brahma Sabha, i.e., Bebhastakari, Acharya Guru and Rajpurohit using the word '*Nanai Ei*' (I your servant). Even the king perhaps thought that it was the duty of the king to accept their suggestions. At the same time there arose a lot of contradictions in the implementation of their policy. It is also mentioned that if a person who was declared untouchable can be redeemed again after paying a fix amount of money. Such cases were happened in many instances. From these evidences, it was observed that the real intention of the leaders of Brahma Sabha was to establish a sanskritized society by adopting a various types of undesirable methods.¹⁴⁹

The main function of the Brahma Sabha was the propagation of Vaishnavism, initiation of disciples and holding of religious festivals. This Sabha being the guardians of religion and morality played an important role not only in the sphere of religion but in other field also. It enriched the Manipuri life socially and culturally as well as contributed to the realm of literature and art. Thus, the Brahma Sabha became very effective in the propagation of Vaishnava faith leading to the spiritual and cultural upliftment of the valley people of Manipur at large.¹⁵⁰

The local Brahmins who are said to be the descendents of Brahmins immigrants, and landed here in several historical waves, actually shouldered the burden of introducing the Hindu way of life. In the valley of Manipur, there has been hardly any village without a Hindu temple and a Brahmin family. There are also references of formation of the local Brahmins in the process of mass sanskritisation of the Meitei populace. As a result, with the popularization of Hinduism, the role of the *maibas* (priest) and *maibis* (priestesses) became marginalized in the society. In their absence the Brahmins played a major role on religious affairs. However, at the beginning, there occurred a conflict between the old and the new schools of religious administrators both at the political and religious levels. In this connection, J. Shakespear comments that “the spread of Hinduism was slow and achieved only by a compromise with ancient faith.”¹⁵¹

It was due to the growth and development of Vaishnavism that idol worship became very popular in Manipur. There are many temples sprang out in Manipur, the most famous among them was the palace temple dedicated to Shri Govindaji. The temple of Shri Govindaji is the institution per excellence connected with the cultural life of the people of Manipur. Vaishnavism has also a considerable effect upon the rites of the passage of the Meiteis. The traditional rites of birth, marriage and death at several points are modified and expanded by the addition of Hindu elements.¹⁵²

The introduction of Hinduism, no doubt, marked the beginning of a new age in the history of Manipuri coinage. All the successors of king Charairongba down to the last independent king Kulachandra issued coins bearing the legends in Sanskrit either in Devanagiri (also called Nagari) or Bengali script. The use of Sanskrit words in Devanagiri and Bengali script on bell metal, gold and silver coins from the time of king Garibniwaz onwards bore eloquent testimony to the impact of Hinduisation on

the designs, patterns and styles of the coins. The depiction of the names of Hindu deities, like “*Je Shri Rama*”, “*Jaya Rama*” and “*Shri Shri Govinda, Shrimad Radha Govinda*” on different coins issued between the periods from 1709 -1834 CE, reflected on the coins which signifies the Hindu influence.¹⁵³

The gold coin issued by the kings of Manipur between the periods from 1798 - 1822 CE depicts the legend in Sanskrit written in Nagari script showing the popularity of Radha–Krishna cult. A gold coin of Gambhir Singh issued in 1831 CE depicting the legends in Sanskrit and Bengali scripts prove that the king was a devotee of Radha and Krishna. Thus, the impact of Hinduism on inscription is clearly evident from the use of Sanskrit words “*Rama Rama*” in the last line and “*Jaya Shri*” in the first line of Ningel stone inscription of King Garibniwaz in archaic Manipuri script and Manipuri language dated 1743 CE. And, both the coins and inscriptions bear the stamp of Hindu influence.¹⁵⁴

Indeed, the whole picture of the Meitei society was completely transformed into the Hindu way of life. The Meiteis were forced to ignore the value of the traditional religious principles and practices. As a result, the importance of the traditional religion which was associated with the growth of the society was completely marginal and people began to give more emphasis to the practices of new religious cults. Besides this, the people began to accept them to be the branch of the Aryan people. Accordingly, they preferred more importance to the religious sacred places of Hindu religion. As a mark of respect to the Hindu religion, the Meiteis took initiative in constructing temples in every Meitei inhabited areas where the Brahmins were invited to make a permanent settlement and to manage the temple. Then, the Brahmins actively involved in every activities in concerning the celebration of Hindu religious festivals. Gradually the Meitei people began to accept the concept of upper

caste character of Brahmins and as a mark of respect, the common people used to address them '*Eigyā*'.¹⁵⁵

The concept of 'untouchable' introduced by the Brahmins through a religious organization called 'Brahma Sabha' gave a new dimension to the outlook of the people. The concept which contained so many conditions was against the traditional social character of the state, and the imposition of these conditions on the people has created a breeding ground for the growth of unhappiness among the people. Under this policy, the common people began to get a lot of harassment and ultimately it became a social issue in the state. Therefore, the dominating character of the Brahmins in the social hierarchy of the state and their nature of relationship of high and low concept with common people has led to the growth of the idea of religious revitalization movement in Manipur.¹⁵⁶

The different Hindu cults, like Saivism, Saktism and Tantricism had already been in existence in Manipur but in comparison to these cults, Vaishnava form of Hinduism gained popularity under the royal patronage.¹⁵⁷ The fact is that the Vaishnava worship obtained royal patronage of successive Manipuri kings. Even, the subjects also followed the same. This was due to the reason that the popularity of this religion had been increased in Manipur. The process of Hinduisation brought major changes in the field of social, cultural and religious identity of the Meitei community. This task was carried out especially by the immigrant Brahmins with a view to make a full control and command over socio-political system of the Manipur valley. Thus, the socio-cultural and religious life of the Meiteis was gradually transformed into the Hindu culture.

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