

## AN APPRAISAL ON THE REVIVAL MOVEMENT OF ISLAM AMONG THE PANGAL OF MANIPUR: RENARRATIVE AND REVIEWING

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### ABSTRACT

*The people who had been migrated from the East into Manipur in different periods were called 'Nongpok Haram' (Nongpok = East and Haram = Direction ie people coming from the eastern side). These groups of people came from the places like Kabo, Senbi (Shan) and Khagi (China) . Nongpok Haram indicates that these people came to Manipur during the reign of Meetei kings Naothingkhong (663-763)AD and Moramba (1709-1753)AD and assimilated into the social and cultural fabrics of the indigenous people of Manipur. The people who were coming into Manipur through the various ages of historical periods from Tripura, Shyllet, Cachhar, Assam etc were known as Nongchup Harm (Nongchup=West and Haram = Direction) . Indigenous records informed that the Mayangs (outsiders) entered into Manipur during Thingon Likmaba (891AD), the king of Khuman (Khuman Kangleirol, MS).The Mayangs were defeated by the Khuman king and war captive were allowed to settle in a particular place which was named as Mayang Yumpham and later on known as Mayang Imphal. The earliest Muslim who had settled in Manipur were from east Bengal and they are called Pangal. The Muslim enter into Manipur from Bengal not as conquerors, nor as traders or preachers but as prisoners of war, in the year 1606. Among the Meetei Pangal the movement of revivalism of Islam began towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such movement was required because Meetei Pangal were neither strict followers of Islam nor the followers indigenous Meetei religion for many years*

**Keyword:** *Pangal, Meetei, Islam, modernization, Masjid*

From Historical account it is known that Muslim inhabited in various places are known by different names as in China they are acknowledged as Hui, in Thailand as Hao and Southern side of the Myanmar they are called Pansi(Oinam Ranjit Singh, 2015:75-76) The Muslim in Manipur are known locally as 'Pangal' which is regarded

as a corrupt or derivative form of the word Bengal. R.K.Jhalajit Singh avowed that Pangal means Muslim in modern Manipur but in Medieval Manipuri it indicates as East Bengali, east Bengal was known as Bengal to the Manipuri, however, most people pronounced it as Pangal. Anyone living in that region or coming from that area was a Pangal irrespective of religious profession. The earliest Muslim settlers in Manipur were from east Bengal, as a result of which they are called Pangal. Later on, because of the change in the meaning, only the Muslim from Bengal were known Pangal. Still later any Muslim from any part of the world comes to be known as Pangal, although he had nothing to do with Bengal (R.K. Jhalajit Singha, 1992:13 and Dr. Sayed Ahmad, 2007:21).

*Puyas* (Annals) like *Sakok Lamlen Ahanba* and *Kangleilangba Pakhangba* made a reference to the coming of Muslim (Pangal) in Manipur which is the earliest reference (Kh. Chandrashekhar,1992:10 & Kokngangsana Rajkumar, 1955:2). Muslim began to settle in Manipur during the reign of Mongyamba (1562-1597) AD with the coming of three Musalmans from Sylhet in the middle of sixteen century (Md. Abdur Rahman, 1995:7 & Kheiruddin Khullakpam, 1997: 7). The king conferred on them the clan name *Aribam* (Th. Subhas Singh, 2007:22). *Cheitharol Kumbaba* records that the Muslim started to settle in Manipur during the reign of king Khagemba (1597-1652) AD (N. Khelchandra & L. Ibungohal, 1989:3). *Nongsamei Puya*, *Pangal Thorakpa* and other literary texts of Manipur mentioned that during the reign of king Khagemba, Sanongba the brother of Khagemba engaged Cacharis along with Muslim forces that were provided by the king of Taraf in Sylhet to attack on the Manipuri. In the ensuing battle, the Manipuri troops defeated the forces led by Sanongba, following which the Cacharis managed to escape while the Muslim troops including their leader Prasena, numbering about a thousand, were made prisoners. According to the *Lost Kingdom (Royal Chronicle of Manipur)*, “In the year Sak 1527 (English era 1605-6) Sanongba came from Cachar side with large number of troops to invade Manipur but Khagemba defeated them and took 1000 captives including their leaders with 30 elephants and 1000 rifles. He made those captives to settle in Manipur and appointed them to work as bugler, drummer, dhobi, mahut of elephants, syces for horses and other works according to their respective qualities”( L. Joychandra Singh:6). During the reign of king Khunjaoba (1652-1666), seven persons from Makak, South East of Taraf (Sylhet) had come to Manipur. Out of these, 3 (three) were Musalman. During Paikhomba’s reign (1666-1697) thirty seven Muslim and another six Muslim from Gujarat entered into Manipur and settled down (O. Bhogeshor and Janab Khan, 1973 & B. Kullachandra and Badaruddin, 1991). Thus the coming of Muslim in Manipur began right from king Khagemba or prior to Khagemba, which continued up to the reign of king Chandrakirti (1850-1886) AD (N. Debendra Singh, 17). The Muslim entered into Manipur in the year 1606 from Bengal not as conquerors, nor as traders or preachers but as prisoners of war (N. Khelchandra & L. Ibungohal, 1989:1). In course of time Muslim

population was strengthened by Muslim immigrants from different parts of India as well as marriage with the Manipuri.

The Pangal are believed to have originated from Sylhet and Cachar who entered in to Manipur to fight over the throne in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the battle ensued on the southern fringe of the valley of Manipur, Lainingthou Khagemba, the then king of Manipur, inflicted a crushing defeat on them; and they were taken as prisoners. However, the king pardoned those Muslim prisoners and made them settlement in the valley. They were given local women as wives and indigenous family titles or '*Yumnak Sagei*' to each family according to their respective occupation. Then in course of time, these Muslim, as they had a close contact with the Meetei and adopted Meetei tradition and language, could be more or less identified culturally with the Meetei. When the Muslim settled in Manipur, they used to share a common ecological niche with the Meetei and married Meetei ladies which brought a reciprocal exchange of cultural information between the Meetei and Meetei Pangal (Oinam Ranjit Singh, Vol.31, No.2:65.). The kings of Manipur and Meetei extended very generous treatment to the new comers by giving wives, lands etc. They (Meetei Pangal) regarded Manipur as their own country of permanent abode from which they did not turn their eyes away. The Muslim (Meetei Pangal) and Meetei lived as one people, there was no hostility or enmity between them and they live unitedly in peace and war time for Manipur. The Meetei Pangal are the only community in Manipur who speak Meeteilon (Manipuri) as their own language like the Meetei and take it as their mother tongue. However, with their coming, many Urdu words entered into the Meetei vocabulary such as Chalak (trick), Karbar (business), Dukan (shop), Hapta (week), Dag (mark), Moza (sock), Hinshap (account), Bhaki (credit), Hak (right), Ain (law), Pharak (odd), Khabar (news), Namuna or nomna (model), Darzi (tailor), Dalil (will) etc. (M.A. Rahman, 1983:7-10).

In fact, in the pre-colonial period, till 1873, they did not have 'Masjid' (Mosque) and were, for the most part, very ignorant of the religion they professed. It was during the British colonial period (1891-1947) that with the appearance of local Maulvis, Madrasahs and M.E. Schools for the Muslim were established. In the said schools and Muslim villages, Arabic, Urdu and Persians were taught so as to enable them to read Quran and understand Islam and its principles of *Namaz*, *Roza*, *Haz* and *Zakat*. In the post colonial period with merger of Manipur with Indian Union on 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1949, the Manipur Muslim introduced Purdah system which could not be readily accepted by the women as it restricted their movement in the society. They had also introduced '*Lungi*' a dress current in the days of the Prophet, among the local Muslim. Masjids were built for regular congregation of the local Muslim in their five-time prayer a day. They also preferred Muslim names to the earlier local family titles given to them; and thus they try to identify themselves with other Muslim outside the state. The population of the

Muslim in the post-colonial/post independent period has been multiplied by the immigrants chiefly from Sylhet and Cachar who had entered with the help of their relatives in the state(Md. Nazir Ahamad, 2013:10ff).

Among the Meetei Pangal the movement of revivalism of Islam began towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such movement was required because Meetei Pangal were neither strict followers of Islam nor the followers indigenous Meetei religion for many years. It is fact that when they began to settle in Manipur they sown the seed of Islam. However because of the marriage of Meetei women they were ignorant of Islamic religion, which is supported by numbers of historical evidences. McCulloch writes, “.....the whole Mussalman population being very ignorant of the creed they profess is not attended with the inconvenience which it would be amongst a better people. The Maniporee Mussalmans very industrious, indeed, I think them the most industrious portion of the population of Mannipore. They bore the same character in Cachar, where a good many are now settled. They, the *Phooagnai*, *Tengkul*, and serve *laloop* with the *Punnahs*(McCulloch, 1980:14-15). E.W. Dun in his Gazetteer of Manipur writes “The Muhammadans of this country are very ignorant of their religion(E.W. Dun, 1975:16).” In the Statistical Account of Manipur of R. Brown, it is written as “they were liberal and unorthodox because they had “no masjid”, and were, for the most party, very ignorant of the religion they profess (R. Brown, 1975 :15).” We find some contradiction in the statements of the English writers with the opinion of Kheiruddin Khullakpam who mentioned that there were Masajids and Panjgans before the seven year Devastation in Manipur(Kheiruddin Khullakpam, 1997 :225). However, on the basis of colonial writers the opinion of Kheiruddin Khullapam has no sound justification and no priestly class among the Meetei Pangal did existence at that particular time.

In the opinion of Mohad Shakil Ahmad, “The attempt, among, the Pangal, to be more in conformity with their din (roughly translated in this book as religion) began in Manipur with a renewed thrust in the study of Islamic education in Madrassas outside Manipur. This process started in the second half of nineteenth century and picked up in the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Mohad Shakil Ahmad, 2011:114). In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century some Meetei Pangal began to study Islamic religious works and many of them became Maulvis. Mention may be made of Abatullah of Irong Chessaba and Tanjo Maulvi. They were the first Maulvis of Meetei Pangal. Thoubal Moijing was the center of revivalism and many prominent Maulvi of Meetei Pangal were born in that place (Th. Subhas Singh, 2007: 105-106). The names of the some of the Maulvis who got the knowledge of Islam from outside Manipur during the period under survey are Mohd. Ebadullah Maulvi of Chesam, residence of Irong Chessaba, Mohd. Abdul Jalil Maulvi of Moijing clan, residence of Thoubal, Mohd. Usman Gani Maulvi of Khutheibam clan, residence of Keikhu, Mohd. Hafiz-Ali Maulvi of Moijing clan, residence of Thoubal, Mohd. Omedalhi Maulvi of Merai clan, residence of Haoreibi, Mohd. Moinuddin Maulvi of Maibam clan, residence of

Thoubal, Mohd. Sarfuddin Maulvi of Phundrei clan, residence of Haoreibi, Mohd. Bro Mia Maulvi of Basei clan, residence of Haoreibi (M.A. Janab Khan, 1972:42-45).

It is reported that Maulana Abdula, Maulana Kiramat Ali and Maulana Abdul Jalil were the earliest Meetei Pangal who went outside Manipur to study Maulvi during the king Chandrakriti (1850-1886) and king Surchandra (1886-1890) (Mohad Shakil Ahmad, 2011:115). Meetei Pangal went to different places of India i.e., outside Manipur such as Cachar, Shyllet, etc. to study Maulvi and they had renewed the process of making Pangal beliefs increasingly conform to Islam (Mohad Shakil Ahmad, 2011:115). B.C. Allen wrote “Their Maulvi are Manipuris, who have been sent to Cachar to be instructed in the principles of their faith by Maulvis from Hindustan. They are said to be fairly well acquainted with the doctrines of their religion .....” (B.C. Allen, 2002 :64-65). In the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century Maulvi education started, and in the first part or early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century we appeared a self conscious attempt to revitalize Islam. It is said that “In beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Muslim self consciousness had started. Some Manipuri Muslim had sent to Northern India for undergoing religious training as Maulvis. It is said that the first trained Manipur Muslim Maulvis returned to Manipur in 1910 only and they started the Islamic revivalism in Manipur. However, they did not suffer from any social and religious persecution from the Hindu ruling families and the Hindu subjects (Gangmumei Kabui, :100).”

The emergence of trained Maulvis in the Meetei Pangal society of Manipur came to witness a strong pursuit in terms of giving and absorbing Islamic knowledge – *Namaz, Roza, Haj, Zakat* etc. In this regard Mohad Shakil Ahmad observed as “The Maulvis devised their own ways of diffusing knowledge associated with Islam learned mostly from Urdu commentaries of Quran and Hadith. As a result their *Waaaz* (lecture about Islam) and *Nasihbat* (advice, preaching the truth), delivered in Manipuri, were interspersed with Arabic/urdu. They would usually come to a home, according to a prior arrangement, where they would sit on a *Kangthol Phal* (a small bed) placed at corner of the *Mangol* (verandah) and from their Maulvis would deliver their *Waaaz* and *Nasihbat*, listened to by an eager gathering consisted of man and women. Women are sitting in a separate quarter usually inside the house. This exhortation is known as *Lairik Toubu*. Thus, men and women gathered from the Leikai to listen to the Maulvi would imbibe and absorb the knowledge of Islam imparted to them” (Mohad Shakil Ahmad, 2011:120).

In 1907-1908 a Madrassah was opened at Lilong. Numbers of the Madrasshas were established at the different places of Meetei Pangal inhabited area of Manipur, which were already mentioned. Madrassahas are the entrance of religious education which involved daily prayer of Islam etc. According to Dr. N. Basanta “since many years a Muhammadan School was in existence at Lilong (village at the south of Imphal, where fairly large number of Muslim population was concentrated). A new Madrassa was established in 1908 by introducing curriculum in

Arabic, Urdu and Persian at the Muhammadan school. Owing to the introduction of the study of these classical languages the number of boys attending this school was trebled in the 1908, and an additional Maulvi was demanded in the year's budget. In 1944 the number of Madrassahas reached 10 and these exclusively stood for the Muslim boys and girls "(Dr. N. Basanta, 1998:39).

Masjid becomes one of the foremost religious institutions of the Pangal. It emerged among the Meetei Pangal society on large scale because of the revivalist movement. Masjid also became as the platform for discussing the socio-religious issues of the Meetei Pangal. In every locality of the Meetei Pangal, there is one or more than one Masjid. The officiating priest of the Masjid is called Imam who is assisted by *Maujins*. Imam is acted as an interpreter of the Islamic precepts. A committee of Masjid is constituted in every Meetei Pangal locality under the advice of Imam. The committee looks after those Pangal who are against the Islamic way of life, like not performing *Namaj*, *Roja*, *Purdah* and those who take drugs, indulge in adultery etc. As we know that there are lots of changes in the dress of the Meetei Pangal after revivalist movement. *Purdah* system appeared in the Meetei Pangal society very lately, which is also attributed to the revivalist movement. Earlier such system i.e., *Purdah* system did not prevalent among the Meetei Pangal. *Maktabs*, the religious schools are attached to the Masjid where the Meetei Pangal children are given the elementary education in Islam, taught the reading of Quran and the basis of their faith either by Imams or Maulvis from the locality (Dr. Sayed Ahmad, 2007 :24).

*Jamiat-ul-ulama*, another important religious institution was established in Manipur in 1961(Dr. Sayed Ahmad, 2007 :24). The Jamiat is an apex organization of Ulama. It works for the propagation of Islam and its values; to secure and save guard the religious, educational, cultural and civil rights of Muslim; a revival of Islamic and Arabic study; educational and socio religious reform of the Muslim etc. *Jamial* serves as the both for the Madrassha in Manipur(Dr. Sayed Ahmad, 2007 :24). Other institutions like Manipur Wakf Board, Manipur Haji committee also furnish the religious need of the Meetei Pangal community. In fact these bodies as stated above not only serve as the vanguard of the Meetei Pangal community and helps in asserting their religious identities but also introduce Islamic dress code, manners, lifestyle etc. among the Meetei Pangal. The revivalist movement among the Pangal started with great effort of *Ulama* and the movements reached each momentum in the part of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Thus, the movement of revivalism among the Meetei Pangal of Islam began towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such movement was required because Meetei Pangal were neither strict followers of Islam nor the followers indigenous Meetei religion for many years. It is fact that when they began to settle in Manipur they sown the seed of Islam. However because of the marriage of Meetei women they were ignorant of

Islamic religion, which is supported by numbers of historical evidences. Oinam Ranjit Singh portrayed as “.....the seed of Islam was sprouted in the soil of Manipur with the settlement of Muslim. However, the Meetei Pangal never adopted the conversion policy in Manipur. They neither converted the native non-Muslim population to Islam nor did ever force them to accept their faith(Oinam Ranjit Singh, 2015:75-76)”.

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