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INTEGRATION OF THE MUSLIM INTO MEITEI SOCIETY OF MANIPUR

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ABSTRACT

The Muslim who is living in Manipur is known as “Pangal” and they are not original inhabitants of Manipur. They migrated to Manipur in different historical periods of time. Prior to their settlement in Manipur, the Muslim came as mercenaries hired by Shanongba, the younger brother of king Khagemba. The historical accounts reveal that the migration of Muslim in Manipur continuous till the reign of king Chandrakirti (1850-1886). It appears that the Muslim population in Manipur was greatly reduced as a larger numbers them left Manipur during the “Seven years Devastation” (1819-1826) of Manipur. In an account of 1873 the population in Manipur was 908 families or 4500 persons approximately.⁴ According to 1919 census of Manipur, Muslim population conversed 8% of the whole population of Manipur. Many factors festered Muslim integration with the Meitei. That, they had taken Meitei wife’s. Their getting clans (Sagei) as the Meitei and included in Lallup system etc.

KEYWORDS: *Integration, migration, mercenaries, devastation.*

INTRODUCTION:

This paper is a humble attempt to give the answer for the question how the Muslim easily integrated to Meitei Society. The Muslim who is living in Manipur is known as “Pangal” and they are not original inhabitants of Manipur. They migrated to Manipur in different historical periods of time and they came mainly from the eastern side of Bengal particularly from Sylhet, presently in Bangladesh. The first settlement of the Muslim of Manipur began at the beginning of the 17th century during the reign of king Khagemba (1597-1652) historical significance.¹ Prior to their settlement in Manipur, the Muslim came as mercenaries hired by Shanongba, the younger brother of king Khagemba. In this i Muhamad Shahni, along with his Muslim troop of about one thousand men, was captured by the then King of Manipur, Khagemba. The king entered into an agreement with them.nvasion of 1606 A.D. the commander of the Muslim troop and allowed them to settle in Manipur. The historical accounts reveal that the migration of Muslim in Manipur continuous till the reign of king Chandrakirti (1850- 1886) but migration of Muslim after 1606 A.D. were not eventful

and less numbers.³ It appears that the Muslim population in Manipur was greatly reduced as a larger number than left Manipur during the “Seven years Devastation” (1819-1826) of Manipur. In an account of 1873 the population in Manipur was 908 families or 4500 people’s approximately.⁴ According to 1919 census of Manipur, Muslim population converted 8% of the whole population of Manipur. When this new immigrant Muslim was allowed to settle in Manipur the then king accorded them the same privileges which the Meitei enjoyed. Since the early time of this settlement Muslim in Manipur had emulated the Meitei way of life.

One of the most important factors which fostered Muslim integration with the Meitei’s was, they had taken Meitei wives. When the Muslim came to Manipur no female member had accompanied them. Because in the first and major incident of this settlement, they were engaged as mercenaries and captives.⁵ However, when these new immigrant Muslim were allowed to settle in Manipur, the king accorded them the same privileges which the Meitei enjoyed. More over they were allowed to marry Meitei lady. It was historical fact that most of these Muslims married Meiteis ladies with the blessing and concerned of the then king.⁶ It effected on cultural integration of Muslim to Meitei society. Since they married Meitei women, they started speaking Meiteion (Manipuri) and this language because their mother tongue.⁷ They are the only community in Manipur who speak this language next to the Meiteis as a mother tongue. On the dress both male and female had to prefer Meitei dresses. Of the Meitei women dress the Phanek (Sarong type or female dress) wearing at the upper or lower abdomen or a cloth covered from breast to heel has got its place in the Muslim society of Manipur.⁸ Muslims in Manipur wear Khudei which is the dress of male Meitei wearing at the waist. Prior Innaphi (cloth which covered the upper part of the abdomen) is the dress of both Meitei male and female. Muslim male and women wore this dress. So, the Khudei, Phanek and Innaphi became commonly used dresses of Muslim in Manipur.⁹

In the field of marriage, Muslim marriage system mixed up within Meitei marriage norms. In the Islamic marriage tradition to choose a bride engagement (contract) is compulsory. But in Manipur Muslim followed by engagement and marriage by elopement. The marriage system of Muslim of Manipur is a combination of Islamic law and Manipuri customs. There is not much deference between the Meiteis and Muslim of Manipur in arranging and solemnizing in marriage. The Muslim have been ignoring most of the Islamic marriage customs but they only preserved ceremony or custom is “Nikah”.¹⁰

Another factor for easily integrated the Muslim into the Meitei society was their getting clans (Sagei) and Yumnak or Surnames of lineage. Sagei is a kinship group or institution related by blood. Since the time of Pakhangba integrated the confederacy Manipur provided salais clans which belonging different sageis. Salai means the kinship relation of clans and lineage and sibling ages having a common ancestor.¹¹ Like Meiteis King Khagemba had given different clans (Sagei) and title yumnak to the new Muslim settler. During the reign of king Khagemba thirty one Muslim families were entitled their sub clans (Yumnak Sagei). During the reign of Chandrakirti, there were 61 (sixty one) numbers of family titles of Muslim immigrants.¹² The giving their family titles had been based on different reasons.¹³

- i. Based on occupation in Sangom Sumbam means acknowledged their skill in cattle rearing.
- ii. Based on residence i.e. Moijingmayum meaning the first Muslim settler at the first hill of Moijing.

- iii. Based on administrative divisions i.e. Menjormayum means, given to the first Muslim who held the post of Menjor (major) in the military administration.

THIS OPPORTUNITY FACILITATED THE INTEGRATION OF MUSLIMS INTO MEITEI SOCIETY

Since the time of the consolidation of Meitei confederation by Pakhangba, marriage between Yeks (Salai) had been strictly prohibited.¹⁴ This predominant system of Meitei was followed by this immigrant Muslim i.e. in the Pangal society, marriage between clan members was strictly forbidden and not popular.¹⁵ It is believed the marriage between the same sagei or clan members resulted in adverse consequences. During the king Charairongba's time, one clan "Miraimayum" was

Punished by killing of the whole clan except an unborn child for arranging marriage between parallel cousins.¹⁶ The prevalence of such customs is considered to be the influence of the Meitei.

Since the earliest time of Muslim settlement in Manipur, they were included under roof of the Lallup system.¹⁷ According to the system, the state demanded the services of a fixed time i.e. 10 days of labour for every 40 days from the male members belonging to age group between 16 years and 60 years of every house hold. The Lallup means literally Lal = War, Lup = Group and it was a Although it was a military organization, in times of peace it played an important role in the economic life of the country. Thus the native people had to sacrifice as Lanmi (soldier) for the state. In the time of peace every person had to learn the art of warfare in and at the same time they had to provide labour for development works.¹⁸ On the other hand Lallup system could show the feudal structural society of Manipur and identified the status of people. Every individual who perform the service of Lallup was entitle to cultivate for this support one pari (2 ½ acres) of land subject to payment of regular taxes in kind.¹⁹ But some low cost group like Loi, Tengum, Yaithibi etc. could not getting Lallup duty. The Muslim could enjoy the same privileges which the Meitei enjoyed and they were allowed to perform Lallup by the then king. According to R. Brown only Meitei, Mabon (Brahmin) and Pangal had enjoyed the Lallup.²⁰

Another important reason for the integration of Muslim to the Meitei Society was the establishment of a separate administrative unit of the new settler Muslim Pangal Loisang in the administrative system of Manipur.

There were generally ten ministers to assist the king in his administration. These ten ministers were known as Ningthou Pongba T'ara.²¹ Interestingly King Khagemba appointed one Muslim, Muhamed Shahni who was a leader of the Muslim troops who invade Manipur as one of the 'Pongba Tara'.²² So far as the civil administration system of Manipur was concerned, the whole valley was divided into political units, or Panas. Separate.²³ To govern all different departments were set up. The departments could be broadly divided into two categories:

- (i) Basic Departments and
- (ii) Subsidiary Departments

And then Pangal Laishang (Department) was established as a separate department for administration exclusively for (Pangals).²⁴ The Pangal Loisang was instituted by king Khangemba in the year 1606. In 1609,²⁵ Sayed Ambia Shyed Abdullah and Khalka Hussain came to Manipur and they enlarged the Pangal Loisang by sub dividing it into three sub-departments religious department, social department and judicial department.²⁶

T.C. Hudson gives that the next group of department is in charge of affairs These departments were related to the Pangals (Muhammadan inhabitants) and consisted of: (i) Pangal Sanglen, (ii) Pangal Inghol, (iii) Pangal Singa Loisang, (iv) Pangal Phundrei Loisang, (v) Pangal Kumar/Kumhar, (vi) Pangal Mall (apparently the Muhammadan acrobats and performers), and (vii) Pangal Likli. All these departments were attached to the Palace. The principal officer of these departments was the Kazi. These departments had their own distinct functions and duties, as outlined below:

1. Pangal Sanglen

It was a department to look after the king's horses and elephants. Its main duty was to feed the royal animals with fodder and grass.²⁸ There were many employees who had to collect these fodders from different places and feed them.

2. Pangal Inghol

Those who were engaged in cultivation of varieties of crops for the royal families at different places came under the control of the department of Pangal Inghol.²⁹ It also looked after all gardening and agricultural activities of the royal family

3. Pangal Singa Loisang

The King of Manipur employed many musicians and artists from among the Muslim community. A new instrument a clarinet called Singa, locally known as Bangoon was introduced by these Muslims. It became very popular with both the king and the people. Other artists, such as drummers, singers, and dancers, were equally proficient. The activities of all these artists were regulated by the aforesaid department, which was named

1. After the Singa. Pangal Phundrei

This department was concerned with the Muslim artisans. Blacksmith and carpentry works were popular and they were expert in it. They made weapons and furniture including construction of houses and bridges. An important contribution of the Muslim artisan was the introduction of the Phundrei (Lathe). The king appointed some Muslims as royal artisan to make engraved and decorated furniture as also palanquins the royal canopy etc.³¹

2. Pangal Kumar/Kumhar

"Kumhar" refers to the word pottery. It was a department of pottery works, which was then an essential and important item of all households including the royal palace.³² Among the Pangals some artisans were excellent pot makers. They introduced the system of making pots using the wheel.

3. Pangal Mal (Man)

This department oversaw the acrobats and performers. Prior to the advent of Muslims, such forms of entertainment did not exist. However, with Muslim settlement, these performances became popular and were greatly appreciated

4. Pangal Likli

This department deals with trade and commerce. The Muslim had imported many fine ornamental items from outside the state. The necklaces and chains they imported were very popular in the royal palace. In Manipuri language necklace is termed 'lik' and thus this department derived its name from lik. One of the main functions of this department was to assist business men in their trading activities and commercial transactions.³³

POWER AND FUNCTIONS OF KAZIIN MANIPUR

In every Muslim state, generally, the Kazi was a judicial head who passed judgments according to the Islamic law. In Manipur the Kazi seemed to have been vested with both judicial and executive power. There is no evidence of the separation of these two functions in Muslim administration. The post of Kazi was first made in the time of Khagemba.³⁴ Kazi appeared at the Pangal Sanglen (office of the Pangal) as the head of all departments related to the Muslims. Kazi was appointed by the King and all the power of the Kazi was under the authority, of the king.

It is thus clear from the facts that, the Muslims came to Manipur as mere soldier but were allowed to be settling down permanently in the state. We have known the above different factors which could Muslims integrated to Meitei society that, the marriages of Meitei ladies by the Muslim and getting Salad with Sage is caused easily cultural integration Muslim community to Meitei. On the other hand, by the observation of Muslim to lallup system of Manipur dignified them the same privilege which the Meitei enjoyed. Moreover, the establishment of their own administrative division, these Muslims were activated in the state service in both civil and military works which had helped for the strengthening the power of the state. Since the Muslims were kept under the roof of Manipur society they had been sharing the happy and sorrow life of Manipur. In fact as living long in peaceful co-existence of two communities, there was little to distinguish them from Meitei except their religion of Islam.

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