

MANIPURI MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT IN BARAK VALLEY

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ABSTRACT:

Manipuri settlement in Barak Valley is from ancient time. There are about 195 Manipuri villages in Barak valley. To trace the origin of the Manipuris in the valley one is invited to look back to the past. Historian view that the Manipuris belonged to Manipur, who have migrated from their homeland in remote past due to various reasons. The matter of their migration is clearly evident from the used of the epithet 'Manipuri' as their identity.

Manipuri migration in Barak valley also took place at different places at different period of history and number of causes and circumstance were involved in it. In the historical evidence of Manipuri recorded that the first settlement of Manipuris in the valley took place during the reign of king Kaokhomba (411-428 A.D) a king of Manipur, when one ChingjelNaralPanganba migrated to the Barak valley in the 5th century A.D. Then centuries after, a limited number of Manipuri families also settled in Khaspur. They were the relatives of the Princes Induprava, who was married to Krishnachandra, a Cachari king. In fact, the influx of the Manipuri took place as a group during the Burmese occupation of Manipur 1819-26 A.D. Thus, the migration and settlement of Manipuris in Barak valley has been discussed in various phases. The major depredation of Burmese invasion(1819-25A.D) in Manipur which is known as the 'ChahiTaretKhuntakpa' or seven years Devastation in the history of Manipur.

Key words: Manipuri, Settlement, Laiyingthou, Mongloid, Austric, Khuntakpa, Escape, Meidingu, Bagidaw, Dimasa, Kachari, Cachar etc.

Introduction:

Entire Barak Valley was referred to as 'Cachar', although at present, Cachar is one of the three districts of the valley – Karimganj and Hailakandi being the other two districts, situated in between longitude 92°15" and 93°15" east and latitude 24°8" and 25°8" north covering an area of 2680 square miles. It is bounded on all sides the hill ranges of Meghalaya, North Cachar Hills of Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura with opening towards the west to present Bangladesh. Before independence, it constituted the whole of the eastern part of the Surma Valley.

In the dense forest tracts adjoining Manipur and Barak Valley, there existed trade routes and innumerable foot track, which served as inter-communication in the past. In the context of Indian trade with colonization in South-east Asia, R.C. Majumdar stated that in ancient time, Indian proceeded to Far East by land routes through Bengal, Manipur and Assam.¹ In the 11th century, there was a route from Pattikara kingdom of East Bengal to central Burma through Cachar, Mizo hills and Manipur.² In the medieval periods, flourishing trade centers sprang up at Mohung-Dijua and Rangarung, Mohung-Dijua was place situated on the frontiers of Ahom and Kachari kingdoms and the this place, the AhomsNagas, Kacharis and Manipuris exchanged their goods.³ In the 13th century, the Barak Valley was ruled by the Tipperahs, a section of the Bodos, and capital of the kingdom was at 'Khalangsha' in Cachar. Khalangsha was perhaps the ancient name of Rajghat, on the bank of Rukni. However, in the early part of the 16th century Cachar was annexed to Tripura.⁴ Early part of the 18th century Ahom Raja Rudra Singh visited Tipperah Raja's court on the three occasions between 1709-1715 A.D. On their way to Tipperah court they had seen at Rangarung Many Manipuris selling gold, bell metal utensils and cloths to Kacharis and Tipperahs.⁵ As a result, some Manipuri settled down in Cachar.

Any scholar does not mentioned for certain who were the earliest inhabitants of Barak Valley. From indirect evidences, it is presumed by scholars that the earliest settlers in the valley were Tibeto-Burman speaking group of different Mongoloid people and some Austric speaking people also migrated in the valley.⁶ Later period most of the territories of the Cachar(Barak Valley) plains were perhaps under the nominal control of Tripuri royal house. Subsequently Chilarai, the brother of Koch king Narnarayan, conquered the reign and put it under the charge of his official. Cachar plains within no time freed himself from his overlord and started functioning as independent ruler from Khaspur, his

capital. In the year, 1745 This Koch kingdom was later merged together with the Hiramba Kingdom through a matrimonial alliance and the Dimasas shifted their capital from Maibong to Khaspur.⁷ Last second king of Kachari Krishnachandra who married to Manipuri princes Induprava, daughter of Modhuchandra. Under the influence of Manipuri King, Kachari king and his followers became more religious, finally, Kachari king initiated to Vaisnavism.⁸

In the history of Manipur Laiyingthou Khamlangba visited Tipperah via Cachar in 1st century A.D.⁹ Laiyingthou Chingjel Nara Panganba migrated to Thongnang Pasa (Mayang Leibak) in 5th century A.D.¹⁰ In the reign of Meidingu Thangbi Lanthaba (1302-1324) his son Kwakpa Thawan Thaba married with Kachari princes Chingurembi.¹¹ In the reign of Meidingu Chalamba (1545-1562) and Meidingu Mungyamba (1562-1597) and in reigned of Meidingu Pamheiba (1709-1748) his daughter Haripriya married with Kachari King Sandhikari.¹² Consequently, many Manipuris were migrated to Cachar and Dimasa Cachari also migrated to Manipur with their Princes as followers and assimilated with Manipuri. In the year 1765 A.D., Burmese attacked to Manipur and Chingthangkomba Maharaj fled to Kachari kingdom and he went to Ahom court with Kachari king.¹³ After the demised of Chingthangkomba (Bhagyachandra Maharaja), Labanyachandra became the king Manipur. After two years, Maharaja Labanyachandra demised in the 1801 A.D. and Modhuchandra became the king of Manipur. Maharaja Modhuchandra gave his daughter Princes Induprava to Kachari king Krishnachandra and numbers of Manipuri families were settled in Khaspur and neighboring village. They were retinues of princes Induprava.¹⁴

After the demised of Kachari king Krishnachandra in the year 1813, his brother Govinchandra became the new king of Cachar and married with his sister in-law (widow) Induprava (wife of his brother Krishnachandra), against her will. Besides the trouble caused by the Dimasas, Govinchandra had to face many problems within his kingdom itself. He became dissatisfied with his tyrannical rule, and it exasperated when he married Induprava. The people felt insecure under his rule, and the Raja was deprived of proper co-operation from indispensable quarters.¹⁵

By that time in Manipur, Maharaja Chourjit Singh was the ruler. His brother Marjit Singh feeling jealous of the throne connived with Burmese, and thus, the later invaded Manipur in 1812. Ultimately, by 1813, his brother Marjit Singh expelled Maharaja Chourjit Singh and the former took shelter in Cachar with his brother Gambhir Singh. They sought the assistance of Govinchandra, but were refused.¹⁶

On the other hand, Marjit Singh, having consolidated his authority in Manipur with Burmese support invaded Cachar. Once more Govinchandra invoked the intervention of the British Government, but no notice was taken of his application. Therefore, Govinchandra requested help from Chourjit Singh and Gambhir Singh. With the help of the two Manipuri brothers Govinchandra could expel Marjit Singh from Cachar. Before the engagement, Chourjit Singh got the consent from Govinchandra to handover southern part of Cachar in the event of their success against Marjit. Hence, from 1818, Chourjit Singh and Gambhir Singh had been ruling over some part of south Cachar independently. Govinchandra's principality was saved for the being. Chourjit Singh, Gambhir Singh, and Tularam took advantage of Govinchandra's troubles and plundered Cachar. Ultimately, the Cachar Raja was ousted from his Kingdom and compelled to take shelter at Sylhet, a British Division now in Bangladesh, and Manipuris ruled over the whole south Cachar. In 1819, Bagidaw became the king of Burma, and Marjit was ordered to attain the coronation but he refused to go. Being angry at the defiance of his order, the Burmese king sent a large army under General Maha Bandula to invade Manipur and punish Marjit. Marjit was defeated and escaped to Cachar and compromised with Chourjit and Gambhir Singh.¹⁷

The three Manipuri brothers living in Cachar split the Kachari Kingdom into three divisions and each governed one part during 1819-1823, from new capitals, Gambhir Singh from Gumrah, Marjit Singh from Hilakandi and Chourjit Singh from Dunguripar near Sonaimukh.¹⁸

Conclusion:

It is presumed that Manipuri settlement in Barak valley is early period. However, large number of Manipuri settled in the valley is during the seven years devastation of Manipur in hand of Ava (1819-1826), popularly known as 'Chahi Taret Khuntakpa' in the history of Manipur. Therefore, the largest number of Manipuris left their country and settled in Barak Valley, Tripura, Brahmaputra Valley, Khasi Hills, West Bengal and Bangladesh. Gambhir Singh restored his power in Manipur, but

many of Manipuris remained backed in Barak Valley, Bangladesh.

(An official report of 1832 showed that a large proportion of the new settlers consisted of Manipuris, who being adverse to the system of government in their own country had determined not to return to it, and had in consequence, obtained grants of land in Cachar. Even after the annexation of Cachar plains to the East India Company's territory in 1832, the migration of the Manipuris still continued. All the factors worked together leading to the migration of the Manipuris into the kingdom of Cachar, which later on became a district under the British.) A census taken in 1851 showed the population figure of the district at 85,522 of which 30,573 were Bengali Hindus, 29,708 Bengali Muslims, 10,723 Manipuris, 276 Assamese, 62 Europeans, 6,320 Kukis, 5,645 Nagas and 2,215 Dimasas. An increase in the number of Manipuri settlers in Cachar plain was also seen in another census taken in 1857. The census of 1931 put the Manipuri population of the Cachar district (Silchar, Hailakandi and north Cachar hills) at 55,550 out of the total population of 5,70,531 and entire area of Barak Valley i.e. Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi all together there are 195 Manipuri villages.

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