



## REDISCUSSING ON THE GENESIS AND THE SETTLEMENT PATTERN OF MEITEI PANGAL IN MANIPUR

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### INTRODUCTION

Islam began in Arabia in the beginning of 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Prophet Mohammad who was born in 570A.D. in the distinguished family of Mecca was the founder of this religion. At the age of forty (40) he proclaimed himself to be the prophet of God. His teachings were “God is one. He alone is worthy of adoration, idolatry is very bad and should be given”. Some groups of the people of Mecca believed him but majority of the people of Mecca were against him. As a result of which prophet Mohammad had to leave Mecca for *Madina* in 622A.D. This event is known as *Hijrat* and Muslim era which is called *Hijri* began from this time. Prophet Muhammad with the help of the people of *Madina* conquered Mecca again in 630 A.D. and put an end to idolatry there. He was able to make the Arabia a strong nation. He died in 632A.D. and was buried at *Madina*. The prophet Muhammad was succeeded by *Khalifas*, who were both religious and political heads. The *Khalifas* were very eager to spread Islam throughout the world. Now the Arabs began their conquests both in the east and west and wherever they went, they spread Islam.

We know that the second battle of *Tarrain* in 1192 is the landmark in the history of India. In this battle Muhammad Ghor captured Prithivi Raj and put to death. It laid foundation of Muslim domination in northern India. Muhammad Ghor appointed his faithful slave Qutb-ud-din Aibak as his Viceroy in India and himself return to *Ghazini*. Muhammad Bin Bakhtiar Khilji, a general of Qutb-ud-din Aibak easily conquered Bihar, a Buddhist province, in 1197. He destroyed the *Nalanda* University and put to the sword many Buddhist monks. After this he proceeded against Bengal. The Raja Lakshman Sen fled away in terror, and in 1198 Bengal was also added to the Muslim empire. Muhammad Bin Bakhtiar made Lakhnauti or Gour his capital. Thus the whole of Northern India came under Muslim sway. The fact is that Delhi Sultanate was established following the second Battle of *Tarrain* and Bakhtiar Khilji established Bangal Sultanate in 1204 A.D. Romila Thapar pointed on the Arab horse traders diaspora in Coromandal and Bengal through Tamralipi and Chittagong since 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Muslim political expansion in India can be traced back to the conquest of Sind by the Arab in 712 A.D. led by

Muhammad Bin Quasim.<sup>1</sup> It was Muhammad Ghori who was real founder of Muslim rule in India and not Muhammad Ghazini (997-1030A.D.), a Ghaznavid Turk who attacked north western India seventeen times with the sole aim to loot and plunder but not to establish an empire in India. Bengal after the conquest of Muhammad Baktia Khilji became a province of Delhi Sultanate between 1204-1342 A.D. and it became an independent Bengal Sultanate from 1342-1400 A.D. during the interlude of Raja Ganesh 1400-1421 A.D. whose sons were converted into Islam, Sultan Jalal-u-din ruled between 1415 A.D. and 1432 A.D. following by the Abishynian period 1486-1493A.D. then Husain Shah dynasty, 1493-1538A.D. finally the Afghan under Sher Shah and successors 1538-1564 A.D. another Afghan dynasty ruled between 1564-1575A.D. and finally Bengal was amalgamated into the Mughal Empire in 1575A.D.

It is stated that ‘Bengal’s historical experience was extra-ordinary, not only in its widespread reception of Islam, but also in its frontier character. In part, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Turkish drive eastward both to Bengal, and within Bengal, was the end product of the process triggered by political convulsions in thirteenth century inner Asia. For several centuries, before and after the Mongol irruption into west Asia newly Islamised Turks from Central Asia, and the Iranian plateau, provided a ready supply of soldiers for commanders such as Muhammad Bhakhtiyar. Once within Bengal’s fertile delta, these men pushed on until stopped only by geographical barriers. Surrounded on the north and East by the Mountains and to the south by the sea, Bengal was the terminus of the continent wide process of Turko-Mongol conquest and migration. It was in short, a frontier zone.’<sup>2</sup>

Historians accepted that Muslims occupied Shylhet in 1303-1304A.D. It is also stated that the Saint Shah Jalan is noted for the conquest of Sylhet in 1257 from prince Ishaladiv.<sup>3</sup> After the Mughals defeated Afghans in Bengal, the Afgans ran away to Sylhet. There they established their rule in 574A.D. under BagazedKarrani and continue till 1612A.D. The Mughals under the leadership of Islam Khan defeated the two Afghan rulers of Sylhet namely Usman Kuaja and BayajidKarrani in 1612 A.D.

The southern Barak Valley, the present Sylhet which was also known as Srihata, the old name, was divided into three provinces – (i) Gaur, (ii) Laur and (iii) Taraf which were ruled by different Nawabs. In the year 1384A.D. the Sultan of Delhi conquered Gaur. For the local administration of the Gaur the Sultan of Delhi appointed an officer first called Amil then Nawab. Thereafter Taraf, Laur and all the tributary states of Tripura in the Barak valley were annexed by the Nawab. These were transformed into a single unit under the common name (Srihata) or Sylhet under Sultan of Bengal.<sup>4</sup> Dr. Wise in his article Mohamodon of Eastern Bengal published in the journal of Asiatic society of Bengal in 1898 says “The enthusiastic soldiers who in the thirteen and fourteenth centuries, spread the faith of Islam among the limit races of Bengal, made forcible conversions by the swords, and penetrating the dense forests of the Eastern Frontier, planted the crescent in the villages of Sylhet.”<sup>5</sup>

In the context of Manipur, the Muslim population in this land, has undoubtedly increased almost entirely from immigrant Bangalies mainly from district of Sylhet and Cachar who have connection with the ladies of this Asiatic Ancient Kingdom and settled in the valley of Manipur. E.W. Dun writes, the Mussalmans are the descendants of Bangali immigrants; they retained knowledge of Hindusthani and Bengali, and hardly distinguishable in appearance from the Bengalis, who had never left Cachar.<sup>6</sup> It is recorded that Kathe Musalmans were descendants from enter-mixing of Muslims who came in different eras from different directions Arakan, Cachar and Manipur itself. Silk spinning was a trade widely followed by Kathe Mohamads of Arkan, Manipur

and perhaps Cachar.<sup>7</sup> In the opinion of B.C. Allen, the Manipuri Muslims are descendants of migrants from Surma valley, who came in waves in different periods and married Meitei women in Manipur.<sup>8</sup>

In the early days the people of Manipur called Bengal as Bangal. The people of this land in ancient times could not pronounce *Ba*. Instead of *Ba* they pronounce *Pa* so Bengal was pronounced as *Pangal*. *NingthourolLambuba*, and ancient Manipuri text mentioned Bengal settlements in Manipur. It is also further mentioned in one occasion in the same text that one Bengal village located on some flattened hill tops lying between the source of Khuga river and meeting point of Koubureng and Areng streams indicating the location was a watershed on southern side of this land.<sup>9</sup> *NingthourolLambuba* mentioned a Bengal village situated on western side of the village, which was most probably at Lamangdong and its adjoining area, however, the text mentioned neither the name of the village nor exact area except Bengal village located of the western side.<sup>10</sup> The application Bengal was originally assigned to the people of Bengal and the earliest reference of this people is found from *Ningthourol Lambuba*,<sup>11</sup> which stated that Nongai Thingkonbanba, the father-in-law of Irengba and *Khuman* chief, went on an assault on the southern Loijing ranges inhabited by the *Pangals*. It will be seen in subsequent sections the *Pangal* mention here is the people of Bengal. When the Hindus of Bengal became more acquainted in later period the word *Pangal* applied to the Muslims or Muhammadans. The word *Pangal* became a vocabulary meaning of Muslim or the follower of Islam religion.

**As we know that the Muslims moves from Delhi to Bihar** under the leadership of Baktiar Khilji with 200 horse soldiers and conquered Bihar in 1689A.D. and then they reached Bengal. They forcibly converted many Bangali into Muslims. As a result of which the population of the Muslims were gradually increased. *Pangal* is the derivative form of the word Bengal meaning the people in Bengal. The earlier Muslim people came from east Bengal and were subsequently known as Bengals meaning Bengali in Bengal. Soon the word Bengal corrupted into *Pangal*, as Manipuri in early days pronounce B as P. From the historical account it is well known that Muslims living in different places of the world are known by different names as in China they are called 'Hui', in Thailand 'How' and in southern side of the Burma they are known as 'Panshi', the Muslim in Manipur are known as *Pangal* generally acknowledged as a corrupt form of the word Bengal. R.K. Jhalajit one of the historians of Manipur explained the origin of the word as "In modern Manipur, *Pangal* means a Muslim. But in medieval Manipuri, it meant as East Bengali, East Bengal was known to the Manipuris as Bengal but most people pronounced it as *Pangal*. Anyone living in that place or coming from it was as *Pangal* irrespective of religious profession. The earliest Muslim settlers in Manipur were from east Bengal. So they were called *Pangal*. Later on, as a result of a change in the meaning, only Muslims from Bengal were called Pangles. Still later, any Muslim from any part of the world comes to be known as *Pangal*, although he had nothing to do with Bengal."<sup>12</sup>

The earlier reference to the Muslims of Manipur is found in Puyas called "*SakokLamlan Ahanba*" and '*KangleiLangba Pakhangba*'.<sup>13</sup> Md. Abdul Rahaman and KheiruddinKhulakpam stated that Muslims began to settle in Manipur during the reign of King Mungjamba (1562- 1597A.D.), with the coming of three Mussalmans from Sylhet. They were regarded as the earliest Muslim settlers in Manipur, who took opined Meitei sub-clan called Aribum. Md. Abdul Rahaman informs us that the three Muslims were Saikha Ruba, Gora Khan and Ashique Shah. KheiruddinKhulakpam in his *TrukoAfghangi Chada Nouda* mentioned the name of the Muslims who came to Manipur form Sylhet as Ashik Shah, Ruba Saikh and Qatuwan Khan. However, their statements can be recognized as a part of official record or not and became a matter of discussion and careful investigation as *CheitharolKumbaba* tells us that the Muslims settlement began in Manipur during the reign of King Khagemba

(1597-1652).<sup>14</sup> Thus the entry of Muslim in Manipur started from the time of Khagemba (1596-1652 A.D.) and it continued up to the time of King Gambhir Singh (1825-1834 A.D.) and King Chandrakriti (1834-1844 A.D.).<sup>15</sup> These Muslims were mostly came from Sylhet, Gouradesh and Shiri Hata.

**The Manipuri Muslims commonly known Meitei Pangals** have a history of 400 years in Manipur. Their settlement in this land is recorded in the archaic in indigenous Chronicles. *CheitharolKumbaba* and *NongshameiPuya* mentioned the invasion of Manipur by a combined force of Kachari and Muslims mercenaries. However, *NingthourolLambuba* informed about a group of invaders known as Thongang who came from the south western side led by one Hasom and Naran. They were Bodo-Kacharies from Tripura of Kachari Kingdom who invaded south west Manipur. Hasom might have been a corruption of Hasal, a Muslim adventure. Naran or Narain was Hindu. *NingthourolLambuba* further records that Mungyamba's wife Kainou Changpombi participated in the military expeditions in the eastern hills and Kabaw Valley against the Monshangs and Shans respectively. Her exploits remind us of the similar adventures of warrior queen Linthoingambi. King Khagemba, the most illustrious ruler of medieval Kingdom of Manipur, during his region (1597-1652) tried to consolidate his rule in Kabaw valley and check the Muslim to check the Muslim invasion from the west and defended his country from several foreign invaders like Muslim, Cacharies, etc.<sup>16</sup>

In ancient time those people who came from west were called *Pangal*. Then during the time of Khagemba the Muslim war captives were known as *Pangals* and rest were called Mayang.<sup>17</sup> According to the Puyas, prior to 1606AD Lairen Nawphangba (594-624)AD requested a *Pangal* Muslim Guru who recently came to Manipur from the west to Kangla to help to build the Kangla Throne.<sup>18</sup> The first Mahamadon, the Aribam family came to Manipur during the reign of Naophangba (428-518).<sup>19</sup> N. Debendra and the Muslim PanchyetLilong report (1932) stated that Sadar Para Koireng and Katwan Khan were the progenitors of the Muslims (*Pangal*) Aribam clan. The Meitei scholars are of the opinion that the Manipuri Muslims clan formation commenced with what is name as the AribamSagei since the King of Nouphangba. This *Pangal* population as found in 930A.D. was adept in preparing salt from dug wells, since their Muslim co-religionists used to called salt from the Bengal sea.<sup>20</sup> *NingthourolLambuba* stated that two Pasha and one *Pangal* village developed during the period King Irengba (984-1074A.D.). These *Pangal* introduced the procedure of rice broadcast and transplantation in Manipur.<sup>21</sup> Muslims were divided into four groups viz. Sheikh, Syed, Pathan, Mughal.<sup>22</sup> The group was numerous enough to form a clan, and King Naophangba had given to them a clan name called Aribam. In Manipur Sheikh groups occupy the largest Muslim population.

In Manipur context the migration and settlement of the Muslims in Manipur may be traced back to the reign of King Khagemba. This view is supported by many ancient Manipuri literatures including *CheitharolKumbaba*, the Royal Chronicle of Manipur. In the history of Manipur Muslim Khagemba period became so important to know their genesis, settlement pattern, status, economic life, cultural life, political life, etc.

King Mungyamba (1562-1597) was a great conqueror and his period was marked by large number of military expeditions. He died in 1597. His son Ningthou Lanba succeeded him in 1597, the same year of the death of King Mungyamba. At the age of 23 NingthouLanbu assumed the reign name Khagemba or conqueror of the Chinese. He was one of the greatest Kings of Manipur. Khagemba whose earlier name was *Sana Hihouhan Poirei Ningthou Hanba*<sup>23</sup> or *Ningthou Lanba*<sup>24</sup> had two brothers Chingsomba and Sanongba. In 1603A.D. on the day of

Meitei traditional 'HiyangeiKumjanba' day a boat race festival was held at *Leishang hidden*.<sup>25</sup> In that boat race festival the two brothers of King Khagemba-Chingshomba, the *Khurailakpa* and Shanongba, the *Yaiskul Lakpa* were competed with each other. As Chingshomba did not have his own boat, so he hired a race boat called *KabongbaChaokhongpaba* from his brother Shanongba. During the boat race a small portion on the edge of the boat was broken due to collision. When Shanongba was apprised of situation he refused to take back the boat even after it was repaired and also refused to accept a new similar boat but he demanded the original one which was not possible. The issue came to be known as *Shanongba Higaiwa* in the history of Manipur. The case was put up before King Khagemba who intervene in favour of Chingshomba.<sup>26</sup> Shanongba took exception to it and fled to Kachar along with his mother Queen Dawager Luwang Chanbambi and other nobles. He requested King PrathaPhinanda of Cachar, who was his brother in-law to invade Manipur.<sup>27</sup> Gangmumei Kabui pointed out that the Cachari King name Supradas Naryan accepted the request of Shanongba and sent Takharek (Yakharek) and Bhimbal who was his brother with a Cachari force in 1604A.D.<sup>28</sup> The Cachari forces crossed the western hill and reached the valley of Manipur where they encamped at Lamshang. The forces of the King Khagemba were captured at Luwang River. In the battle, luck was not in favour of the Meitei force so they retreated towards capital. The force of Cachari advanced to Khurai, the Northern division of the capital city. To encounter the advancing force of the Cachari Khagemba, the King of Manipur summoned all his nobles at the palace and appealed them to face and defeat the Cachari forces. Some brave Meitei nobles made surprise counter attack on the invaders and leaders of the invaders were taken prisoners. Yakharek surrendered to King Khagemba in Manipur with the promise not to invade Manipur in future. Then he went back to his Cachari Kingdom with Shanongba. However, the retreating Cachari forces made a notice of their King that Yakharek, Bhimbal and Shanongba betrayed them and became the alliance of King Khagemba.<sup>28</sup> Among the Manipuri forces who attacked on the Cachari there was one *Pangal* soldier whose name was Palak Koireng.<sup>29</sup> This gives a clue to know the Muslim settlement before this event.

On the request of Shanongba and his mother for the invasion of Manipur, the King of Cachar now engaged a leader of the Muslim mercenaries of a locality called Taraf near Habiganj in eastern Bengal.<sup>30</sup> It is said that King Paratha of Cachar thought that with the strength of his forces, the Manipuri soldiers could not be defeated so he requested his neighbor Mushalman Nawab Muhammad Nazir or BayajidKarrani of Taraf (Sylhet) which is at present at Bangladesh for help.<sup>31</sup> Taraf is located in the North east of Paragana of Serain, at a distance of about 34km and in the south west portion of the district of Sylhet about 10 miles from Habiganj. The Nawab extended his cooperation to the King of Cachar against the Manipuri King and sent a Muslim contingent numbering 1007 soldiers under the leadership of his younger brother Muhammad Shahni alias Bor Sena who was accompanied by sixteen leaders namely *viz.*, Munon Khan, Aman, Monai, Akon, Aluf, Chuleiya, Namfa, Faitong, Tumiya, Quamaya, Khendo, Aquya, Sapra, Muhammad, Punot, Ayamba and Kashra and joined the troops at Cachar on 15 of Mera in 1605.<sup>32</sup> As a part of the military tactics and technique Cachar King organized two groups of soldiers (i) Muslim troops under the command of general Shahni and (ii) Cachar troops under the command of Yekhrak and Bhimbal who were supported/assisted by 6 leaders namely Phaleifao, Maikafao, Sebudhi, Tikkaraj, Keikiyulung and *Tharakpa*. The combined force was led by Meidingucha Shanongba who was assisted by Labanga, Soiroysmcha, Takhongba, OinamchaPukchao, Thokchom Muba etc. proceeded to the *Meitei Leipak* for attack.<sup>33</sup> This was a joint Cachari and Muslim invasion of Manipur in 1606A.D. The Muhammadan soldiers arrived at the valley of Manipur through Khoupum and encamped on the bank of Sarang Yangoi which is at present at Lamangdong in the Bishnupur district, while the Cachar troop stayed in their camp on upper hill slope

of the Khoupum observing the movement of the Manipuri soldiers or the strength of the Manipuris.<sup>34</sup> The Royal Chronicle records the invasion of Manipur by the Mayangs and Shanongba. The invasion of combined force of Cachar and Muslims led by Shanongba was reported to King Khagemba by some betel nut traders of Lamangdong. King Khagemba without any delay, immediately rushed to the spot and encamped at Toubul and Khoijuman near the Yangoi River to face the invading force.

The *NongshameiPuyas* and in the works of the other scholars who are authorities on the Muslim (*MeiteiPangal*) of Manipur mentioned elaborately the details of King Khagemba's preparation to keep intact his Kingdom and to defend against invasion of Shanongba. The King organized many brave people of Manipur and constructed a fortress from *Awang Iharai* to *HaoyenYangoibung* which is identified with the areas lying to the North West parts of present Bishnupur<sup>35</sup> and divided it into four parts. Each side was defended by a group of troops.<sup>36</sup> King Khagemba acted as Supreme Commander and other important persons in the Khagemba's force were as follows:

1. MeidinguKurailakpa Koirengba/Chingsamba
2. Lairel Nongsamei/Surgo Lairikyengba Jagat Singh/ Chaksing
3. Kiyam Lairenmei
4. SektaChabutaba
5. MongbijambaHaomu Yaraba
6. Akhom Mayon
7. Salamcha Kiyamba
8. Okramcha Kiyamba
9. YairokпамчаKhungam
10. Ngangbamcha Koingamba
11. Yumnamcha Kiyamba
12. HaobamchaAroy
13. YellangbamchaKhungam
14. Pala Koireng
15. KhumukchaKoingam
16. Wangkheimayumchakiyamba
17. SalamchaCheksha
18. NongthonbamchaMoiramba
19. TakhenmayumchaAthouba
20. ThokchomchaKoireng
21. Chikomcha Lairenmei
22. SalamchaKoingam
23. Moibamcha Keisha etc.

The King of Manipur made fully ready for the battle with a contingent of one hundred eighty cavalry and two guns.<sup>37</sup> The Cachar troops led by Yakharek and Bhimbal went back to their homeland without informing to the Muhammadan troops after knowing the Military skill of the Meiteis or knowing the Meiteis skill in art of warfare.<sup>38</sup> The Kabuis of Khoupum informed the King of Manipur about the Cacharis retreat. Khagemba attacked the retreating force of Cachar. In the action Cachari leaders namely Phaleitao, Maikatao, Sebudhi, Tekkaraj,

Keikiyalung and Tharakpa were killed. Khagemba accidentally fell down from his horse and Munol Khan, a Muslim soldier tried to kill him but Khagemba was saved by *Nongshamei*, attacking on Munal Khan with a spear then Cachari troops retreated to their homeland without giving any information to Muhammad Shani.<sup>39</sup> Now without the Cachari troops, the Muslim force had to fight against the King Khagemba. The King of the Manipur realized that the military strength of the Muslim was considerably greater than that of his troops. He decided to have recourse to diplomatic measures as a means of diffusing the situation.<sup>40</sup> He sent *Nongshamei* who was well-versed in different languages like Parshi, Cachari, Bengali etc. to negotiate with the leaders of Muslim troops. *Nongshamei* made a proposal to Parsena, the Muslim leader for withdrawing both their respective troops. The Muslim leader accepted the proposal of *Nongshamei*. However, after the agreement had been arrived at, the Manipur force judiciously surrounded the unarmed Muslim troops and made an offer of surrender or death.<sup>41</sup> They replied that instead of being killed, they would rather settle in Manipur. The King of Manipur accepted their proposal.<sup>42</sup>

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