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A Glimpse on History of Manipuri Literature Upto Nineteenth Century: A Study

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Abstract

This paper intends to put a glimpse on the history of Manipuri literature with mention of some of the representative literary creations till 19th century. Every linguistic Community in this universe has its own language, literature and culture. Likewise, the Manipuri community also has its own language, literature and culture the history of which has been long belated. For centuries Manipuri people are having turmoil in social, cultural and political fronts. Such turmoil has brought many changes in Manipuri society and its literature, which are beautifully captured by many writers. Manipuri literature has its own richness of innate sensibility and has successfully safeguarded the flavor of its originality, whereas at the same time it has imbibed others as well in the due course of time, be it Sanskrit or Bengali. The paper also attempts to unfold the journey of Manipuri society and its literature till 19th century.

Key words: Manipuri Literature, History, Ancient, Medieval, Society.

Literature always plays a key role in developing culture, tradition and civilization of a particular community. The word 'Literature' is derived from Latin word 'Littera' which means "letter of the alphabet" and used in plural form. It describes analytically the happiness and sorrows, feelings and intuitions, the beauty and ugliness, love and hatred, good and evil etc. of the people. It is a written works in the forms of books, leaflets, periodicals, journal etc. specially those regarded as having artistic merit bearing contemporary human art, cultural, philosophy, etc. Further, it is expressed in the forms of stories, poem, drama, novels, travelogues, essays etc. on the subjects like culture, history, social, political and economic reflecting them of the prevailing conditions, situations of the contemporary human society.

It is said that literature of a particular community is the mirror of that community. Therefore, people study or have to study literature to know their past, present and future in the field of socio-economic conditions, situations and human civilization. Script is a must for literature as pronunciations of languages are portrayed through scripts and words. Manipuri script, better known as Meitei script, has been in existence since time immemorial which is evidently and clearly mentioned in the 'Cheitharol Kumbaba' the royal chronicle

which records the history of Meitei people from the early part of the first century A.D. All the earlier works of Manipuri literature were written in this script. Here, Dr. Kalidas Nag may also be quoted as he said, "This Manipuri Script was as old as Pre-Asoka period, and some letters occurring in the inscribed stone of Pre-Asoka Period, now in the Patna Museum are found in the Manipuri Script."¹ The inscription in the copper plate of the King Khongtekcha dated 799 A.D also represented the same. Manipuri Literature like other Indian Languages has accepted Sanskrit literature and criticism as its guide and inspiration preserving its own independent tradition or status which is about 2000 years old and also developed its literary style which is basically Meitei (Manipuri). The forefathers of the Manipuris had been belonged to a highly cultivated section in terms of literature and culture amongst the Tibeto- Burman language speaking people. It is apt to quote Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee who once said, "Among the various Tibeto – Burman Languages, the most important and in literature certainly of much greater importance than Newari, is the Meitei or Manipuri Language."² Manipuri is not only spoken in Manipur, which is one of the eastern most states of India, but also spoken in some parts of Assam, mainly in Barak Valley. It is also spoken in Tripura, Bangladesh and Myanmar (Burma) where there are the Manipuri habitations.

Prior to the 18th Century, the names of writers and the time of composition of literary texts were not properly mentioned or recorded in most of those works or books for which to arrange them in a chronological order is very difficult.³ That is why only an approximate period of time has been taken into account. During the reign of Garibniwaj Maharaj (king Pamheiba) (1709-1748), with the emergence of Vaishnavism in Manipur, a big number of old books, chronicle were burnt away under the influence of sage Shantidas Goswami.⁴ Notwithstanding, since the number of works of early literature is large and most of them are also of traditional oral literature, it is inconvenient to discuss here all those works. Hence, only a few works of the literature have been taken under discussion. The history of Manipuri literature upto 19th Century has been categorized into two periods. They are:

- Ancient - The Manipuri literature upto 17th century is considered as Ancient period.
- Medieval - The period between 18th -19th century is known as medieval period of Manipuri literature.

The Ancient Period of History of Manipuri Literature: The literary works of Manipuri literature upto 17th century is also known as 'Early Manipuri Literature'. The Manipuri Scholars/ Pundits like N.Khelchandra Singha, O. Bhogeswar Singha, Ch. Manihar Singha etc. enumerated the Ancient period of Manipuri Literature as from the pre-century time extending upto 1709 when Garibniwaj Maharaj (king Pamheiba) ascended to the throne of Manipur (Pre- Vaishnava Manipuri Literature). From different books in ancient times, we could find the people of this valley called the land of Manipur with different names- 'Mayai Koiren Poirei', 'Ngamthak Sarong Pung', 'Muapali'. Later on, the place was called as 'Porei Kunthokpa', 'Porei Mamai' and same is mentioned in books- 'Shaklon Lamlen', 'Subon Yeirenbi'. Primordially, W. Yumjao Singh reported on 1935 in Archaeological studies of Manipur Bulletin that 'Near Nungoibi and between Taibongthong there is a stone

with supernatural power known as Mani or Precious stone on account of which the place is known as 'Manipur'. Moreover people of different regions recognized the land Manipur with various names such as- 'Kathe' to Burmese, 'Mekela' to Tekhao/Asom, 'Moglai' to Kacharis, and 'Mekheli' to British. In the ancient times, the script written about Manipuri literature was called as 'Meitei Che/Paper' and it has been processed from Aloeswood (Agar). Script was written on 'Tengna Mana/ Tengna leaf', 'Kuwa Mana/Betel leaf'. The ink was manufactured from 'Wu da haoba cha/ Lac'; 'Tengali / lamp black' and 'Cheng/ rice'.⁵

During 17th century, several books were published without authors' name and year of publication. The earlier literature consists of ritual hymn, cosmogony, history and folks. Most of them were written in archaic Meiteilon (Manipuri). These books were divulged in poetic style and also some were found to be in prose. The books were:- 'Ougri', 'Numit Kappa', 'Sana Lambok', 'Wahonglon', 'Hijing Hairou', 'Poreiton Khuntokpa', 'Naothingkhong Phambal Kaba', 'Khamba-Thoibi', 'Lairemma Paosa', 'Khemcho'.

As depicted in Chronicle, in the early period traditional oral literatures had been prevalent in Manipuri and its written literature in the own script developed from the 12th to the 15th Century. Before the advent of Vaishnavism in Manipur, the Manipur language and the literature developed on its own without the help and influence of any other language or literature. The ancient Manipuri literary works are found to be both in verse and prose forms. But the works in verse seem to be precursor to that of the prose works in the early Manipuri literature. In the light of all these, rituals songs and hymns may be said to have ushered in the dawn of ancient Manipuri Poetry. We shall briefly discuss few of the works during ancient period.

Ougri: Ougri is a devotional poem and the finest literary composition addressing to the god Sun. It is believed that it was written in pre-Christian era as mentioned in the chronicle Laishra Pham. It was sung or recited on the occasion of coronation of King Nongda Lairen Pakhangba which occurred in 33 A.D. It is also traditionally believed to have been closely related with the creation of the earth itself.⁶ Ougri songs are sung till today on the occasion of 'Lai Haraoba', a religious and social festival. It is the real source of a variety of songs which is always sung with dance known as Ougri Hangen and Khencho (Lyrics) in chorus associated by Pena (a violin like musical instrument) and Instruments like drum.

According to Pundits/ Scholars of Meitei Lore, the inception of this festival is associated with the myth of creation of earth. The myth is described in the manuscript named 'Leithak Leikharon' as 'Asheeba', the first son of the almighty, created the earth at the command of his father by raising it from beneath the water. In the ritual dances of Lai Haraoba, the performers (young boys and girls) use to exhibit the cycle of life of human being – "like from the foetus in the womb of mother to birth and construction of houses for dwelling, cultivation and weaving of clothes for wearing by postures and gestures of the hands and the body".⁷

Lairemma Paosa: It is comparatively of simple diction and a love story repartee believed to take place between two (youthful) god and goddess. Though they are heavenly being, the god approaches to his beloved sweet heart as a careless youth by throwing a small piece of earth in her pitcher. To this, the goddess gave a sharp witty reply to him like a simple and unrestrained young girl that she is not yet fully grown up, so he need not make further advances. Such song is sung by men and women with proper and playful movements of the hands and the body in a cheerful tone.⁸

Khamba Thoibi: The growth of secular narrative verse in the shape of ballads is said to have its inception in the 12th Century. Moirang gave the first and the most romantic poem. The stories of ‘Moirang Saiyon’(Moirang incarnation) are highly poetical with historical background and Khamba and Thoibi being the seventh and the last ‘Saiyon’(incarnation). Manuscript fragments of the works basing on Moirang themes seem to have been found to be dating from the middle of the 13th century. As visualized by the ancient pundits and scholars, in terms of theme, treatment and proposition, the Khamba-Thoibi episodes, which is the greatest of the Manipuri romances, is magnificently an epic.⁹

Pundit Hijam Anganghal, a great writer of the middle period of Manipuri literature, has adapted and revived the Khamba- Thoibi episodes in 7 (seven) volumes. Dr. S.K Chatterjee in his ‘Languages and literatures of Modern Indian’(April 1963), has described the adaptations of the last Saiyon (incarnation) by Pundit Anganghal as- “ a huge poem of 39000 lines in Meitei on a popular theme, old ballads about which in Manipuri are still sung viz., the love of the Khamba and the Princess Thoibi, the 12th Century hero and heroine of the most romantic story of Manipur”.¹⁰

There are large numbers of popular songs in Manipur coming down from generation to generation which are composed by uneducated rural archaic poets. Most of them are extempore (oral and sung by the common people from all walks of life on the occasions like marriages and spring festivals to appease the gods and goddesses which are generally known as-

- i. Khulang Eesei (Love Song)
- ii. Kumdum Eesei (Season Song)
- iii. Louta Eesei (Ploughing Song)
- iv. Naosum Eesei (Cradle Song) etc.

All these folk songs are melodious store of people’s life as it has been passed on to forth generations for centuries.¹¹ With respect to prose literary works in the Ancient period, the earliest work available so far which is claimed to be dated from the 3rd century is the ‘Poireiton Khunthokpa’.¹² In the light of above, the following works which are narrative and descriptive long stories and are regarded as prominent in ancient Manipuri prose aspects- ‘Panthoibi Khongun’, ‘Naothingkhong Phambal Kaba’, ‘Khongjamnubi Nongarol’, ‘Pakhangba Laihui’, ‘Nongsaba Laihui’ and ‘Leiron’ etc. All these stories are of Pre-Vaishnavite in spirit and sentiment.

Cheitharol Kumbaba: It is the most important reliable and authentic royal chronicle which was emerged with the king Nongda Lairen Pakhangba when was ascended to the throne in 33 A.D. It emerges and develops gradually step by step in the 5th, 15th and 17th centuries. The chronicle became full-fledged in 1660. It contains the eclipse of the Sun, the Moon, earthquake, occurrence of comets, floods, famine, epidemics, invasions, victories and defeats of the kings and many other events covering a very wide range.¹³ Over and above the aforesaid royal chronicle, the ‘Amaiba Loisang’, the Department of Royal Scholars in charge of Royal Archives and Records, also used to maintain ‘Yumdaba Puyas’ which captures the genealogies of the families belonging to the ‘Salai Taret’ (Seven Clans) of the Meiteis. Those chronicles are written in the form of Manipuri Prose in a very lively and suggestive character. They are mutually supportive and enhancing. As these were compiled under the strict supervision of the ‘Amaiba Loisang’, the facts recorded are accurate.

Numit Kappa: Numit Kappa, literally meaning shooting down of the sun, is one of the oldest literary books in Manipuri literature. From then till date, Maiba-Maibis (Priest-Priestess) narrate Numit Kappa in various rituals. Tauhureng Nonpa and Numit Sana Khomadon had a servant named Khwai Nongchenpam Naicha Yekma Haotangla. Khwai Nongchengpam had to serve his masters throughout day and night. And he was not able to attend his own family responsibilities. He held his two masters responsible for that and hatched a plot to do away with the princess. He found the suitable opportunity and shot Tauhuren Ahanpa with sharp arrows using his marksmanship skill. Tauhuren Ahanpa was severely injured but manages to hide himself in a place called Khumbirak. Numitsana, the younger brother, now in great fear and went hiding underground. The suffering of common people was growing grimmer day by day as both the suns were disappeared. Finally with the help of priestess, the younger sun, Numitsana was brought out of the concealment which brought utter rejoice to the common people and whole land was lit bright. Numit Sana was given a ceremonial coronation with ritual hymns stating to obstruct recurrence of such unfortunate incidents.¹⁴

‘Numit Kappa’ is basically an allegory; it’s a story with a strong political overtone, nonetheless having a universal theme: struggle for power, misery of the common people and tyranny.

The Medieval Period of History of Manipuri Literature: According to the Manipuri eminent pundits/scholars like Ch Manihar Singha, N. Khelchara Singha, O. Bhogeswar Singha etc., the medieval period of Manipuri literature covers the period of 18th and 19th century i.e., from 1709 to 1891. Since the works during this period is large enough, it is not convenient to discuss here all those works covering the entire period. Hence only a few works of the 18th century, the first part of middle period have been taken for discussion.

In the beginning of the 18th century, Pamheiba popularly known as Garibniwaj ascended to the throne in 1709 immediate after his father’s (Charairongba) death who was the preacher of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Initially Garibniwaj also started to follow the Gaudiya faith in 1717.¹⁵ But he responded soon to the call of Shantidas Goswami from Sylhet district

to go over to Rama worship in 1737.¹⁶ He soon made his people votaries of the new religion without caring the strong resistance of the general people. As a result of this, worshipping of local ancestral deities, observance of traditional rites, performance of the religious festival-‘Lai Haraoba’ were put to a sudden end and the dead had since been burnt.¹⁷ It may be noted here that there was neither any class nor any caste in the Meitei society before the introduction of Hinduism till early part of the 18th century. But the influx of the terminologies Brahmanas and Kshatriyas to Manipur, and the mass conversion to Hinduism in the time of Garibniwaj led to the formation of two distinct social classes- Brahmanas and Kshatriyas. The two-fold social division ultimately resulted in some sort of class or caste distinction. As they represented two upper classes, the feeling of low and high emerge in the society and social distinction was maintained to some extent.¹⁸ These developments have, therefore usually reflected in the literature of the period. In respect of theme, diction etc. the writings have also been changed from those of the previous. Unlike in the previous works/productions, the system of mentioning the names of writers and dates/times of composition has been found to be implemented in most of the books/works. A good number of writers implemented in most of the books/works. Also a good number of writers got acquainted with Indo-Aryan languages mainly Sanskrit and Bengali. Developments of habits of interlarding their writings with words of those languages are also seen for the sake of emphasis. We shall discuss few of the works of the medieval period classified under heads below:

- Hindu epics
- Traditional Meitei faith
- Historical biography

Hindu epics: As per longings and instructions of kings/emperors, some transcreation works were carried out of some Hindu epics viz. the Ramayana , and the Mahabharata in Manipuri by Kshema Singha Moiramba with the help of Pramananda Nongjai Khumanthem, Mukundaram Khaishnam, Lakhmi Narayan Soiba, Ramcharan Nongthomba and Lakhmi Narayan Saikhuba who all were well versed in Bengali language.¹⁹ Out of seven Cantons (kandas) of the Ramayana all Cantons except Ayodhya have been transcreated and published in Manipuri-Adi, Ayodhya, Aranya, Kiskindhya, Sundara, Lanka and Uttara. In addition to these, many books based on Hindu religion were composed in Manipuri some of which may be mentioned here- ‘Birbahu Tuba’, (1713) by Murary and Gopi Singha ; ‘Ram Nongaba’ by Konthouyamba Labonga during the reign of Rajarshi Bhagya Chandra (1759-1798); ‘Parikshit Sarpayagya’ during the reign of Meidingu Garibniwaj; ‘Virat Shanthuprol’ (Virat parva of the Mahabharata) by Mayengbam Brindaban and Wahengbam Madhabram Pandit, ‘Arong Nandakumar Laibu Ningba’ by Sree Haricharan Wayenba and Sree Khelram Wahengba, ‘Sanamanik’ by Wahengbam Madhabram also a fine work during the reign of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra. Moreover, the introduction of Hinduism, no doubt, marked the beginning of a new age in the history Manipuri coinage also. All successors of king Charairongba down to the last independent king Kulchandra issued coins bearing the legends in Sanskrit either in Devanagiri or Bengali script.

Traditional Meitei Faith: Charairongba never attempted to impose the new faith of Vaishnavism upon his people and he erected the statue of Panthoibi and the Laiwa Haiba (Sanamahi). Vaishnavism became the dominant religion of Manipur during the reign of Garibniwaj (1709-1748). The King Pamheiba punished those who were of anti-Hindu dietary laws. The more the current of Hinduism got strong, the greater was the assertion of the value of the local faith.

Sanamahi Laikan: Sanamahi Laikan is the work which truly depicts this period, composed most definitely during the heyday of Maharaja Garibniwaj. The name 'Manipur' was first officially introduced in 'Sanamahi Laikan' during the reign of Maharaja Garibniwaj.²⁰ Meitei scripture 'Sanamahi Laikan' provides many aspects of performance of malicious act put forth by divine Sanamahi. The divine Sanamahi in the Manipuri theology has the corresponding virtues and powers of the Hindu Trinity (i.e. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva). Therefore, the status and rank of divine Sanamahi in the Manipuri pantheon are high and he is revered as next one to the supreme almighty in the Meitei religious thought and philosophy. The divine Sanamahi is attributed the power, function, duties and virtues of Lord Vishnu as in the Hindu pantheon. In this regard, Sanamahi is described to function as the proctor of sustenance and preservation of the universe or the three worlds as mentioned in Hindu divinity. The writer tries to establish the importance occupied by Sanamahi in Meitei life in 'Sanamahi Laikan' when it says that the creation of earth against many odds and filling it with living beings was due to the patronage of Awang Phatlou Laimakhoba, later Sanamahi, the first son of the almighty. During the reign of King Pamheiba, the local god was ignored and the enraged god made his presence felt by making the queen and his son mysteriously ill. The experienced physician Moirang Lalhanba appraised the king of his offense and the ways to please the ancestral god. But the King did not disposed to the suggestion after initial compliance. The writer here tries to bring a balance between the old local faith and the worship of Rama and deliberately avoids resorting to Indo-Aryan words.

Khagemba Langjei: Another work of that period is 'Khagemba Langjei', was intended to reinforce the traditional faith in Awang Phatlou Laimakhomba or Taibang Khaiba or Sanamahi which was continued during the reigns of Khagemba, Charairongba and Garibniwaj who enjoyed glory and success because of the blessings of the ancestral god. Similar to the epic 'Sanamahi Laikan', 'Khagemba Langjei' began with the incarnation of the Khagemba in this mortal world. As the Mughal intended to captivate Meitei lord Khagemba for annexation of the then Manipur they sent Kabui Asam with presentations to propose the Meitei king to come at the ferry on the river Barak on the west to establish friendly alliance between the Mughal and the Meitei. The Mughal plan to capture Khagemba when he was in the boat along with his body-guard for crossing iron chain which was set under the water and when the Meitei king mounded/ascended on the boat they were to draw the chain towards them with firing guns toward their opposite side to frighten the Meiteis. But the timing of their firing and drawing the chain were mistaken by themselves. During this course they captivated two Muslims namely Anankhan and Mangkan Khan. On the other hand the Mughal boat had carried Mongbijamba Yara, the body-guard of

Meiteilord Khagemba. Thus Khagemba escaped from the deceptive plan of the Mughals with grace and blessing of divine Sanamahi. There was another event also, in which Khagemba could get rid of the joint-plan to kill him on the east of Manipur. This is also assumed as the blessing of divine Sanamahi. King Charairongba (1697-1709) could achieve fame as a good administrator and had won many battles with the blessings of the god. And paid his tribute to the ancestral god by raising a temple and installing an image of him with new clothes and jewelry. The king Chingthangkomba finds its mention in the last part of the story that he had blessings of Taibang Khaiba during his troublesome and ordeal days. It is very much evident from this work that his intention was to highlight the prominence of the Sanamahi in the life of the Meitei kings. Apart from describing momentous social events, the work is also a fine literary specimen.

Sanamahi Laihui: Another anonymous work of the period was ‘Sanamahi Laihui’, which is combination of the previous two works. Clear background of Taibang Khaiba and Sanamahi was drawn in this work. The writer mentioned here that with blessing of the almighty, how the habitable earth was created against the destructive opposition of his youngest brother. And because of that, he was worshipped as god of living beings. The first prince-son of Meitei-king Khagemba was given birth to Meitei queen Korou Nongthil-Chaibee in the Meitei luni-solar month of (June-July) at the residence of Meitei-lord Khagemba. The newly born child was given the name of “Meidingngu (Meitei-lord) Macha Ahanba” at the first instant but he was also renamed “Sana Wapihan” as the second nomenclature of the first instant of naming the prince. The actual date of birth of Sana Waiphan is provided in different days of the same date. Sanamahi Laikan pleads for Friday while Sanamahi Laihui,²¹ Khagemba Langjei, Pakhangba Nongkarol favours for Saturday.²² The most auspicious day for the veneration of divine Sanamahi is afforded as the Thursday in the month of Eenga (a month in Manipuri calendar which falls in May-June) by the Meitei scripture Sanamahi Nauyom while Friday and Saturday are also prescribed for the same matter by the scriptures named Sanamahi Phankhong and Santhong Laigee Thounee. All these days are set as the birth day of the divinity.

From time to time the ancestral god asserted his significance in the life of Meiteis. The king Khagemba retorted to the worship of Sanamahi and hence the two kings immediately after him, Khunjaoba (1652-1666) and Paikhomba (1666-1697) had ruled very peacefully and we do not come across any sort of stirring during that rule. The king Charairongba (1607-1709) was cut down by lightning at an early age, probably because of his neglect to Sanamahi. Garibniwaj (1709-1754) had suffered miserably at the beginning of his tenure as a king. After the restoration of homage to the ancestral god, he achieved peace and prosperity. We can conclude here that “Sanamahi Laihui”, like other previous two texts tried to extoll the virtue of Sanamahi.

Chingoiron: The worship of nature and its various components form an important part of the Meitei religious practices. ‘Chingoiron’, literally meaning the worship of hills and mountains, is a collective name for a number of works on tussocks, hills and mountains held sacred by the Meiteis. The ‘Cheitharol Kumbaba’, the royal chronicle mentioned the

incident of 'Puya Meithaba' (burning of Ancient books of Manipuri Scriptures). The first reference to the burning of Ancient books were made by Khumanthem Kaomacha who was ballad singer turned historian in his 'Manipur Ittibritti' (1934) and the names of 123 books in manuscripts which were burnt are listed in this work.²³ More than 123 Meitei Puyas had been consigned at Kangla Utra to flames at around 9–10 a.m. Sunday the 17th day of Mera (21st October in 1729). Of the 123 manuscripts, the ancient chingoirons which were also burnt in this unethical and condemnable act namely, Langmaiching Chingoiron, Koubru Chingoiron, Loijing Chingoiron. Later on during this period 'Chingoiron' in the same spirit of worship of hills and mountains was scripted. They are comparatively short and cryptic and deal with indicating location of scared places, rituals and various articles associated with them. In this text, references are made to the Sri Hari and the Mahadeva in prayers, clearly indicating its inception after the advent of Hinduism in Meitei folks. However during the same period, original animistic religion of the Meitei and its practices were in continuance.

Historical Biography: Pamheiba or also more popularly known as Garibniwaj, is regarded as the one of the greatest king in the history of Manipur. In this period, there were prose with Sanskrit and Bengali Vocabularies and at the same time there were prose without such vocabularies. It is pertinent to mention 'Samsok Ngamba' and 'Takhel Ngamba', which were written to commemorate Garibniwaj's heroic achievements in the war which took place in 1717, without the influence of Sanskrit or Bengali vocabularies. 'Smsok Ngamba' was written by Laishram Aroi and Yumnam Atibar during the time of Garibniwaj Maharaja (1709-1748). It describes that L. Aroi accompanied the king Garibniwaj in the invasion of Samsok, a San kingdom on the Manipur–Burma Border and defeat by the great king of Manipur is recorded in the book.²⁴

Samsok Ngamba: 'Samsok Ngamba', is about the war which took place at Samsok, a part of eastern Burma. The sister of King Charairongba (1697-1709), Chakpa Makhao Ngambi, who was the queen of Burma after getting married to the Burmese King, was demoted after giving birth to a baby boy. The Manipuri king Charairongba, who was bed-ridden, was in great resentment due to the disgrace and unrighteous act by the Burmese empire to her sister. The Burmese king sought to marry another Meitei princess with rich presents, which didn't go well at all with the young king Pamheiba, who ascended the throne after the death of Charairongba. He pretended to oblige to the demand and with a very diligently designed plan accompanied by detachment of armed men in the guise of women crossed the Ningthi (Chindwin) river and attacked the Burmese army. The Burmese army was routed out of the place. The Meitei army invaded till Samsok and beleaguered entire region for one month. But within four days, there was reinforcement under the command of two Burmese generals namely, Chaothop and Tarung Tekwa who also faced humiliating defeat at the hands of the Meitei king and his brave soldiers.

The work is full of lively characterisations and whole gamut of emotions. The agony of the young princess going to alien land for marriage with comparatively old Burmese king, portrayal of the young king Pamheiba as legendary warrior due to his matchless strategy,

skills, courage and charisma. The author is able to instill the humane side of the king Pamheiba when he instantly obliged to the requests of residents of Samsok for food and reconstruction of their destroyed village.

Takhel Ngamba: 'Takhel Ngamba', by Nungambam Govinda Ram, depicts the war and heroic deeds of the king Pamheiba which fetched Meitei the victory, and again instills him as an epic and unparalleled leader. It is another historical work written during the reign of great king Garibniwaj which narrates in details the account of the invasion of Manipur by the combined forces of Takhel (Tripura) and Awa (Burma) and defeat of the invading forces by the Manipur army under the leadership of the king (1709-1748).²⁵ The Burmese were looking for an apposite opportunity to take a fitting revenge from the Meitei King. They could find an ally in Takhels who also had conflict in terms of collecting tributes from the tribal villages in the outskirts of Manipur. The two forces in-coalition attacked the Manipur. To counter the Takhels, Pamheiba sent a troop of army under the command of his trusted general Akong Haomacha. Later another general Thangjaba Chakrapani with Akong to knock down the invading Takhels. The King Pamheiba, who was still on his high spirits post last victory, immediately headed for south-west in order to retaliate the obstinate Burmese.

The diction in this work is more grand and stylized, and the king emerges bolder and more dashing as he successfully combated the two-pronged attack of the powerful forces. Apart from historical account the book highlights the laws of chivalry followed by the Manipuri warriors. It describes how the war prisoners should be treated and not be killed. The book also finds mention of tradition and customs of how the kings processed to war, how they were welcomed they returned after victory, etc.

There are many other literary works during this period depicting the political, social and religious fronts in Manipur and it will be impossible to mention all the books. Few of them are- Chingthangkomba Ganga Chatpa, Birbahu Tuba, Sanamik, Dhananjoi Laibu Ningba, Data Karna, Bhakta Charit, Laanglol, Tilain Laanda Narsingh, Chothe Thawaigi Pakhanba, Nungpan Pombee Luwaoba Thawanthaba Hiren, Ariba Meiteilongi Ramayan, etc.

At the end we can say that the period between 18th and 19th century was the most vibrant and turbulent period for Manipuri literature. There was break and extension of the literary tradition of writing narratives based on the lives of persons and also of religious books. It was the period when old religious stories of Manipur and its people seem to have revived. The contemporary works were significantly influenced by Hinduism, taking the help of vocabularies of either Sanskrit or Bengali or both the languages in addition to its own, which in turn helped enrich Manipuri literature as a whole to attain its grater epitome, despite turbulences, turmoil and unrest in social, cultural, political and religion fronts in the land of Manipur.

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