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GENESIS AND THE CAUSES OF THE MANIPURIS MIGRATION TO TRIPURA REFLECTED IN SOME LITERARY TEXTS

***DR. ASEM BIDHYALEIMA CHANU & **PROF. OINAM RANJIT SINGH**

**Visiting Faculty Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, Manipur University*

Email: bidhyaleima@gmail.com

***Head, Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, Manipur University*

Email: ranjitoinam09@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Manipur has maintained close relations with Tripura in various way since ancient time as evidenced by several literary sources. Migration has been one of the essential factors that created unbreakable bond between the kingdoms of Manipur and Tripura. Manipuris have been migrated to Tripura due to various push and pull factors. Among these, matrimonial alliances and the Burmese invasion of 1819 (Chahi Taret Khuntakpa) were one of the significant factors that led to the large-scale migration of Manipuris to Tripura. The migration initiated a process of adaptation and assimilation of the Manipuris within the broader Tripuri society shaping the socio-political and cultural landscape of Tripura. This paper made humble attempt to revisit the factors behind the historical migration of Manipuris to Tripura

KEYWORDS: *Manipuri migration, socio-cultural assimilation, Burmese invasion, matrimonial alliance, Tripura-Manipur relations.*

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INTRODUCTION:

Migration is a fundamental aspect of human history and civilization. The studies of migration are essential for understanding the complexities of human mobility and its impacts on individuals, communities and societies. Man migrated to different places across the globe as a result of an impact made by certain push and pull factors. The movement is caused by not only a choice but also a product of the social, cultural, political and psychological forces.ⁱ Everett Lee explained in his seminal work *A Theory of Migration* about the four push and pull factors that instigated people to migrate from one place to another, i.e., factors associated with the area of origin, factors associated with the area of destination, intervening obstacles, and personal factors.ⁱⁱ Push factors are implied when people are forced to leave their homeland due to various circumstances such as natural disasters, fear of political persecution and others, while pull factors are more leaning towards positive causes as they lead people to move willingly for better opportunities like searching for employment.ⁱⁱⁱ Migration is often followed by a cascade of socio-cultural restructuring and reorientation. V.C. Cormos asserted that acculturation has been one of the primary and crucial impacts brought by migration.^{iv} Based on the number of literary sources, the main reasons for the migration of Manipuri in Tripura occurred due to push factors that included court intrigues, political turmoil and marriage ties with neighbouring kingdoms. However, Naorem Sanajaoba has implied that the Manipuris who were migrated to Tripura indirectly from Manipur but from Cachar and Sylhet were mainly triggered by the pull factors which included easy accessibility and less competition over land.^v As a result of the migration of Manipuri in Tripura, the adaptation and assimilation of the Manipuris' traditional socio-cultural practices into a larger Tripura societal norm has happened.

Several historical evidences shared information about Manipuri's mobility in various regions, particularly in adjacent ancient kingdoms such as Ahom (Assam), Takhel (Tripura), Ava (Burma) and Kachar (Cachar) since ancient times. The earliest phase of Meitei dispersal in different locations was traced back to the period of proto-historic Meitei monarch Kangba, who controlled Manipur during the pre-Christian era. *Ningthou Kangbalon* described the nine sons of King Kangba; Koikoi, Teima, Yangma, Tesrot, Urenkhunba, Urenhanba, Irem, Khabi and Langba were spread beyond Manipur in various directions. Tesrot, one of his sons, departed towards southwest directions and became the Takhel (present-day Tripura).^{vi} An archaic Manipuri text like *Poireiton Khunthok* mentioned about the dispersion of Meitei's ethnogenesis in various locations. It furnished information about the spread of Poireiton's adherents in various regions, wearing distinctive traditions and customs that represented different communities. Those who decided to be Takhel were identified by their white lower garment and wield swords on the left side of the hand.^{vii}

The migration of Manipuris in Tripura was occurred due to various circumstances. Court intrigues became one of the reasons for the Manipuris, particularly the prince's settlement in nearby kingdoms. Udainarayan Adhikari's *Socio-Cultural Relations among States in pre-Independence India: A study of Tripura and Manipur* stated that in the year 1760 AD, due to the court intrigues in the royal palace of Manipur, Chit Shai, son of King Garibniwaz (1709-1748 AD) of Manipur moved to Tripura and settled in Kailasgarh or Kashba. He was followed by several Manipuris who established their settlement in Kashba, Sonamura, Comilla, etc.^{viii} L. Biramangal Singh in his work *Takhelda Manipuri* also mentioned that the son of Garibniwaz, Ajit Sai (Chit Sai) along with his assistant came to Tripura to seek the help of King Krishna Manikya of Tripura (1760-1783 AD) in regaining the throne of Manipur. He further noted that the followers of Ajit Sai (Chit Sai) settled in places such as Kashba and Sonamura sub-division i.e., Nalchhara, Khedabari, Tokchhapara etc.^{ix}

Another important reasons for the migration of Manipuri in Tripura was the matrimonial alliance between Manipur and Tripura kingdoms which was occurred since ancient times. The marriage alliance between Manipur and Tripura dates back to around the 5th century A.D. when Taidaksin succeeded his father Dakshin as the ruler of Tripura. Taidakshin wedded a princess from Mekhali and had a son called Sutaksin was described in the Royal Chronicle of Tripura, *Rajmala Vol I-IV*.^x However, N. C. Nath does not provide the name of the Mekhali princess who was wedded to Taidakshin. Since then, royal matrimony has been one of the essential diplomatic tools between the two kingdoms. The most significant matrimonial relation between the royal house of Tripura and Manipur was occurred in 1798 A.D. during the period of Bhagyachandra (1763-1798 AD), the King of Manipur and Rajdhar Manikya II (1785-1804), the King of Tripura. King Bhagyachandra, on his way to Nabadwip for a pilgrimage gave his daughter Princess Hariseshwori in marriage to Rajdhar Manikya II, the King of Tripura.^{xi} The incident is also highlighted in Hamilton's *An Account of Assam* as in the year 1798 AD, King Jaya Singha (another name of King Bhagyachandra) of Manipur visited the King of Tripura in Agartala and had him married one of his daughters to the Radan Manikya (Rajdhar Manikya II), King of Tripura.^{xii} On this occasion, he presented the idol of Shri Shri Radhamadav to his daughter for daily worshipping deity. The princess was accompanied by a number of followers who were settled with her in Tripura. According to Soibam Suresh Kumar Singh, multiple households relocated in Tripura to provide comfort to the princess who had just married to the kingdom where language, customs and people were completely unfamiliar to her.^{xiii} Rajkumar Kamaljit Singh's *Tripuragi Meihourola Meitei (The Manipuris beginning of their settlements in Tripura)* has provided an information about the *sagei* (lineage) who came as retinues of the princess and made a permanent settlement in Agartala as Sarungbam, Hanjabam, Khumanthem and Laipubam. It is further informed that the task of serving the Radhamadhav idol was performed by the Laipubam family at the royal palace of Tripura.^{xiv} Dr Ch. Jaimini Devi in her work *Daughter of Manipur* provided the names of the King's trusted attendants who remained in Tripura to

assist the princess as Shrideb Mallik Hidamcha, Nongsu Khumbongcha, Tayung Hidang Shridam, Narayan Laishraba, Tulsishyam, Pheidanai Shanglakpa, Naharup Hajari, Churamani Thiyamcha Nungsong Surya, Naha Cheiteinya of Nongpok Cheitheng, Sanchani Thingujamba.^{xv} On this occasion, the Brahmins, musicians and noblemen were not debarred to stay with the princess as both the King of Manipur and Tripura had mutually agreed them to be with the princess.^{xvi} The followers of the princess were allotted a village called *Mekhlipara* (Meitei Leikai) located near the palace in Puratan (old) Agartala.^{xvii}

The king of Tripura had married number of Manipuri women hailing from both royal and plebeian family whose forefather were fled from Manipur due to court intrigue and Burmese war of 1819 and made permanent settlement in Tripura and around Cachar and Sylhet region. For instances, Kashi Chandra Manikya (1826-1829 AD) married Ningthem Chanu Kutilakshi who hailed from royal family of Manipur and other three Manipuri women from plebeian family who had escape from Manipur due to Burmese war of 1819 locally known as *Chahi Taret Khuntakpa* (Seven Years Devastation).^{xviii} The marriage had often led to the shifting of the family of Manipuris Maharani who married the royal house from their habitation site to Agartala, the capital of Tripura kingdom for permanent settlement under the royal patronage.

King Bir Chandra Manikya (1863-1897 AD) following the tradition of his forefather of marrying Meitei women had three Meitei Maharani, among them, Tonjam (Pangambam) Chanu Kaboklei who was also known as Maharani Rajeshwari was hailed from Sylhet. The relatives of the queen were brought from her hometown and endowed them with suitable land to established the settlement and sustained livelihood at Dhaleswar. Moreover, the king of Tripura also granted Maharani Rajeshwari a taluk of land (village) under her name which was located at the southern side of Agartala. The village was given name following the name of Maharani as *Rajeshwaripur*, which was still known today by this name.^{xix} Moreover, the migration of Manipuri in Tripura based on matrimonial relations was occurred during the period of King Bir Chandra Manikya of Tripura (1863-1897 AD) with the exiled King of Manipur, Debendra Singh, who had been living in Dacca since 1850 AD. The incident has occurred in 1874 AD when King Bir Chandra Manikya (1863-1897 AD) on his journey to meet the Governor General of British India, Lord Northbrook paid a visit to the resident of Debendra Singh at Dacca and sought the hand of his daughter Ningthem Chanu Kaboklei who was also known as *Dacca Leima* in marriage with his son the then Yuvaraj Radha Kishore. As a part of royal matrimony, Ningthem Chanu Kaboklei along with her brothers Dhamanjit Rajkumar, Chitragupta (Amusana) etc. were shifted from Dacca and established their settlement in Agartala. Later, Ningthem Chanu Kabokleima came to be called Maharani Ratnamanjuri and her husband Radha Kishore Manikya (1896-1909 AD) built a residence for her at Dhaleswar Meitei Leikai located at the northern side of Howrah River.^{xx} The marriage of Maharani Ratnamanjuri to Radha

Kishore Manikya (1896-1909 AD) had led to the migration of Manipuris who used to settle down at *Manipuri Para* in Dacca to Tripura and established a habitation site at villages such as Daccabari near Bishalgarh, Narayan Khamer and Agartala.^{xxi} Moreover, the Manipuris (Meiteis) habituating at Cachar, Sylhet and Bhanuganch maintained matrimonial relations with the royal house of Tripura and established their settlement in various places near and about the river bank which was 20/25 miles within Nutan Agartala.^{xxii}

Another major incident that led to the migration of Manipuri in Tripura was the Burmese invasion of 1819 which lasted for seven years and that period is also known as *Chahi Taret Khuntakpa* (Seven years devastation) by the Manipuris. The immediate cause of the Burmese War of 1819 was over the issue of Marjit Singh, the King of Manipur refusal to attend the coronation ceremony of King Bagyidaw of Burma while giving his brothers antagonistic attitude as an excuse.^{xxiii} Consequently, the King of Burma ordered his general to punish Marjit Singh and annihilate Manipur including the royal palaces, temples, idols, statues, towns, villages, brick walls, bridges, crops and paddy fields for his insolent behaviour against the King of Burma.^{xxiv} D. G. E. Hall also stated in *A History of South-East Asia* that *The failure of the Raja of Manipur to attend Bagyidaw's coronation was used as an excuse to dethrone him and devastate his country.*^{xxv} In response to the atrocities committed by the Burmese, the people of Manipur were forced to flee their homeland in search of safer locations where they sought refuge in neighbouring states like Assam and Tripura.^{xxvi} Shri Gourachandra in his work *Gambhir Singh: Chahi Taret Khuntakpa* described that Marjit Singh, the King of Manipur escaped to Cachar after directing his people to take shelter in safer locations. The dreadful act committed on the Manipuri by the Ava (Burmese) during Seven years devastation is evoked till now by the Meitei as *Ava Meehat* or *Ava Meehai*.^{xxvii} The large-scale migration which took place during the Seven Years' Devastation testified a desperate yet strategic effort of the Manipuri in times of chaos and their establishment of new settlements in neighbouring kingdoms where they could rebuild their lives in a more secure and stable environment. As a result, there was a drastic reduction in the population size of the Manipur valley. The exact number of Manipuri who arrived in Tripura due to Burmese havoc is hard to trace. However, Soibam Suresh Kumar in his work *Takhenda Meitei Khuntaba* informed that even though the precise number of individuals who entered Tripura during *Awa Lan* (Burmese war) is unknown, more than 10,000 Manipuri were believed to have migrated to Tripura.^{xxviii} In the *Statistical Account of Hill Tipperah*, W. W. Hunter has provided an information about the rough estimate of the Manipuris population in Tripura for the year 1872 was 14,500 out of a total 34,500.^{xxix}

Udainarayan Adhikari furnished that another notable influx of Manipuris in Tripura was occurred around 1804 AD and settlement was made in the villages of Khowai sub-division of Tripura like Sagardighi, Bongaon,

Shibnagar, Gobarkhala, Khangaon, Abadgaon, Yatragram.^{xxx} Even after the Burmese war 1819, some Manipuris were entering Tripura from Cachar, Sylhet and Taka to made permanent settlement.^{xxxii}

Most of the Manipuris who settled down in Tripura during Burmese War (1819-1826 AD) locally known as *Chahi Taret Khuntakpa* (Seven Years Devastation) did not migrate directly from Manipur but through Cachar and Sylhet, then gradually entered places such as Dharmanagar, Kailashahar, Kamalpur, and Khowai Sub-division of Tripura.^{xxxiii} According to Nandalal Sharma, the people of Manipur used the hill route of Heirok ching lambi, Aimon ching lambi, Ngarachingjen Lambi, Maring ching lambi to reached Kabaw, Ava, Khagi (China) and South-East Asian country in ancient times. They used Chingkei Haram Lambi to reached Tekhao (Assam) and other western states. The main route taken by the people of Manipur to reached Cachar, Tripura and other western states in ancient times were Tongjei Maril (an old Cachar road), Ngapurum Chingjel Lambi, Khongjai lambi and Akui Lambi.^{xxxiii} To escape the Burmese atrocities during Burmese war 1819 also known as Seven Years Devastation, the Manipuris used *Tongjei maril Lambi* to reach the neighbouring kingdoms located on the western sides of Manipur including Tripura.^{xxxiv} Sanajaoba Naorem has mentioned in *Manipur Past and Present Vol IV* that in the 1820s, the Manipuris (Meitei) migration moves through Barak river following the valley towards the western direction in search of safer locater. Afterwards, they then advanced further from Cachar and reached other fertile places in East Bengal like Srihatta, Mymensing, Comilla and Dhaka. The Manipuris (Meities) who settled in Dharmanagar, Koilasahar, Kanchanbari, Komolpuri and Khowai are entering from the erstwhile East Bengal.^{xxxv} Most of the Manipuris who settled in Tripura did not directly came from Manipur. They first migrated to Cachar and Sylhet then gradually entered Tripura's adjoining places such as Dharmanagar, Kailashahar, Kamalpur, Khowai Sub-division and extend up to Agartala, Bisalgarh, Sonamura, Nalchhara.^{xxxvi}

After India got independence in 1947, a change occurred in the demographical structure of Tripura. There was a large influx of population in Tripura including Manipuri from eastern Pakistan (Present day Bangladesh) who were settled in Sylhet, Daka and Susum Durgapur (Myeman Sing). It is difficult to determine the precise number of Manipuris who entered Tripura at this time. However, Soibam Suresh Kumar asserted in *Takhenda Meitei Khuntaba* that around 6-7 thousand Manipuri arrived in Tripura during this period. Consequently, an enormous challenge was faced by the Manipuris (Meitei) settlers in Tripura because of the increasing of competition with the other community and the high value of the land.^{xxxvii} Therefore, in search of better livelihood, Tripura's Manipuri began to migrated to different places such as Manipur and Assam. This steered to the disappearance of several Meitei villages in Tripura.^{xxxviii}

CONCLUSION

The migration of Manipuri in Tripura has been a significant chapter in the history of north-east India that also shows inter connection between the ancient kingdom of Manipur with its neighbouring kingdoms in terms of war, trade and diplomacy. Manipur has shared close relations with Tripura since ancient times and migration between the two kingdoms became common which made an unbreakable bond between them. The main reasons for migration as informed by number of literary sources were matrimonial alliances between the two kingdoms and Burmese war of 1819 which was also known as Seven years devastation or *Chahi Taret Khuntakpa*. The migration of Manipuris in Tripura occurred either directly from Manipur or through the adjacent regions of Tripura such as Cachar and Sylhet. In addition to Seven years of devastation, the Manipuris were migrated to Tripura as a result of matrimonial relations with the royal house of Tripura. Afterwards, the Manipuris began to establish themselves in Tripura and contributed to the development of the socio-political and cultural landscape of the region. They also faced numerous conflicts and challenges to establish their settlement and preserve their identity in its original form. Moreover, the evolving socio-political landscape and demographic shifts after India's independence posed continuous challenges to their livelihood. Despite facing challenges such as cultural assimilation and resource competition, the Manipuris managed to preserve their distinctive identity through language, religious practices and socio-cultural events.

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