

## PRE-COLONIAL EDUCATION IN MANIPUR - A FOCUS ON INDIGENOUS EDUCATION SYSTEM SINCE 33A.D. (A RETROSPECT)

L. Basanti Devi

Associate Professor, Standard College, Kongba, Manipur

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### Abstract

*Education in the traditional sense means imparting knowledge and skill as well as controlling or disciplining the behaviour of an individual. The history and civilization of a nation is reflected by its education. It also tells the advancement of a race in the matter of experience, knowledge, wisdom, aptitude, skills, and other human values from time to time. The way of conservation of knowledge and skills and the methods of its transmission was regarded as the education of the native people of Manipur in the early period. The present paper is to focus a retrospective historical background of the growth of education in Manipur since 33 A.D. upto 1891.*

**Keywords:** pre-colonial education in manipur - a focus on indigenous education

Manipur lies between 93.03E and 94<sup>0</sup>.78E Longitude and 23<sup>0</sup>.83N and 25<sup>0</sup>.68 N Latitude with an area of 22.327sq.km. It is bounded on the North by Nagaland, on the South by Mizoram and the Chin Hills of Burma (Myanmar), on the East by Burma and on the West by the Cachar District of Assam. Topographically it has valley area and hills areas. The Meities who predominantly resides in the valley of Manipur are the largest ethnic group of the state. Other communities such as the Meitei Pangals or Muslims Mayangs, Chakpas and other also settled in the valley. The people of various other tribes dwell in the hills surrounding the valley. The recorded history of Manipur begins in the first half of the Christian era. Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Royal Chronicle of Manipur recorded that the first historical king of Manipur was Nongda Lairen Pakhangba who ascended the throne of Manipur in 33A.D. Manipur was formerly an independent kingdom and subsequently merged into the Indian Dominion on 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1949. Manipur has its own script. According to Linguistic survey of India the Manipuri (Meitei) belong to the kuki chin group of Tibeto-Burman family and its languages. However due to the limited number of transcribed books and other written materials, in the earlier days, education was mainly confined to the oral type of education relating to the ethical, moral spiritual and the way to attain perfect living of a person throughout his lifetime. Over and above this it relates to the imparting of skills of military training, Martial arts, vocational training, indigenous games and sports, the arts of weaving, embroidery etc. Later on many books on history religion, medicine, fine arts, fighting, philosophy of life, astrology etc. were written. These books written with Manipuri script popularly known Meitei Mayek. Written records and other literary accounts highlighted something about the early system of education in Manipur before the advent of modern (western) system of education that started since 1883. The scholars of Maichous of Manipur have written books on the leaves of Palm, Agarbak and Meitei Che which is an indigenously manufactured paper. They used local made ink made out of lac, lamp and rice etc. In earlier times education in Manipur was under the

supervision of an institution known as Yoirel Loishang (Yoirel-Loishang-Department). During the reign of king Charairongba (1697-1709) the said Yoirel Loishang came to be known as Pandit Loishang. Under this department there are four sub-departments<sup>(4)</sup> viz (1) Yoirel Maichou Loishang (Scholar), (2) Amaiba Loishang (Priest), (3) Asheiba Loishang (Songster/Singer), (4) Lairik Yengba Loishang (Writer/reader).

The head of the Yoirel Maichou Department was the overall head of the Pandit Loishang. Under this Pandit Loishang there were some such posts like the Pakhanglakpa (composed by three officials) and Nahalakpa (composed of three officials). Both of them were important functionaries of education, who impart education to the younger group of people. Under the supervision of these instructors the pupils were expected to achieve a perfect physical and mental strength, courage and obedience. Besides providing physical strength and courage to the pupils education aimed at inculcating virtues like truthfulness obedience, fortitude, sincerity and politeness. Moral education was also an inalienable part of general education. One who attains knowledge in fine art such as dance and music and also in the traditional martial arts with the armed (Thang-Ta) and unarmed (Sarit-Sarat) was regarded as the mark of the educated person. And, the knowledge and skill in the art of weaving and embroidery was regarded as the hallmark of girl's education. However, this kind of knowledge was obtained from their elder womenfolk at their respective homes. This shows that ancient Manipuris emphasized all round development of the personality through education. Charairongba Khongul a book which deals with moral lessons, statecraft etc. enshrined that a person who was devoid of learning was considered useless and a good-for-nothing fellow. The text reads thus

“Bidyairikheitrabadithawaiarembane  
Wakhalmatouleitabapungdileibakamangbane.  
Bidyairiknattanapathouamaleite”

Other educational institutions known as Pakhangfal & Leishafal were already prevailed both hills and plains areas in order to educate the boys and girls. They were the centres where ethical education was taught by the elders before their couple lives. These

centres are still retained in the hill regions. Another book called *Sakok Lamlen* written in Archaic Manipuri throws light on the way how the students learnt from their teachers. The Education in Manipur may be divided into three types- i) Gurukul system (Teacher and Student tradition). ii) To impart training the children by hiring experts. iii) To teach the children by the parents and elders in their home and to the house of the elders (learning through family tradition).

Some of the reknown Pandits (Scholars) of the earlier days were Ashangbam Laiba who lived in the court of King Naophangba (428-512 A.D.), Apoimacha, Langol Lukhoh, Konok Thengra, Salam Sana, Yumnam Tomba, Khaidem Tomba in the court of King Khagemba (1597-1652 A.D.). Among Gopi, Nungangbam Gobindaram in the court of Garibniwaj (1709-1748 A.D.), Wangkhei Pandit Gopiram, Madhob Wahengba in the court of Bhagyachandra (1763-1798 A.D.), Chaobaton Pandit, Khumujamba Pandit in the court of Chandrakriti (1850-1886 A.D.). They left behind many books and the valuable documents about the development of education in Manipur.

Early system of education in Manipur is depicted in the book *Naothingkhong Phambalkaba-as Naothingkhong* (663-763) was sent of the Chief of Luwang Ningthou Punshiba who was supposed to have an exceptionally longer life. Naothingkhong was given training in teacher and student tradition on history moral code, rites and rituals, statecraft and in different arts. During the time of King Loiyamba (1078-1112 A.D.) Lallup system was introduced in Manipur. (Lal-war, Lup-organisation) Lallup system was based on the military service which later extended to civil and economic activities of the state. Under this system every able male from 16-60 years will render their service to the state for ten (10) days in every 40 days. During the days of their service they also learned varieties of industrial works and military education. King Mongyamba (1562-1597) gave military education to king Khagemba. During king Khagemba's (1597-1652) time many Meitei books were written. He established Lairik Yengba Loishang. As there were no proper system of education the learning, writing and reading was confined to a few section of people especially royal family, relatives and countries. During the reign of King Garibniwaj (1709-1748) Hinduism became the state religion of Manipur. His reign was a turning point in the history of Manipur. Under the investigation of Santa Das Gosai a Hindu missionary from West Bengal more than 120 books better known as Puya (an authoritative holy book of Meitei) written on different subjects were burn down. This incident was known as Puya Meithaba. Every year on 10<sup>th</sup> October people of Manipur mourn for this lost. Bengali script was introduced in Manipur which affected to the growth of indigenous education system in the state. Even after the introduction of Bengali script formal education was not imparted to all common people. It seems that a compulsory education was imposed to immigrant Brahmins for the religious

performance. But common people were ignorant of the benefit of the reading and writing.

Since Manipur is situated in a strategic point and always threatened by external aggression from the neighboring countries like Burma, China etc. and by inter-tribal or inter-communal tends, physical education and martial art rather than literary education were vigorously encouraged. The person who could show his merit in sports, hunting and fighting were highly honoured and respected. The physical education imparted through physical activities was very popular. This systematic way of education existed since the days of king Pakhangba (33 A.D.) It consisted learning of military techniques, physical exercises, use of armbai, sword, spear and riding of ponies. Martial arts may be regarded an important art of education among the Manipurians. It is also believed that before learning this martial arts education there existed a system of oath taking as the student should stand on a plate of big stone by saying with this art he would dedicate himself for the country. The technical education like carpentry, dyeing, smithy, metallurgy, weaving etc. also imparted in the early days. This system was vividly shown in the book *Loiyumba Shinyen* a royal edict of King Loiyumba. In the field of Medicine Maibas (Male healer) and Maibis (Female healer) prepared a wide range of medicines from the herbs, shrubs trees and other animal organ as well minerals. The book *Hidaklon* (Hidak-Medicine, lon-study) shows the knowledge of preparing medicine by medical experts of those early days. Not only the medicines they also use some words called in Manipuri Laiwa (Chanting of hymns) (Lai-God-Wa-Word) in the treatment of the patient. Another form of education starting from the ancient period was through several art form. The family is considered to be starting point of education. The children used to learn the preliminary art of dancing from their mother and other member of the family. The most important form of art among Manipurians is Jagoi (dance). Manipuri Laiharaoba (worship of Sylvian deities) and Manipur Ras Lila well known creative form of dance. In the Laiharaoba shows the ideas of creation of earth, household ethics, physical education such as Mukna (wrestling). Yubilakpi (Manipuri Rugby) Kangjei (Hockey) etc.

As mentioned above Manipur lies in a strategic point and always disturbed by the external pressure Manipurians were taught to the patriotic, love and sacrifice for the country. To preserve the freedom and independence the Manipurians were trained to become soldiers by developing sentiment of patriotism. As the child grows up he was expected, to learn the skill of self defence and attack which is known as sharitsharat (defence and attack) of satjal (Martial arts). Since the very early days women have been playing an important role in the socio-economic and political affairs of the state. They learn the art of dance, music weaving, embroidery moral ethics as well as martial arts. Weaving is done in every family, rich or poor. One loom for one female is compulsory to weave cloths for the family members. So, the training for proper



weaving is essential. In early days in selecting a good bride, the knowledge of weaving was asked and weaving equipment were regarded as an essential items of the brides wealth. The women who learnt how to cook deliciously were also regarded as "Goddess of Wealth".

A new system of education emerged in Manipur with the contact of the English (British). After the first Anglo Burmese war 1826, a British political Agent office was opened 1835 in Manipur. The British officers were very sock to the ignorance of the Manipur masses. So to give the light of western education for bringing good governance in the state and to impart western scientific knowledge expert were made to introduce western education from 1835 upto 1891 ceaselessly without much success. In 1872, Major General W.E. Nuthal the Political Agent opened a school at Imphal with English language as the medium of instruction. The People of the land did not appreciate or encourage to the establishment of English School and parents did not sent their children to that school. The people of Manipur also thought that if they learned English, they will be compelled to adopt Christian religion, the same way Hindusm was imposed in Manipur during the time of king Garibniwaz. Consequently the attendance in the school was very poor. They refused to take any kind of assistance given by the Englishmen to start English education. The boy who attended the English School was treated as an untouchable and not allowed to enter into the house with school dress. They should changed their school dress. As a result no further English School could established for a long time. "The question of education may be dismissed in a very few words. There were no schools or any wish for them on the part of the authorities. About a year ago I had an offer of assistance in forming a school in Manipur but the offer was declined by the Manipuries who said they preferred remaining ignorant. So illiterate they that some of the highest officials can neither read nor write and are not a with ashamed of their want of knowledge".

Slowly many changes have comes. The feeling of untouchability has gone in society. In 1885 a middle English school was opened by the then Political Agent of Manipur Sir James Johnstone with the permission of the king of Manipur. Sir Chandrakriti Singh K.C.S.I. He allotted a plot of land for the school building Maharaja Johnstone as Johnstone Middle English School. The school have a poor number of student. "The number of boys attending to Johnstone School fell off during the year, as there were 100 at the close of March 1889 and in March 1890 there were only 78 or a decrease of 22". With the establishment of this school there was a progress in the education in

Manipur. Upto 1891, the prevailing system of education was existed in Manipur. In 1891 the Anglo Manipur war was broke out in Manipur. Manipur was defeated and lost its independence into the hands of British. After this was under the colonial rule many changes were brought in Manipur in all respect.

#### Conclusion

To conclude, Manipur, an independent sovereign state had her own system of education. Before, the advent of writing the education system it was mainly based on oral teaching. Manipuri practiced many forms of education, physical, martial art technical, art form of education etc. with the traditional ways of education. An individual aimed at over all development. Political, Socio-religious changes reflected to the development of the education system of the state. With the coming of the Hindusm the Education system was changed with Bengali script from Meitei Mayek (the original script of Manipur). Again with the coming of the European mainly Britishers the western education or English education was introduced in Manipur. Therefore, the development or the history of education in Manipur may be discussed in many stages. Lastly, the Manipuri mainly the Meities perceived their traditional education on games and sports, dance music, weaving technology, through their ancient literature, etc which can be shown in their achievement all over the world.

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