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GR^T CLAN FORMATION IN MANIPUR : AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract:-The development of human society was associated with the varying process and progressive forces of cultural activities. In some primitive societies there was an almost complete absence of differentiated political institutions. In the historical process conflict among the several ethnic groups for economic and political supremacy was the process of human history in nature and this process was hastened by the growth of economic activities coincided with the expansion of human ideas. The Meitei state itself evolved and developed with inclusion of numerous ethnic groups through a long process of war and conflicts. The growth of population as well as the development of economic system based on private ownership led to the emergence of organized social structure in the form of family, lineage and clan groups. Some societies like Meithei's were structured in an established order in which father was the family head and there were heads of the lineages and clans. In course of time the clan leader attaining certain powers and privileges could establish powerful territory which brought weaker groups under his suzerainty. Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, who made a firm and stronghold position at Kangla pioneered in the process of the unification of clan principalities and other groups into a powerful state.

Keywords:clan; conflict; amalgamate; kinship; lineage.

INTRODUCTION

Manipur, a small native state situated in the extreme north eastern corner of India. Regarding the boundary, the east is bounded by Burma, the west by Cachar district of Assam, the north by Nagaland and the south by Chin Hills of Burma. Manipur literally means the “city or the land of gems”. The name Manipur was formally introduced in the early 18th century, during the period of King Garibnawaz when he formally adopted Vaishnavism as a state religion. Manipur is geographically divided into the hills and the centrally situated valley. Usually, the hilly areas are occupied by the different tribes and the valley is exclusively occupied by the Meiteis. In Mc Culloch's view, Manipuri's are a conglomeration of several distinct tribes. Generally, valley of Manipur was divided into minute kingdoms under the rule of different groups of people primarily the celebrated seven clans; they are Ningthouja, Khaba-Nganba, Chenglei, Angom, Khuman, Luwang and Moirang. Several clashes arose among these seven principalities or tribes for defending their respective territorial boundaries and gradually Ningthouja clan able to grasp all the others. The word Meitei was used only during the period of establishment of the Ningthouja dynasty by Nongda Lairen Pakhangba and all the ethnic and social groups were fused mutually under the suzerain power of the Ningthouja. The Meiteis who were inhabited in the valley and they formed the majority group. Usually, the Meiteis they had their own distinct culture, myths and legends, language and religion,

rites and ritual etc.

In this study a humble attempt is being made to delineate the evolution of clan system and the process of amalgamation through historical point of view.

The origin of the seven clans - There are numerous versions or accounts reveal about the origin of the clans or salais in the Meitei literature. All the accounts could not be taken as historical, but used as a source of history. Different theories offered by different scholars based on the various account specified in ancient literally texts. Various puyas (chronicles) and a lot of scholars traced the origin of clans from different angles or views. One popular myth observed that the supreme god Sorarel Sidaba created man in his own image from different organs of his body, which was followed by the creation of the clans or salais. The genealogist of the clan shows that they originated from the three sons of supreme god Atingkok namely Ashiba, Atiya and Konjing Tuthokpa which were known as Luwang Guru, Khuman Guru and Mangang Guru. A quantity of Manipuri chronicles like Meihourol Pukok, Meihourol Lathup, Meihourol Thirel, Leithak Leikharol gave fairly similar theories or views regarding the divine origin of the clans. The local chronicles sketch the existence of salais from the beginning of Meitei history. The origin of the salais, number of salais and the chronology of events leading to distraction. Myths and legends attempted to elucidate the origin and inter-connection of the salais. A large amount of Puyas tent to implicitly deduce that the salais are the descendants of the same parents. The motives of the Puya lead generally to the integration of the salais. Afterwards myths and legends were created to elucidate the origin of the seven clans in order to strengthen the social and political confederacy. The versions of this mythological account fluctuate slightly from one another, yet almost all of them agreed that all the seven salais were descended from Sidaba Mapu (the Divine ancestor) and all the seven salais originated at the same period.

A variety of theories explained about the origin of the salai. But virtually all of the theories are in the form of riddles. A number of theories reveal the names of the ancestor (male or female) of the salais. Some other theories attempt to demonstrate ethnic origin of the salais. As such, each theory has a unique interpretation of its individual. They cannot be ignored as mere theories. Hence, it is imperative to meager a minute study of their theories.

Numerous Meitei scholars supposed that in Manipur, the clan system was recognized since the pre-Pakhangba period. Generally, the Meitei society is a kinship and lineage based society. The clan is known as salai which literally means the ancestor god of the lineage (sa = sagei = lineage and lai = god ancestor).

Ancient chronicles designate that the seven major principalities were descended from a supreme being, Taibang Mapu sidaba, who was a formless divinity having myriad manifestations(the divine ancestor). The recorded history of Manipur begins from the second quarter of the first century of the Christian era when Pakhangba, the first king of the Meitei's ascended the throne of Kangla, the historic capital of Manipur.

Regarding the origin and evolution of the clan system, local historical documents like Sakok Lamlen and Ningthou Kangbalon mentioned about the evolution of clan system before Pakhangba. There is a mythical tradition concerning the evolution of the seven clans which gives the reference that the clan system was introduced by Atiya Guru Sidaba, father of Pakhangba. According to this tradition, Guru Sidaba the supreme god taking the forms of a dead cow, floated down a big river to test the devotion and wisdom of his two sons. On seeing the cow, Kuptreng thought it was a rotten thing. But Sentreng thought further when he saw the wagging tail of the dead cow. He realized that it may be god in disguise. Atiya Guru Sidaba had moved his tail to give his sons intimation of his own identity, wishing to reveal himself. Kuptreng and Sentreng, in accordance with the latter's wish dragged the carcass out of the water. Atiya Guru Sidaba was pleased and resuming his original form said to Sentreng, "You know your father, the guru and so let your name be Pakhangba" (pa: father, khangba: to know). After that Sentreng was known henceforth as Pakhangba. The account goes on to say that the carcass of the dead cow was cut into seven pieces and distributed among the founders of the seven salais as follows. Different parts of the carcass share by each group are as follows -

*Clan Formation In Manipur : An Overview

Founder	Salai	Parts of the Carcass
Sentreng (Pakhangba)	Ningthouja	Eyes.
Kuptreng (Sanamahi)	Angom	Neck
Pammaringga	Luwang	Head
Leisatao	Khuman	Knee
Konsuren	Moirang	Stripe belly
Asangba	Khaba	Left side of head
Tumanganba	Nganba	Heart

Another customary version says that --- Angom springs from the right eye of the Taibangpanba Mapu (Lord of the universe), Ningthouja springs from the left eye, Luwang springs from the right ear, Khuman springs from the left ear, Sarang-Leisangthem springs from the right nostril, Khaba-Nganba springs from the left nostril. Moirang springs from the teeth.

One of the ancient text, Meihourol Pukok traces the origin of salais from the five divine kings namely, Tari, Kangba, Sakuppa, Kangkhal, Kaksu Tenkonba. Tari had two wives. His union with Huimu Leima begot Nungou Imthangba, the progenitor of Sarang-Leisangthem and Kangkhal Leima begot Purang and Pureilomba, the progenitor of Angom clan. The union of Kangba Tanu begot Kangkhujam Toriya, progenitor of Mangang, Sakuppa and Leinung Keibi Tera gave birth to Moirang, Kaksu Tonkonba and Leima Urum Khongjonbi begot two sons, Luwang Nongdamlon Ahanba and Khuman Nongdamlon Akhuba. Kangkhal and Phurei Leima begot Khaba-Nganba.

Another category of versions, mention about the origin of the salais from seven different colours. Every salai has a distinctive colour of its own. Apopka Thounirol has given the origin of the salais in such a manner that- Angouba or white gave birth to Angom, Ashangba or eshing aruba or blue to Luwang, Arangba or stripe of black and white to Moirang, Aawouba or dust grey to Sarang-Leisangthem, Imuraba or black to Khuman, Angangba or red to Ningthouja, Arangba or stripe of green to Khaba.

According to Y.Budhichandra- Ningthouja – Angangba (red), Angom -- Angouba (white), Moirang- Napuna Langba (stripe of yellow), Khuman -- Amuba (black), Luwang -Higok (blue), Khaba-Nganba- Sangna langba(stripe of green and white), Sarang-Leisangthem --Sangna waoba (greenish grey). O. Bhogesore Singh, explained that the colour of the seven salais derived from the sun rays which according to him consisted of Angangba (Ningthouja), Angouba (Angom), Amuba (Khuman), Asangba (Khaba-Nganba), Napu (Moirang), Mumanaba (Luwang), Wouthangnaba (Sarang-Leisangthem). The colours of salais have several thoughtful meanings, which are beyond our description. In offering of articles to the deities each article has preferably seven in number. In Leisemlon Ariba Puwari Salai Sakok Ahanba, it is stated that the concept of seven salais was connected with seven days of a week. A version in Thiren Meiram Leeba tells that Taibang Panba Mapu gave birth seven days of the week and then to the seven salais. . Sunday gave birth to Khaba-Nganba, Monday gave birth to Angom, Tuesday gave birth to Khuman, Wednesday gave birth to Ningthouja, Thursday gave birth to Sarang-Leisangthem, Friday gave birth to Luwang, and Saturday gave birth to Moirang. This perceptibly indicates that the birthdays of the salais on which the ancestor rituals were carried out. However a variety of opinions have been articulated as to the date of birth of the salais.

Moreover, one more myth associated with Pakhangba, states that Pakhangba introduced the clan system in which every clan was given to each of his seven sons. Pakhangba was a clan king of the Ningthouja. He is characterized in three different ways -- as a man, as a god and as a snake. Pakhangba took the forms of a divine being during day time, but used to get transformed into human being at night. Pakhangba is described as the king in Konachak, which is the last era of Meitei cosmological time scale. This explanation also mentions that his union with seven Lainuras (divine girls) produced seven sons; they became the founding head of seven salais. The name of the seven Lainuras and their respective sons are- Laikik Huimulei Puksikombi-Mangang, Huimuleima-Luwang, Loikhumbi Mayai Thongailelpi-Khuman, Leiyek Pithetleima-Angom, Ulum Khaichou Tonpi-Moirang, Leitham Taileima-Khanganba and Nonghainu Lila Leima-Sarang-Leisangthem.

One of the earliest manuscripts, Poireiton Khunthok, which provide a picture of migration

***Clan Formation In Manipur : An Overview**

of Poireiton at the turn of the Christian era, describes to settle a group of Poireitons followers settled in Manipur valley whereas the Tangkhuls and other groups, Kabui Nungnangs settled in the hills. Another local puya called Leithak Leikharol, the Meities are believed to be the descendants of Lord Atiya Guru Sidaba and the valley was divided into eight principalities, namely Ningthouja, Luwang, khuman, Moirang, Khaba, Nganba, Angom and Leisangthem.

Thus, the seven salais or clans steadily began to settle in different parts of Manipur in the first century A.D. These seven clans had several independent principalities of their own in well-defined regions in the valley. Thiren Meiram Leeba has referred the territorial direction in which the various salais or clans settled in different regions viz - the western portion of the Kangla was for Mangang, Luwangthong, the areas around the Lamphelpat (lake) was for the Luwang, the area of Pumlenpat (Pumlen lake) was for Khuman. The area near the Kongba river was for the Angom, Loikhongpum (Moirang) was for Moirang, Teknakha was for Khaba-Nganba and Laishang-Hiden (Thoubal Leisangkhong) was for Sarang-Leisangthem. The waters distinctively prescribe and anticipated to be strictly used in the rituals of the Apopka khurumba (ancestor worship) of the salais indirectly refer to the locations of the territories or principalities of the salais.

Consequently, there were different myths and theories concerning about the origin of clans. It has been pointed out that all the mythical accounts of common origin of the seven clans or salais was a later utterance which was a necessary ingredient of nation building.

Amalgamation of clans - The state of Manipur existed as an independent kingdom from the earliest period. Primarily the state was occupied by several groups of people they were come from different directions. Those immigrants came from the east were consisting of Chinese, Burmese, and Shans which got assimilated into the Meitei society was known as the Nongpok Haram. The rest consisting generally of Indian races that entered into this land from the western directions are known as Nongchup Haram. They were fused into the sagei or lineage of the seven salais or clans of the Meitei. Due to the incursion or absorption of these different groups of people at different stages of collective evolution in the Manipuri society, primitive or pre-literate, intermediate or literate and contemporary society have been estimated. For this occurrence, both the internal and peripheral forces were dependable for social structure in Meitei society.

A lot of local historical documents trace the subsistence of a number of ethnic groups inhabiting in Manipur in early period. Those ethnic groups were – Mangang, Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Khabas, Nganba, Sarang, Leisangthem, Huirem-Khunjam, Angal, Makhel, Kambong, Lokkha, Haokha, Lera, Khongnang, Ningol, Laiton, Thanga, Kambong, Urok, Ushai, Hoarak, Konthou etc. But, those ethnoses belonging to the Tibeto-Burman Tai and other Mongolioid groups were first brought steadily under the political suzerainty of primary clans with their principalities and group into seven clans. Those seven clans were - Mangang, Angom, Khuman, Luwang, Moirang, Khaba-Nganba and Sarang-Leisangthem became prominent. These powerful seven tribes absorbed the remaining groups- Haokha-Lokkha absorbed into Angom. Haorak-Konthou absorbed into Chenglei. Thanga-Kambong and Urok-Ushai absorbed into Khaba-Nganba and Huirem-Khunjam absorbed into Luwang. Khabas were once a powerful clan before the advent of the Ningthoujas.

The earlier kingdom of Manipur was formed as a product of the amalgamation of independent principalities under Nongda Laien Pakhangba (33-154 A.D.) who belong to Ningthouja clan. The confederacy was produced by the union of seven clans namely, Ningthouja, Angom, Khuman, Luwang, Khaba-Nganba, Moirang and Sarang-Leisangthem. The clan or salai was commonly, a political part and a kin group of the Meitei's which was constituted by merging or amalgamating different ethnic or tribal groups under a single clan. The Mangang before the amalgamation with Poirei, they absorbed a number of tribes belonging to Leihou, Ma-hou and Heirong. The Mangang clan was the genesis of the ethnic fusion of Poirei and Mangang tribes. The amalgamation between the Nung and Chakkha tribes evolved the Chakkha-Nung and the entire Chakkha-Nung was converted to Luwang clan and later on Leinung tribe was also absorbed to Luwang. According to W. Ibohal, Khuman clan was an amalgamated tribe of Khu and Man. The gathering of Nongyai and Kharoi tribes respectively with the Khuman tribes altered it into a bigger tribe or clan. The Angom clan emerged out of the ethnic blending of Kongba and Nongbal tribes. Their union with the Selloi-Langmais resulted in the rise of the Angoms a powerful clan. The

inclusion of a number of tribes like Senbi, Lai, Kabo, Khuyon, Kayensucha, Mayang, Huirem, Khujal and Kauba to Moirang tribe took place before they entered into the present Manipur valley. The Moirang tribe got an amalgamation with the Keges, Noriyas and Ngangois on the eve of its dawn in the valley of Manipur. Perhaps, the Khaba and Nganba clan must be the product of the union of Khaba and Nganba tribes. The Sarang-Leisangthem clan emerged out of the gathering of Thanga and Kambong. Meitei salai or clans have been formed after several ethnic tribes or groups intermingle with each other and merged into one another. Although the fact that cultural and physical affinities of different salais brought the cultural, social and political unity of the numerous groups.

Gangumei Kabui quoted that, the salai of the Meitei was originally an ethnic group or tribe speaking a distinct language or dialect occupying a territory, having an autonomous principality under a ruler who was both a political chieftain and social head of the clan. In the early period, Manipur valley had a lineage based social system and lineage based political units which ultimately emerged as the principalities. The principalities of the salai or clan lineages had delineated territories. These different principalities were ruled by different chiefs. Sometimes they fought with each other, which was quite natural for protecting their respective territorial boundaries. Among these seven clans, Ningthouja became the ruling clan under the leadership of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba.

The establishment of the social structure of Meiteis was the clan system Known as the yek system. The Meiteis being a collective group of various sageis or yumnaks (lineages) which they belong to seven clans. The yek system was associated with the confederation of several salais into a Meitei power. The yek structure and its policy being a nucleus part of Meitei social structure, played multi-role in amplification and unifying Meitei power. The Kin relationship which played a vital role in the formation of Meitei power as well as a unique society was associated with the yek rules. Intermarriage between the members of same yek and yumnaks or sageis was prohibited under the rigid rules of yek. Each salai or clan consisted of a number of sageis (lineages) which in turn consisted of a number of families or households. A lineage is again a cluster of families (locally called imungs). The growth and extension of lineages was the product of the growth of population, socio-cultural and economic activities. Accordingly, the continuity of yek system in consecutive periods and its expansion to other groups made it possible to establish amicable relationship between Meiteis and others. The early history of Manipur was the history of the inter-clan fight for supremacy. The clash for supremacy was the common feature of them. As a result of their sanguinary conflicts, most of the principalities were over powered by the Ningthouja principality as the latter was the eldest and powerful among them. The Khaba-Nganba and Sarang-Leisangthem (Chenglei) were subdued firstly, then the Angom, and then the Luwang. As such, just before the accession of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba in 33 A.D., there were three independent principalities in the valley. But with the accession of the king, all the principalities were merged together under the suzerain power of the Ningthouja clan, which ultimately formed the Meitei state. After the formation of the confederacy of the salais and the subjugation by the Ningthoujas, the word Meitei became the common nomenclature for all the people of the valley of Manipur. Hence, the state was the product of socio-economic system and their functions. The growth of power and authority of a king was associated with expansion of territory. Therefore, the process of the evolution and development of the state was possible through continuous wars among each other groups. But ultimately the powerful group formed the position and established its supremacy in a definite territory. Consequently after an unbreakable struggle against his own kinsmen, Pakhangba was selected as the king of Kangla with the immense support from the Angom chief Puleiromba, Luwang chief Langba Langmaiba and Mangang chief Apanba. The enduring other tribes and clans extended help and loyalty to him. Pakhangba was also given the title of Meitingu or Meidingu. Consequently, each clan took enormous support in the formation of the Meitei state.

Accordingly, the early Meitei society was an amalgamation of several different but closely knit and allied principalities formerly settled in different parts of Manipur. The political and cultural absorption of powerful ethnic groups and establishment of its supremacy over many groups, were the processes for making a unified and powerful Meitei state. Although, the seven clans or salais are the main components for the congregation of social structure in Meitei society.

Conclusion - Manipur, in the earliest period, there were many small independent village principalities existed in the valley and its adjoining area. Among these, the principalities of Ningthouja, Luwang, Moirang, Khuman, Angom, Khaba-Nganba and Sarang-Leisangthem became prominent. In the first century A.D, the Ningthouja emerged as a powerful group among the valley based principalities. The foundation of the whole Meitei society was laid during the reign of Nongda Laien Pakhangba; he became the recognized head of the Meitei confederacy. In the historical process territorial clashes and wars of several ethnic groups were happened. Thus, the confederation of Meitei nation was processed with the social, cultural and political absorption of numerous ethnic groups. The intensification of power of clan principalities was due to the growth of the power of clan Pibas (head of the social group) who were under certain power. The Angoms, one of the powerful groups politically united with the Ningthoujas and formed a new powerful group in Manipur. T.C.Hodson, regarded that the seven clans as not only social but also political units which formed the Meitei confederacy. The gradual expansion of human culture was allied with the evolution of state and it was a product of human efforts and activities. Thus the evolution of Meitei clan system was associated with both the social and political policy of Nongda Laien Pakhangba.

Thus the emergence of the Meitei Nation was the final outcome of the process of formation of different ethnic tribes and social groups all of which merged to shaped the seven major salais or clans of the Meitei society. Pakhangba laid the foundation of Meitei state that he unified the different ethnic groups under the clan system.

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***Clan Formation In Manipur : An Overview**

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