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Refashioning Kingship in Manipur in the 18th Century: The Politico-Religious Projects of Garibniwaz and Bhāgyacandra

Rodney Sebastian

Religious Studies Department, Manhattan College, New York, NY 10471, USA; rsebastian01@manhattan.edu

Abstract: In the 18th century, Manipuri kings Garibniwaz and Bhāgyacandra sought to transform the indigenous religious landscape to absorb Vaiṣṇava beliefs and practices due to increasing contact with other Indian states and hostilities with Burma. Garibniwaz aligned himself with the Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇava tradition because he saw it as an effective way to increase his military prowess. He refashioned kingship to portray himself as a warrior king and a devotee of Rāmā. However, he met with resistance from other royal elites for oppressing the indigenous religious practices of Manipur. In contrast, Bhāgyacandra aligned himself with the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition and established his sovereignty on the basis of being a devotee of Krishna and patron of the indigenous gods. By carefully curating a hybrid religious schema, he was able to refashion Manipur kingship for generations to come. I compare the two strategies of negotiating transculturation and sociopolitical transformation and show that the latter approach proved more successful in the long term because it allowed a more organic unification of religious and political factions.

Keywords: Manipur; kingship; Hindu; Vaiṣṇava; Meitei



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1. Introduction

In this article, I discuss the fashioning of kingship and sovereignty in the Northeast Indian state of Manipur from the mid to late 18th century, a period of radical change, that had enduring effects on Manipur's religious and political landscape. Manipuri kings had to negotiate their sovereignty in politically unstable situations complicated by repeated raids from Burmese kingdoms, internal conflicts, and the emerging threat of colonial enterprises by Britain and France. For the survival of their state and their own sovereignty, they invoked religious paradigms that ranged from their indigenous religious tradition (Meitei) to various forms of Vaiṣṇavism. The effects of their policies are still felt today in Manipur's political relationship with India's central government, internal debates about Manipur's identity, and aesthetic cultural productions from the state.

I will focus on the reigns of two of the most impactful kings in Manipur's recent history: Pamheiba, also known as Garibniwaz (r. 1709–1748), and Ching-thang Khomba, also known as Bhāgyacandra (r. 1759–1798). Both played crucial roles in the transformation of religion and politics in Manipur by initiating sweeping reforms, including transforming Manipur into a Vaiṣṇava state. They were also responsible for the cultural performances that Manipur is renowned for today such as the Manipuri *rās* (considered to be one of India's classical dances) and the *nata saṅkīrtana*, which have been included in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. However, they diverged in the form of sovereignty they chose to construct.

While the reforms enacted by Garibniwaz and Bhāgyacandra have been documented in other works (some examples are [H. D. Sharma 2007](#), [Kamei 2007](#)). In this article, I will show how they were a major part of a project of constructing a new sovereignty in response to political instability. In other words, I will link them to their wider social, political, and religious contexts and provide detailed evidence for my argument from various sources. Garibniwaz creatively refashioned Manipuri kingship from the head of a tribal chiefdom

to that of a Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇava warrior-king to meet his religio-political objectives of consolidating the various tribes of Manipur and expanding its borders to reclaim lost territories and gain new ones. Bhāgyacandra reconstituted Manipuri sovereignty to a devotee-patron of a hybrid Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava and Meitei state. He did this to form political alliances with the Vaiṣṇava Ahom (Assamese) kingdom to reclaim Manipur from Burmese rule and to ease tensions between the indigenous Meitei tradition and incoming Vaiṣṇava traditions. I will discuss their policies as well as their short- and long-term impact.

My data is collected from textual sources that include court chronicles, written accounts of British colonial officers, the scholarly works of Manipuri historians, the interviews I conducted with them, and my own observations of religious rituals collected during ethnographic fieldwork in 2016. My main source of historical information was the royal court chronicle, the *Cheitherol Kumpapa* (CK), which is considered by Manipuri scholars to be the most important source of pre-colonial history of Manipur. The text provides a chronological outline of events and activities centered on the rulers of the Ningthouja clan, which would come to dominate Manipur by the 15th century.¹ Gangmumei Kabui (2011, pp. 2–3), a historian of Manipur, referred to it as “the backbone of the history of Manipur.” Courtly scribes recorded significant events such as earthquakes, epidemics, outcomes of battles, solar and lunar eclipses, public ritual sacrifices, expeditions of kings, and crime and punishment. As such, it offers vivid glimpses of the environment—natural and cultural—in which Manipuri life unfolded.

Most Manipuris consider the CK to be the primary source for information on the reigns of Meitei kings, from 33 CE to the last king of Manipur, Bodhachandra, who died in 1955. However, the later part of the chronicle, from the reign of King Kyamba (r. 1467–1508) onwards, provides more detailed information and can be regarded as more historically accurate because the King introduced administrative reforms that included recording events soon after they took place. Some of the incidents recorded in the CK have been corroborated by archaeological evidence (Shakespeare 2010, p. 5). Saroj Parratt (2005, p. 4) undertook the task of translating it from its Ms form into English, with the original *Meitei Mayek* text included. She produced three volumes to cover the period from 33 CE to 1891. Bihari (2012), a retired bureaucrat of Manipur produced a critical version by translating both the Ms copy and earlier Bengali transliteration by Ibungohal Singh and Khelchandra Singh. Bihari’s translation includes the years after Parratt’s translation and ends with the final entry at 1955, denoting the death of the last king, Bodhachandra. I use both Parratt’s and Bihari’s translations and cross-checked the dates and information with each other for accuracy. In some cases, I rely on one more than the other if more details are provided. In my footnotes, I use the abbreviation NB.CK to denote Nepram Bihari’s translation and SP.CK for Saroj Parratt’s.

The organization of the article is as follows: First, I will discuss the pre-Vaiṣṇava religion of Manipur, which I refer to as the Meitei religion, to compare its rituals and social structure with the reformations undertaken by Garibniwaz and Bhāgyacandra. Next, I will focus on the religious and political reforms undertaken by Garibniwaz, and their social and political consequences. Then, I will discuss how Bhāgyacandra responded to the social and political instabilities of his time by creatively reframing sovereignty and the relationship between kingship and divinity. I close by comparing and contrasting the two modes of articulating religio-political authority and what they tell us about the stability and durability of sovereignty.

2. Indigenous Meitei Religion of Manipur

The indigenous religion of Manipur mainly involved the worship of nature, ancestors, and fertility gods and goddesses, collectively known as *Umang lais*. For convenience, I refer to it simply as the “Meitei religion” in reference to the majority ethnic group known as the Meiteis. However, the religion of the Meiteis was not a monolithic religion, because a variety of practices, gods, and beliefs were amalgamated over several centuries of migration into the valley and warfare by different clans. There were seven major clans in the valley

called *yek* or *salai*: Khaba, Chenglei, Luwang, Khuman, Moirang, Angom, and Ningthouja (Kabui 2011, p. 69). Each *salai* is further subdivided into family groups called *yumnak* which are again divided into *sagei*, that trace descent from a common ancestor and bear the same family name. Each *sagei* and *yek* had specific deities or *lais* they devoted themselves to. During inter-tribal wars, the conquering group would claim allegiance from those who had been subdued to their own *lai* (L. B. Singh 2008, p. 130). Over centuries, the Meitei religion has gone through several transformations, some as recently as forty years ago when the Meitei revival movement known as *Apokpa Marup* attempted to present a unified religion called ‘Sanamahism’ as a marker of a pre-Hindu identity to resist Indian political hegemony. Meitei revivalists named it after a popular *lai*, known as Sanamahi, who was worshipped by the clans. Sanamahi and his mother, a goddess known as Leimalel, are still revered and worshipped in Meitei Vaiṣṇava houses today.

The seven valley clans were likely to have been motivated by a desire to form trade links, gain access to agricultural resources, and enjoy the benefits of economies of scale. Manipur occupied a strategic location on the confluence of a south-flowing river system and on the Silk Road in pre-maritime days. The valley’s river system was used to facilitate the free flow of goods such as pottery and ceramics from Chairel, the southernmost point in the valley to the capital, Imphal (Sharma and Sharma 2009, pp. 528–29). Consequently, the clans had to wrestle for control over various access points along the nodes of trade routes to enrich themselves. Over several centuries, the seven *yeks* inhabiting different parts of the land became subjugated by one, the Ningthoujas, whose ancestral deity, Pakhangba, became a common god for all Meiteis. The name “Meitei” was originally applied to the people of the Ningthouja clan alone, but by the 15th century, it was used to include all other clans which had been conquered by the Ningthoujas. A consequence of the amalgamation of the clans was polity-formation and the emergence of a unified monarchy, with a king known as *Ningthem*.

In the Meitei religion, kings were closely associated with performing rituals for the *lais*. Several records in the CK show that Manipuri kings performed rites involving blood and wine offerings to the *lais* (Parratt 2005, p. 75). The earliest recorded reference to animal sacrifice occurred during the reign of King Kyamba. According to the CK, in 1470 CE, Kyamba offered an ox at the foot of Khari hill to seek victory (Bihari 2012, p. 39). Later, during the reign of King Khagemba (r. 1597–1652) onwards, there are more references to lavish displays of animal sacrifice. In particular, in the year 1631 CE, when a new palace was built in Kangla, the *lais* were invoked, and offerings of fruits, flowers, elephants, goats, sheep, cows, ducks, pigeons, hens, pigs, and dogs numbering a hundred each were made (Parratt 2005, p. 53). The CK (Bihari 2012, p. 48) also informs us that it was common for victorious kings to offer the slain heads of their enemies to *lais* or bring them back as war trophies: “heads collected from the battlefield fell down while opening Tenthapung in 1585 CE” during the reign of Mungyamba (r. 1562–1597). This practice was similar to that of Chinese Shan Kings, who ritually slaughtered war prisoners as offerings to ancestor gods.

The chiefs of each clan known as *pibas* were considered to be priests of Meitei, and assumed charge of rituals, while the King, as the head of the Ningthouja clan and the whole confederacy, was considered to be the high priest of the whole country (Hodson 1908, p. 109). The *pibas* officiated at annual ceremonies in honor of their clan’s ancestors, and the King officiated during large events such as wars and calamities such as droughts (Hodson 1908, p. 110). Community worship of the *lais* was also led by priests and priestesses called *maibas* (male priests) and *maibis* (female priestesses). The *maibis*, in particular, played the role of ritual specialists and diviners. They led dances and songs, and delivered oracles in trance, thus preserving ancient Meitei beliefs and practices through their bodies. They were patronized by kings, and they preserved Meitei myths and rituals through their institution.

3. Contact with Hindu Traditions

From the 14th century, there was increasing interaction between Meiteis and people from Bengal, Assam, and Cachar through matrimonial alliances and trade routes. It is likely

that some Hindu religious ideas and practices spread to Manipur in this period, although the absence of documented evidence on the worship of Indian gods makes it difficult to come to a conclusion about the extent of religious influence. The CK indicates there were some innovations in courtly practices, which could be linked to Indian influences. For example, from the late 16th century, a new title was ascribed to king Khagemba (r. 1597–1652): *Lainingthou* (god-king), similar to the Indian title of *naradev* (god-man). Other forms of court aesthetics introduced at this time include carrying the King on a palanquin and building storied houses for him.² They could also have been incorporated from interactions with nearby Hindu kingdoms such as Tripura and Cachar. CK records also indicate that it was a period when Manipur society transitioned towards a more organized feudal system and underwent administrative reforms, as shown by inscriptions with state laws engraved on stone tablets.

It should be noted that in addition to Hindu contact, Islam was also present in Manipur. Most scholars opine that the first Muslims arrived mostly from the Bengal region and Gujarat in the early 17th century and were referred to as “Pangal”, derived from Bangal, in reference to people from Bengal. The migration of Muslims continued until the 19th century. Manipuri kings granted them land to settle, and they married local women and formed their own clan status (Khan 2014, pp. 121–22). Manipuri Muslims had some effect on Manipuri language and culture through the introduction of Urdu, Arabic, and Farsi words (Khan 2014, p. 127). However, they did not have widespread political influence, and even today, only comprise of about 8% of the population (Census of India 2021).

Thus far, although structures of practice associated with Indian kingdoms had been inculcated by Manipuri kings, there were no records of them converting to Vaiṣṇavism. Things changed in April 1704, when Charairongba became the first Manipuri king to be officially initiated into a Vaiṣṇava tradition by a Brahmin named Banamali Krishnacarya, believed to have come from Orissa (BP. vol. 2 1966, p. 204).³ According to the CK, the King, his family members, and ministers fasted and accepted initiation into Vaiṣṇavism.⁴ Charairongba also adopted a Vaiṣṇava name—Pitambar Singh—making him the first Meitei king to adopt a naming convention that comprises their surname, which is based on their ancestor’s employment, a Hindu given name, and a nickname. Today, an example of a typical name would be Lairik-yem-bum (family name) Guneshwar (Hindu name) Baboo (nickname).⁵

Charairongba implemented new Vaiṣṇava practices such as initiation rituals and temple worship. He was the first Manipuri king to issue coins inscribed with names of gods from Hindu traditions such as “Śrī Krishna” and “Śrī Krishna caṇan” (feet of Krishna) (Devi 2003). Indian cultural products such as musical instruments used in Bengal such as *kartal* (hand cymbals), *shinga* (horn-shaped wind instrument) and *sanaï* (wind instruments) were also introduced (Bandopadhyay 2010, p. 41). According to historians Mahaveda Singh and Dwijendra Narayan Goswami, Charairongba worshipped Krishna with a form of *kīrtan* known as *Dhrupad Hari Saṅkīrtan*, which was later called *Bangdesh Pālā* (K. M. Singh 2011, p. 65). (Bangdesh refers to the land of the Bangles or Bengalis). This made him the forerunner of later forms of sovereignty (such as that of that Bhāgyacandra’s) which were heavily invested in cultural productions.

Although Charairongba and his family were initiated into Vaiṣṇavism, there is no evidence that he implemented the religious practices of Vaiṣṇavism on a state-wide scale. Even after his initiation, he did not attempt to enforce Vaiṣṇavism as the state religion, nor did he neglect the worship of the traditional *lai*. The indigenous gods continued to be worshipped and temples in their honor were still erected. For example, the CK records the inauguration of a three-storied Meitei temple in Kangla in 1708 CE.⁶ It was Charairongba’s son and successor to the throne, Pamheiba or Garibniwaz (r. 1709–1744) who established Vaiṣṇavism as a state religion in Manipur.

4. Garibniwaz—Warrior King

Pamheiba was bestowed the name Garibniwaz, meaning “saviour of the poor,” because of his practice of personally distributing paddy to the poor. He is known for his successful military expeditions and for extending the boundaries of Manipur after wars with Burmese kings in 1724, 1737, and 1738 (R. K. J. Singh 2014).⁷ In fact, his raids on Burma contributed to the end of the powerful Toungoo dynasty. He also fought successful wars with Tripura and Cachar, quelled many rebellions, and conducted over 27 military expeditions in the hills of Manipur (Sana 2010). His military campaigns and policies launched Manipur as a formidable power in the region. Garibniwaz’s military expeditions were grounded in his religious zeal, as records in the CK show that military campaigns became more frequent after his conversion to Vaiṣṇavism. Furthermore, his guru often participated in the wars.

Interestingly, the CK shows that during the first 25 years of his life, Garibniwaz rigidly observed Meitei rituals and was indifferent to his father’s Vaiṣṇava practices. This was underscored when, after Charairongba’s death in 1709, Garibniwaz observed Meitei funeral rites by preserving his father’s head in a mound instead of following Hindu rites of cremation.⁸ His religious inclinations were made obvious in that he personally established several places of worship for the *lais*, as shown by the following examples. In 1710, he had consecrated a stone in honor of the *lai Wahaiba*;⁹ in 1711, he built a temple for the *lai Kangla*;¹⁰ and in 1715, he built a pond for *Wahaiba*.¹¹ In 1712, he patronized *Maibas* to stop the effects of a solar eclipse.¹² Overall, from 1709 to 1714, there is no mention of Vaiṣṇava or other Hindu forms of worship, indicating he may have even contested his father’s patronization of the incoming religion.

However, from 1715, his religious inclination underwent drastic changes. In that year, the CK reports that “the guru of the King of Tekhao (Assam)” arrived with 39 “*beiragis*” or mendicants. Just five months later, construction for a temple for the Hindu goddess Kālikā began.¹³ The *Sanamahi Laikan* (SL) informs us that a Hindu missionary referred to as “Bhamon (Brahmin) Gangadhar” initiated Garibniwaz into a Śākta¹⁴ tradition (B. Singh 1973). In October 1717, just two years later, the King accepted Vaiṣṇava initiation from Guru Gopal Dās.¹⁵ The SL says that Guru Gopal Dās was from the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, which originated in Bengal (B. Singh 1973).¹⁶ However, even after his Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava initiation, Meitei burial customs continued to be observed. Moreover, temples of the *lais Pakhra* and *Wahaiba* were renovated in 1719¹⁷ and 1721, with the King personally laying down a foundation for the temple of *Lai Wahaiba*.¹⁸ Like his father and predecessor Charairongba, Garibniwaz articulated a hybrid regime of religious practice, worshipping gods of both traditions simultaneously.

The hybrid state sponsored religious practices of Manipur would be reconfigured into an exclusively Vaiṣṇava format when Garibniwaz later associated himself with Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇavism. The Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇavism was introduced through the medium of Śanta Dās Gosāi, a devotee of Rāma who came to Manipur from Sylhet (now located in Bangladesh) around 1720.¹⁹ Entries in the CK refer to Śanta Dās Gosāi as *mahānta guru* (the great guru) or simply “the guru” in singular, indicating that he had a special influence over Manipur and Garibniwaz. Most likely, he was probably appointed as the chief guru of the court. That Śanta Dās had a close relationship with the King can also be inferred from records that show he regularly joined the King and queen in excursions to eat mangoes and other fruits, and was part of several military expeditions against Tripura, Maring, and Shairem.²⁰ Śanta Dās’s influence soon eclipsed the King’s advisor on the indigenous religion, Louremnam Khongnangthaba who protested Śanta Dās’ reforms and was subsequently withdrawn from his position and barred from participating in public affairs (Lokendra 2014).

Although diverse religious traditions were present in Manipur and competed for Garibniwaz’s patronage, eventually, Śanta Dās Gosāi’s message resonated with Garibniwaz’s military ambitions and persuaded him to patronize the Rāmānandī sect over others. According to the SL, Śanta Dās Gosāi convinced the King to renounce Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism

by telling him that only those who were able to control their anger and lust could practice Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, and that Rāmānandī was more appropriate for the warrior-kings (B. Singh 1973, p. 48). Garibniwaz seemed to have been convinced by this argument because, in 1728, he accepted initiation from Śanta Dās into Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇavism. It was prudent for Garibniwaz to adopt a religion that encouraged martial values because the state of Manipur was at war with Burma. It is noteworthy that the Rāmānandī's principal deity was Lord Rāma, a warrior-king wielding a bow and arrow, as opposed to that of the Gauḍīyas' Lord Krishna, an enchanting cowherd playing a flute. There is also a parallel between personal conduct and affect (sovereignty over self), and management of the conduct of the affairs of the state (sovereignty over the polis). Garibniwaz opted for the body of a warrior king as opposed to a more composed body, which, as I will show later, is an indicative of how he conducted the symbolic body of the king.

Although there are different disciplines within the Rāmānandī tradition, Peter van der Veer showed that all of them focus on acquiring supernatural power (*shakti*) through ascetic practices, especially celibacy, which can be used for a variety of purposes (van der Veer 1989). Particularly, the disciplines of one of the suborders, the *nagas*, is believed to bestow their performers with supernatural military power. They were "fighting ascetics devoted to wrestling and military training and organized into armies (*ani*) and regiments (*akhara*)" (van der Veer 1989). The Rāmānandī tradition enabled a connection between asceticism and transformative political activity upon the world, thereby linking religious and political power that provided Garibniwaz with the resources to construct a new form of sovereignty.

While there is no information on whether Śanta Dās belonged to this order, there are records in the CK showing that he personally participated in warfare alongside his disciple, Garibniwaz, in at least two instances in 1726 and 1727. Therefore, the martial practices that Rāmānandīs engaged in to discipline the body and build socio-political power could have convinced Garibniwaz to accept their order. It is clear that the new bodily discipline of the Rāmānandīs dovetailed with the interests and military logic of the state, which was to make effective warriors to fight their wars.

As mentioned earlier, the tribal groups that had been consolidated by the Ningthouja clan were composed of diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious features. For the purpose of state formation, it made sense for Garibniwaz to impress upon his people the image of a hegemonic religio-political authority that they should submit to and under which they could be unified. It also made sense to align Manipur with a religious tradition within the Hindu fold, given that the neighboring kingdoms such as Assam, Tripura, and Cachar had already embraced some form of Hinduism by the 18th century and Garibniwaz's main nemesis during that period was the Burmese Buddhists.

Garibniwaz's reign was marked by frequent wars and territorial expansion of Manipur. To build a powerful army, he sought to creatively reframe kingship through a new paradigm rooted in a militarized version of Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇavism presented by Śanta Dās. Kingship and sovereignty were redefined to focus on military action framed within the martial ethos of Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇavism. To ensure full participation in the project of transforming Manipur's religious demographics from the Meitei tradition to Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇavism, Garibniwaz, and Śanta Dās instituted a number of reforms such as mass initiation rites, building temples, employing genealogical paradigms to connect Manipuri kings to characters in the Mahabharata, the production of Hindu sacred texts, and cultural productions. Garibniwaz's sovereignty was reframed through the lens of Rāmānandī devotionism.

The formation of a unified theocracy with the King and his chief guru at the helm necessitated the performance of theatrical public ceremonies and rituals. According to Manipuri scholar Lokendra, "control over population, and not on possession of land was the principal focus of the ethno-state, and the relationship with people and populations could only be secured through control over the rituals and rites" (Lokendra 2014). The CK records that in 1737,²¹ 1738, and 1739, many people accepted Vaiṣṇava initiation through a

sacred thread ceremony, a mark of being initiated into one of the higher castes.²² According to Sruti Bandopadhyay, from this time, the masses wore Vaiṣṇava markings on their forehead or *tilak*, thus carrying a mark of religious distinction (Bandopadhyay 2010). Overall, the mass initiation rites, the adorning of symbols on the body, and the promotion of a singular guru, Śanta Dās, over all other religious agents served to bring about a semblance of unification. These strategies in turn supplied Garibniwaz with legitimacy and political control over the people of Manipur.

Other modifications in public rituals involved cremation practices and changes in dietary practices. Meitei burial rites were replaced by Hindu cremation practices, which are followed until today. According to a report in the CK, in 1724, Garibniwaz dug out the graves of his ancestors, collected their heads and skeletons, and performed cremation ceremonies on the bank of the Ningthi River.²³ This was 16 years after he had buried his father in accordance with Meitei rites. Inspired by Hindu Vaiṣṇava dietary prohibitions, he banned the consumption of beef. The CK reported that in September 1722, people of seven *sageis* were arrested and beaten in public for eating beef.²⁴

In addition to reforming public rituals, Garibniwaz remodelled Manipuri sovereignty in Vaiṣṇava terms. In 1724, he adopted the Indian title of “Maharāja” (great king),²⁵ altering it from the earlier “Ningthem.” He also adopted the title “Manipureswar” (lord of Manipur) (Sana 2010, p. 60) confirming that from his reign, the state came to be known as “Manipur”, mapping the state onto Manipur mentioned in the Mahābhārata and other Indian epics. Reflecting his special inclination to the Rāmānandī tradition, new coins minted by his government had “Jai Śrī Rām” (victory to Rām) inscribed on them, along with the King’s title and name (G. Singh 1982). Hence, Garibniwaz’s sovereignty was reconstructed from that of the head of the Ninthouja clan to a devotee of Rāmā and warrior-king of the ancient Manipur of the Mahābhārata.

From the 1720s, Garibniwaz embarked on a number of projects installing Vaiṣṇava iconography. They include a Krishna temple built in 1722,²⁶ and then after his conversion to Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇavism, a large tank with a *mūrti* (image) of Rāma in 1727 (Shakespeare 1913, p. 61), a temple dedicated to Rāma’s monkey devotee Hanumān²⁷ in 1729, and temples with *mūrtis* of Rāma, his brothers (Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, and Śatrughna), and wife Sītā²⁸ in Ningthem Pukri city in 1734. According to Laisram (2009, p. 78), some Hindu deities were also given Meitei names: *Laphupat* Kālikā (Kālikā of Banana tree lake) and *Thinungei Ramji Ningthou* (King Rāma of Thinungei).

Garibniwaz sponsored the literary production of Hindu texts such as the *itihāsas* and *purāṇas*, which were circulated in Manipur for the first time with the aim of propagating Vaiṣṇavism on a large scale. In the early 18th century, copies of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (BhP), were imported to Manipur from Tripura. The BhP had become the most popular literature in Assam due to the influence of Vaiṣṇava missionaries such as Śaṅkardev (1449–1568) (Urban 2011; Neog 1985). When the rulers of Tripura procured a copy of the BhP from Assam and were delivering it back to their country, the Manipuris attacked the convoy and stole it from them (R. K. J. Singh 1986, p. 33). Jhalajit Singh opined that Tripura invaded Manipur in 1723 to avenge this raid (R. K. J. Singh 1986, p. 33).²⁹ Manipur, under the leadership of Garibniwaz, repelled the attack. Some Hindu sacred texts were also translated into the local language. Manipuri scholars E. N. Singh (1986, p. 79) and K. Singh (2014, p. 10) revealed that between 1717 and 1748, a poet by the name of Angom Gopi who was fluent in Meiteilon, Sanskrit, and Bengali translated some of the chapters of the Mahābhārata and Bengali Kṛttivāsa Rāmāyaṇa into Manipuri language. From this period, these were regularly recited in Manipur. (R. K. J. Singh 1986, p. 43).

Reformation also extended into public Meitei festivals, which were reconfigured into Vaiṣṇava formats. In a traditional Meitei festival called *Kwak Jatra* (crow festival), gunshots or other methods were used to startle crows into flying. The direction of their flight was used to make predictions about the future of society. *Kwak Jatra* took place around the same time as *Dusshera*, a Hindu festival that celebrates Rāma’s slaying of Rāvaṇa (September or October). Taking advantage of the overlap in time, Garibniwaz, replaced the shooting

of crows with the shooting of an effigy of Rāvaṇa in 1726–1727 (Shakespeare 1913, p. 61). Similarly, in other indigenous festivals, elements from Vaiṣṇava traditions were added. For example, *Ayang Yoiren Iruppa*, an annual bathing ceremony held at Lilong Sahanpur during December and January was changed to *snāna yatra* (bathing ceremony for the deity of Jagannātha, worshipped by Vaiṣṇavas) and an archery festival called *Waira Tenkap* was replaced by a *kīrtan* (devotional singing) to Rāma (Tejbanta 2015, p. 178). It cannot be ascertained exactly when these changes were made, but they followed the patterns of sanskritization initiated by Garibniwaz.

It was also during Garibniwaz's reign that Meitei society was reorganized to resemble, in some form, the Indian *varna* (caste) structure. Indian migrants and Meiteis were divided into two of the four *varnas*: *brāhmaṇas* (priestly class) and *ṣatriyas* (warrior class). Many of the Indian migrants, and the Meitei families they married into, were classified as Brahmin, even though at least some of the migrants were not born in Brahmin³⁰ families. They were assigned a specific title based on the particular region they came from. For example, descendants of those considered Brahmins from Shantipur and Krishnanagar (now in West Bengal) were called Labuktongbams and Gurumayums, respectively. Migrants who were considered *ṣatriyas* were called *Ṣsetrimayums*. Most of the Meiteis were classified as *ṣatriya*.

It is inconclusive if scheduled castes were designated during the time of Garibniwaz. However, by the 19th century, caste notions of purity and pollution became entrenched. There were disputes about who belonged to which *gotra* or Hindu birth lineage, and intermarriage with someone considered of a low caste was punished.³¹ In 1873, two persons known as Sri Damanadhi Thakur and Bhamon Hanjaba had to drink the water offered to Govindaji for eating rice in the house of a washerman, and under the order of the King, a man was beaten for marrying a girl from a family of laundrymen.³² In 1876, nine people were downgraded to the untouchable caste for eloping.³³ During the reign of Churachand Singh (r. 1891–1941 CE), ritual and social segregation between the higher castes and lower castes became more pronounced. Social exclusion of the hill tribes and Yaithibis (sweeper and scavenger groups) was implemented as they were prevented from entering the court and public places (Kabui 1988, p. xxi).

In the 19th century, British Political Agent for Manipur James Johnstone observed that the King had great powers in determining the religion of Manipuris. Sometimes “the inhabitants of a village were elevated en masse from the level of outcastes, to that of Hindoos (sic) of pure caste” (Johnstone 1878, p. 3). He described that if the King so chooses, a person belonging to the hill tribe could receive the sacred thread of the twice-born castes and be admitted as a *Ksatriya*. It also seems that for the slightest infringements, one had to undergo purificatory rituals. In 1933, when the elder brother of King Churachand had attended a *śraddha* ceremony and was not allowed to eat the rice offered to Govindaji (CK 474). Although it is unlikely that these rigid rituals were introduced during the reign of Garibniwaz, their roots could plausibly be traced back to his administration.

To raise a formidable army for his military conquests, Garibniwaz modified a draft system that was introduced in the 11th century by King Loyumba (r.1074–1122 CE), who established the *lallup*, a conscript system designed to recruit fighters for his battles against neighboring kings.³⁴ Garibniwaz modified the *lallup* system to pass a decree that all males had to engage in military service to the royal family for 10 days every 40 days, in return for land which was leased out.³⁵

As part of their service during *lallup*, men were trained in martial arts. This enabled large numbers of Manipuri men to familiarize themselves with an indigenous form of martial arts using swords and spears. The kings imposed a discipline on the bodies of his subjects, which produced an embodied habitus in generations of Manipuri men (Bourdieu 1977, p. 72).³⁶ The martial arts, commonly called *Thang* (*sword*)-*ta* (*spear*), would later have a significant role in the wars fought by Manipur and its cultural performances, as it influenced the choreography of hand gestures and feet movements that include sitting,

jumping, spinning, and leaping movements. Significantly, it produced a martial class disciplined and loyal to the King, who himself was regarded as a great warrior.

Garibniwaz's reign also oversaw a flourishing of performing arts and courtly aesthetics. Centralized structures known as *loisangs*, were established to institutionalize artistic and cultural productions. Categories of institutions included the *Ishei* (music), *Jagoi* (dance), *Pandit* (scholars), *Lairik Yengba* (scribes), and *Pena* (a local instrument whose name is derived from the stringed instrument veena) *loisangs*.³⁷ They combined produced cultural goods that were patronized by the religious and political elites. The singing of *kīrtan* (devotional hymns), which was popular in Bengal and Assam, was introduced at this time. Although there is no detailed information regarding these developments, scholars have claimed that a style of *kīrtan* known as Bangdes or *Ariba* (old) *pālā* was introduced (E. N. Singh 1997, p. 5). According to the CK, *kīrtan* was performed during Garibniwaz's *shradda* (funeral rites) ceremony in 1753.³⁸ This is the first mention of *kīrtan* being performed during Manipuri life passage rituals. It is a practice that has continued in funeral rites and marriage ceremonies of present-day Manipuri society. Overall, Garibniwaz refashioned kingship using Vaiṣṇava aesthetic vocabularies and militarized tropes to project himself as a warrior devotee of Rāmā.

Apart from his devotion to Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇavism, Garibniwaz stands out from other monarchs in Manipur for his oppression of the indigenous religion. It is alleged by some historians that following the advice of his guru, he burned over 123 manuscripts of *puyas* around 1725 (Kabui 2011, p. 253). This incident is not recorded in the CK and other scholars such as J. Roy doubt it even took place (Roy 1958, p. 13). This debate has continued to be controversial even as late as the mid 20th century, when individuals came forward with *puyas* they claimed were hidden by their ancestors during the burning period. In fact, the burning of the *puyas* has been mobilized by recent Meitei revivalists as one of the central sources of agitation against Manipur's "Hindu" past.

What cannot be contested, however, is that it is recorded in the CK that Garibniwaz ordered the destruction of temples and images of *Umang lais*. In 1723,³⁹ he demolished the shrines of nine *lais*, and in 1726, seven images of the *lais*, including Lainingthou, Panthoibi, and Sanamahi, were destroyed and molded into coins.⁴⁰ The King, however, remained the head of the old religion. It was, therefore, unlikely that he repudiated it entirely, and evidence suggests that he did not do so. The *lais* were sometimes destroyed; yet, at other times, they were reappropriated, reinterpreted, and reinstated. An entry in 1729 says that the King recognized Lai Wahaiba or Sanamahi as god and installed an image of him.⁴¹ The following year, he inaugurated a temple of Wayenbamcha Nongthongba.⁴² In the absence of Śanta Dās, who had temporarily left the capital, a number of temples for Wahaiba were inaugurated in 1732,⁴³ and in 1733, an image of Laiyingthou Fallou Khomba, which had been previously destroyed, was recast and installed again.⁴⁴ This suggests that it was in fact Śanta Dās, who was the main architect behind Garibniwaz's aggressive policies towards the Meitei religion.

Following the destruction of the *lais'* shrines in the 1720s, Garibniwaz appointed Brahmins to initiate the worship of four other *lai*, including two named Nongshaba and Yumthai Lai.⁴⁵ Hence, some of the old gods came under the ritual control of the Brahmins, reducing the importance of the *Maibas* and *Maibis*. At the same time, the complete destruction of local traditions and forms of authority was avoided to appease the people. Nevertheless, the consequence of this policy was that a new orthodoxy was imposed by of migrant Brahmin elites. By patronizing new religious elites, Garibniwaz sought to reinvent his sovereignty through a Hindu Vaiṣṇava devotionism. His special relationships with the new brokers of divine power enhanced his own divine status. In turn, this divinization supported his transition from "Ningthem" to "Maharaj" and brought him greater recognition as a Hindu king in the region.

With the support of Garibniwaz, the trajectory of influence of Brahmins from the 16th to 18th century moved from migrants, to ritual specialists, to initiators of the king, and finally, to the religious elite of Manipur, surpassing the earlier Maiba-Maibi institutions.

Not surprisingly, his strategies led to a rupture in the religio-political fabric, by bringing the traditional priests and priestesses, who represented the ancient faith, into competition and conflict with Vaiṣṇava religious elites (Parratt 1980, p. 156).

The resistance to Garibniwaz's reformations was evidenced by the following curious narrative in the *Sakak Lamlen Ahanba Puya* (Laisram 2009, p. 21), which was probably constructed after the reign of Garibniwaz. According to this story, a *Pangal* guru (probably a corruption of "Bengal" and hence referring to a Brahmin guru coming from that region) came to the land of the Meiteis during the reign of King Naophangba (452–518 AD). He tried to change the traditional customs of the Meiteis by persuading the king to order his subjects to replace their cremation customs with burials of the dead, to forbid the eating of beef, and to build a palace in the royal capital of Kangla, upon the sacred site wherein the Meiteis believe that the first King Pakhangba lies underground in the form of a coiled snake.⁴⁶ In the myth, the Meitei god Atiya reincarnates in the form of a man known as Laiba and persuades the king to disregard the advice of the *Pangal* guru. It is likely that supporters of the Meitei religion constructed this myth as a counter-narrative to Garibniwaz's reforms.

Garibniwaz met with opposition mainly from members of the royal family who were patrons of the *Maibas*. (L. B. Singh 2008, p. 5). The CK reports an instance in which the queen disregarded dietary restrictions to partake of wine and meat. The CK described that she offered wine to Sanamahi on three successive occasions. One of these which took place in 1746 reads, "the Queen with all royal ladies wearing their best attire offered *Yu* (wine) to Sanamahi in the market and they enjoyed a drinking party on Sunday the 26th."⁴⁷ According to Parratt, the practice of offering wine to Sanamahi was "nowhere before mentioned and neither is it the present custom to drink wine to Sanamahi" (Parratt 1980, p. 160). In other words, this was an explicit and public protest against the king's dietary restrictions and his neglect of the *lai* (Parratt 1980, p. 160). The opposition to the king's guru, Śanta Dās Gosāi, is still depicted today in a Rāma temple that he attributably built with Garibniwaz. There is a curious image of Śanta Dās Gosāi with Garibniwaz below the *mūrtis* of the gods in which the guru is depicted being handcuffed with chains. The exact date of the making of the images is not known, but it is clear that, at some point, Śanta Dās was both revered and reviled for his role in the religious affairs of Manipur.

The dietary restrictions, the alleged burning of *puyas*, and the purging of the *lais* did not resonate well with the adherents of the Meitei religion. In the last two or three years of his reign, there are references in the chronicles to Garibniwaz constructing temples for the *lais*. This suggests that Garibniwaz relaxed in his attitude to the *lai* as a response to the opposition to his policies in some circles. To appease his detractors, he tried to make some compromises. However, his efforts came too late.

In 1744, Śanta Dās was killed during a war with Myanmar.⁴⁸ In 1749, Garibniwaz abdicated the throne and went on pilgrimage to Ramnagar in Uttarakhand.⁴⁹ The following year, Garibniwaz's younger son Chit Sai ascended to the throne and drove his father out from Manipur to Myanmar. In 1751, on his way back from Myanmar, Garibniwaz and his attendants were ambushed and killed by Chit Sai.⁵⁰ The reason for Chit Sai assassinating his own father is unknown, but it would not be far-fetched to assume that it could very well be an expression of the feelings that some, including the *Maibas* and members of the royal family, had towards Garibniwaz's religious reforms.

Garibniwaz's religious reforms, including the rites and regulations of the Rāmānandī sect enhanced the symbolic power and personal authority of the *Lainingthou* (god-king), who was transformed into a Hindu Maharaja. However, competition between the institution of *Maibas*/*Maibis* and Brahmins over the patronage of political authorities and dominance of Manipur's religious field led to a Hindu–Vaiṣṇava discourse that involved appropriating Meitei gods and festivals, replacing Meitei texts with Vaiṣṇava ones, and reorganizing the structure of society into one that promoted the agenda of military conquests. The death of Garibniwaz ended the influence of the Rāmānandī tradition in Manipur. Nevertheless, the new practices he introduced such as the usage of Bengali script, the worship

of Vaiṣṇava deities in temples, the production of sacred texts such as the Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa, and Bhāgavata Purāṇa, and the sanskritization of Meitei festivals laid the foundations on which subsequent kingdoms in Manipur built their sovereignty. It also laid groundwork for the construction and popularization of the Manipuri cultural performances such as the *rās̄līlās*. The responses from the Meiteis who opposed Garibniwaz’s suppression of their religious practices would later result in a particular form of Vaiṣṇavism unique to Manipur. This will be evident in the next section when I discuss the reign of Bhāgyacandra.

In his classic work *The King’s Two Bodies*, Ernst Kantorowicz showed that early modern Western monarchies had developed a political theology which drew from Christian debates about the two natures of Christ. According to this theology, the king had two bodies: a natural body, which was his physical self, and an ‘eternal body politic’ or symbolic body endowed with divine right to rule (Kantorowicz 2016, p. 17). The logics of kingship in Manipur, even when the Meitei religion was dominant, was not that different in the sense that the king was considered to be the chief priest of the state and patron of the *lais*. However, when Garibniwaz refashioned kingship, the new symbolic body he tried to construct with the guidance of Śanta Dās did not resonate well with at least some sectors of his people. Disagreements over what the symbolic body of the king eventually led to the destruction of Garibniwaz’s natural body. The symbolic body of Manipuri kingship would then be refashioned again by his descendent, Bhāgyacandra.

5. Bhāgyacandra—The Devotee King

In 1753, after a short period of political instability, two grandsons of Garibniwaz inherited the throne of Manipur. The first, Gaura Shyam, also known as Maramba, ruled Manipur from 1753–1759 (Bihari 2012, p. 114). Gaura Shyam was crippled and, due to his disability, shared the throne with his younger brother, Bhāgyacandra. This was a turbulent period in Manipur’s history, as it had been subjected to frequent invasions from neighboring states, especially from the Burmese, who were led by the illustrious King Alaungpaya of the Konbaung dynasty (r. 1752–1760). In 1754, Alaungpaya raided Manipur and captured two of Bhāgyacandra’s sons, Labanyanachandra and Modhuchandra (Sana 2010, p. 136). Then, in December 1758, Alaungpaya returned to Manipur and sacked the capital, this time, with the help of Gaur Shyam’s uncle Khelempa, who revolted against his nephews for not granting him more power (BP. vol. 2 1966, pp. 29–38). For nine days, the Burmese plundered Manipur and took more than a thousand captives back to Burma.⁵¹

In 1759, Gaura Shyam abdicated the throne for his brother Bhāgyacandra to take complete sovereign control. One of the first things that Bhāgyacandra did when he became king was to destroy a temple constructed by the Burmese in the village of Mawan to commemorate their victory over the Meiteis.⁵² However, the Burmese continued the raids, attacking Manipur no less than three times during Bhāgyacandra’s reign. N. N. Acharya estimated that around 300,000 Meiteis were killed or captured during these invasions (Acharya 1988).

The Burmese were successful because they had superior firepower from guns that were acquired through their contact with the French and the Portuguese (Sana 2010, p. 140). To counter the Burmese alliance with the French, and to regain dispossessed land, Bhāgyacandra sought an alliance with the British. The British accepted his request because they saw it as a way to pressure Burma into providing reparations for the “repeated ill-treatment” of their workers in a factory at Negrain (Wheeler 1878, pp. 281–91). In 1762, a treaty of mutual trade and defense was negotiated between Henry Verelst, Chief of the East India Company at Chittagong, and Haridas Gossain, the Bengali negotiator on behalf of Bhāgyacandra (L. C. Singh 1970, p. 8). To assist Manipur, the British sent six companies of sepoy, but due to rain and an outbreak of disease, they did not reach their destination (Wilson 1852, pp. 19–20).⁵³

In 1764, the Burmese King Hsinbyushin (r. 1763–1776) invaded Manipur with a large and well-equipped army and defeated the troops led by Bhāgyacandra, laying siege to his palace (Harvey 1925, p. 257). The Burmese installed Khelempa as a puppet king

and Bhāgyacandra fled to Cachar. Bhāgyacandra's period of exile would prove to be crucial to his own and Manipur's religious future. This liminal period paved the way for the emergence of a narrative that reconstructed his sovereignty. It is not possible to discern the historicity of the remainder of his story, but it is important to summarize it here because it was the foundational story that legitimized his sovereignty as a divine king in the consciousness of Manipuris.

While in Cachar, Bhāgyacandra supposedly visited the ancestral home of Sri Caitanya, the 16th century founder of the Gauḍīya tradition in Dacca Dakshin, Sylhet, now a part of Bangladesh. There, he met Rām Nārāyaṇ Siromani, a descendant of Upendra Mishra who was the grandfather of Sri Caitanya and received a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava initiation from him (E. N. Singh 1986). According to another account based on oral traditions in Manipur, Bhāgyacandra received initiation from Sri Rūpa Paramānanda, a disciple of Rām Gopal Mahasaya, whose ancestors migrated to Manipur during the reign of King Mungyamba (r. 1562–1597) (Sana 2010, p. 18). Traditional narratives claim that they are from the lineage of disciples of Ganganarayan Chakraborty and his predecessor Narottama-dāsa Thakur (16th century), both famous in the Gauḍīya lineage for their missionary achievements in Bengal and Orissa (Jha 2016). These narratives served to associate Bhāgyacandra with renowned persons and thereby increase his religious capital.

Having been initiated as a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava, between 1764 and 1765, Bhāgyacandra then proceeded to Assam where he was received by King Rajeshwar Singha. According to the *Tungkhungia Buranji* (TB), the royal chronicle of Assam, Rajeshwar Singha's minister Kritichandra Barbarua advised him to assist Bhāgyacandra because of the latter's mythical ancestral relations to Babruvāhana, borne out of the marriage between Arjuna and the Manipuri princess Citrāṅgadā from the Mahābhārata:

The Manipuri Rāja was descended of old from Babrubahan. He is a Kshatriya and there is no doubt about it. I hope Your Majesty will marry the princess (Kuranganayani) . . . ⁵⁴ This chief of Manipur has taken refuge with Your Majesty, being driven from his kingdom by the Burman king. The *sastras* (scriptures) have said that a fugitive should not be denied protection; so, if Your Majesty can contrive to reinstate the Manipuri Rāja to his kingdom, that act will bring in to Your majesty both fame and piety.

(Bhuyan 1933, pp. 55–56)

This account indicates that, by this time, claims to biological connections to the central characters in the Mahābhārata such as Arjuna were already well known and accepted.

However, before Rajeshwar Singha could pledge his alliance, Bhāgyacandra's estranged uncle Khelempa informed him via a letter that Bhāgyacandra was an imposter posing as the king of Manipur (Gosvāmī 2022, p. 28). Consequently, Rajeshwar Singha felt doubtful of the identity of his guest, and wanted to test if he was indeed the true king of Manipur (N. T. Singh 2007, p. 26). Singha put Bhāgyacandra to a test by asking him to tame a wild elephant because he heard that Manipuri kings were gifted with great strength and special power (Gosvāmī 2022, p. 18).

While Bhāgyacandra accepted the challenge, he was overwhelmed by it, and later in the night he fell on his knees and pleaded to his deity, Krishna to save him. According to the narrative, on hearing his prayer, Krishna appeared in his dream and assured the King of victory, not only over the elephant but also that he would be reinstated as king of Manipur. Bhāgyacandra responded by requesting Krishna to be the king of Manipur and accept him as his servant. Krishna then instructed Bhāgyacandra to install an image of him carved out of a specific *theibong* (jackfruit) tree found on Kaina hill in Manipur after his return. Krishna then revealed his own *rāslilā* dance to Bhāgyacandra and requested that he dedicate a *rāslilā* performance to him when he returns to Manipur. Upon waking, the king summoned a member of his counsel, Pandit Gopīram Singh Patchahanba, and related his dream to him. He then requested Patchahanba to paint what he saw in his dream.

The next day, the test for Bhāgyacandra was arranged and a notorious wild elephant was brought to the arena. According to tradition, at first the elephant charged toward

Bhāgyacandra, but as it got closer, it suddenly knelt before him. He tamed the elephant without difficulty and mounted it before parading around the arena victoriously (N. T. Singh 2007, p. 38).⁵⁵ Rajeshwar Singha congratulated him and bestowed upon him the title “Jai Singh” (Devi 2010, p. 23).⁵⁶ This episode is still widely celebrated in Manipur. Figure 1 shows a statue of Bhāgyacandra mounting the elephant at the crossroads of Manipur’s busiest business district, near the Paona Bazaar in Imphal. There are several similar portraits in temples throughout Manipur.



Figure 1. A statue of Bhāgyacandra mounting the elephant is displayed in a marketplace.

After Bhāgyacandra’s legendary victory, thousands of people volunteered to help him in his quest to regain his throne (N. T. Singh 2007, p. 39). In 1767, after an initial failed expedition due to his troops getting lost (Bhuyan 1933, pp. 59–60), a military force of 80,000 Assamese soldiers armed with guns, swords, and spears were sent to Manipur to assist Bhāgyacandra (Sana 2010, p. 145). It succeeded in restoring Bhāgyacandra back to the throne and his triumphant return to Manipur is recorded in the CK.⁵⁷ Bhāgyacandra was then recognized as the supreme ruler of Manipur, both by the people of the valley and the various tribes of the hill (N. T. Singh 2007, p. 42). By the late 1770s, after Bhāgyacandra regained power, one of his first acts was to reverse the practices that the Burmese introduced. When the Burmese occupied Manipur, they appointed Chandragya as governor of Manipur. According to the CK, Chandragya suppressed Hindu practices and forced the Meiteis Vaiṣṇavas to remove their sacred thread.⁵⁸ In 1781, Bhāgyacandra organized a ceremony in which he directed the Meiteis who were forced to remove their thread to wear it again.⁵⁹

Having been reinstated as king, Bhāgyacandra then sought to repel further Burmese attacks, consolidate his sovereignty, and unify his people under a new religious framework. The pan-Indian appeal of Vaiṣṇavism was used by Bhāgyacandra to forge political alliances with Assam and establish Manipur as a regional political and cultural powerhouse. Vaiṣṇavism served a potent tool in his quest for political legitimacy. This is not to say that Bhāgyacandra's support for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism was solely due to political reasons and not influenced by his personal faith. As I will show later, Bhāgyacandra was a very active and interested participant of Vaiṣṇava devotional practices and rituals.

Between 1769 and 1776, the CK records that were a few more attacks from Burma, but these were repelled, and political stability returned to Manipur.⁶⁰ Later, a peaceful compromise seems to have been made with Burma, as the Burmese released his sons from captivity in 1787.⁶¹ As the political situation gradually stabilized, Bhāgyacandra reigned over a peaceful kingdom that flourished with innovative cultural productions until his death in 1798. A period of peace in Manipur during the latter part of Bhāgyacandra's reign allowed him to refashion kingship to focus on other activities such as arts and religion. These including minting coins, publishing sacred literature, patronizing performing arts, establishing networks for pilgrimage, and constructing temples, Bhāgyacandra minted gold and silver coins with "Sri Rādhā Govindaji" inscribed on them (Sana 2010, p. 182). Bhāgyacandra chose aspects of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism that were already familiar with Meiteis, such as temple worship and dance dramas, to create cultural products such as the *rāslilās* that would resonate with Manipuris. References to aesthetics and religious logics that had been already internalized in the Meitei habitus made it less likely that Manipuris would resist the new religion's rituals.

Hindu sacred texts were collected and circulated. Some texts such as the BhP, the *Gītāgovinda*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, and *Mahābhārata* were also recited in public and during festivals.⁶² These public readings of the epics and *purāṇas* by religious specialists were popular means of transmitting and inculcating religious ideas to the illiterate masses. One particular reciter personally patronized by Bhāgyacandra was an Assamese Brahmin by the name of Jiu Ram Sharma who made the narrative style of poetry popular in Manipur (Bandopadhyay 2010, p. 62). While in exile in Assam, Bhāgyacandra had met Jiu Ram Sharma and invited him to Manipur. In 1776 CE, when he finally arrived in Manipur, Jiu Ram Sharma attained fame for narrating the above-mentioned texts in Manipur. He was called "Tekhao Bhamon Leeba"—the storyteller Brahmin from Tekhao (Assam) (Datta 1986, p. 15). The ritual of reading and explanation of scriptures important to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas such as the BhP and *Caitanya Caritāmṛta* came to be called "*Wāri-leeba*" and are still practiced in Manipuri Vaiṣṇava temples.

The institution of *loisangs* begun by Garibniwaz was expanded by Bhāgyacandra. They were committees with various responsibilities. The most influential of these was the *Brāhman Sabhā*, the authority responsible for religious issues. The *Brāhman Sabhā* would adjudicate on debates and controversies related to religion, especially involving issues of purity and pollution, and was the authority on deciding if plays or texts written by local composers were authentic. The primary function of the *loisangs* related to the arts was to serve as figureheads of authority in the fields of dance and music, resolving disputes concerning village temple performances, and to act as advisers to the king, who, as the head of the committee, passed final judgment on these matters (S. Sharma 1989, p. 105). Some of the prominent *loisangs* formed subsidiary groups that were assigned to special roles. The *Pālā loisang* was responsible for composing music and song for *naṭa saṅkīrtan* and *rāslilās*. Two sub-groups that belonged to this *loisang* were the *Ariba pālā* that focused on the form of *saṅkīrtan* during the Garibniwaz era and the *nata saṅkīrtan pālā*, which was established during Bhāgyacandra's era (Devi 2010, p. 34).

The most visible form of transmitting Vaiṣṇava beliefs and practices to the masses was through performances of song and dance. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava emphasis on *saṅkīrtan* as a primary religious practice resonated with the Meiteis who were already accustomed to appeasing their gods through song and dance. Furthermore, Bhāgyacandra continued

a tradition of *saṅkīrtan* that had already been introduced during the time of Garibniwaz, albeit with Gauḍīya sensibilities. In the CK, there are records of the king traveling to different parts of Manipur to attend *saṅkīrtan*, indicating that it was performed all over Manipur.⁶³ The significance of *saṅkīrtan* in Manipur's religious landscape is underscored by records in the CK and my own observation of the *holī* festival.⁶⁴ Groups of singers numbering more than a hundred would perform *saṅkīrtan* at various temples and homes for a week. I even found that several Manipuri homes had a courtyard which specifically served the purpose of hosting *saṅkīrtan* group.

Networks of religious travel between Manipur and Indian states were established, as more Manipuris travelled there for pilgrimage. For example, it is reported in the CK that in 1793, Queen Yipemma Yangampi Reimakhupi took her *mūrti* (image) of Rādhāman (a name for Krishna) with her and went on pilgrimage to Vṛndāvan,⁶⁵ considered by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas to be the spiritual capital of the Vraja region, in Delhi. Manipuris went to these places to study philosophy, rituals, and language, accumulating religious capital that they would exercise in their own state. Today, dozens of Manipuri temples are still active in the Vraja region.

As connections between places in Bengal and Vraja region became more established there was a need for Manipuri Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas to create their own sacred spaces in Manipur that resembled the Indian prototype. As Vaiṣṇavism became more widespread in Manipuri social life, new religious practices that were not previously present during the reign of Garibniwaz emerged. These include the recreation of sacred geographies resembling Vraja and Navadvīpa, pilgrimage places considered to be sacred by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, and the worship of deities specific to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism such as Caitanya and Nityānanda. This ushered in the construction of a number of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava temples in Manipur. Especially noteworthy is the inauguration of the most prominent temple associated with the royal family, the Govindaji palace temple. The inauguration story of this temple weaves the creation of a new sovereignty with sacred spaces, sounds, images, and body movements. Like the earlier episode of Bhāgyacandra's exile, the historical veracity of this story cannot be ascertained, as it contains mystical elements such as divine visions and hierophanies. Nevertheless, it is widely accepted as history by most Manipuri Vaiṣṇavas and holds an important place in the Manipuri psyche.

The story of the construction of the temple and the installation of an image of Krishna as Govindaji began in 1775, after Bhāgyacandra had regained the throne by repelling the final Burmese invasion. The CK reports that the king went to a hilly region, Kaina, and located the jackfruit tree that he saw in his dream while he was in Assam.⁶⁶ The tree was then transported along the Iril River to the palace, and the image of Govindaji was carved out of it. According to Lokendra Arambam, a close motif of the serpent-dragon *lai* known as Pakhangba was carved into the navel of Govindaji (Lokendra 2004), indicating a desire to blend Meitei aesthetics with Vaiṣṇava practices. In November 1776, Govindaji was installed in the palace.⁶⁷ Three years later, during the Manipuri month of *Hiyanggei* (November–December), to fulfill Bhāgyacandra's promise to Krishna, the first *rāslīlā* was dedicated to Govindaji in the *rās mandal* (courtyard where dance is performed) at Bhāgyacandra's new capital Langthabal, which he named as Canchipur (Singh and Singh 1989, p. 133).⁶⁸ The entry reads as follows:

Friday, the 11th, the *mūrti* of Śrī Govinda was ritually bathed in the *rāsmandal* of the Canchipur. *Rās* was dedicated for five consecutive days.

Bhāgyacandra also dedicated himself and his throne to Govindaji and declared that he would carry out his royal duties by considering himself as the servant of his lord (Devi 2010, p. 32). Thereafter, the same decorum and ritual fanfare given to kings was offered to Govindaji. This occasion was described 58 years later in the British periodical, *the Chinese repository*⁶⁹, as follows:

It was the command and example of a prince of Manipur, which first introduced Hinduism into the country. About the year 1780, an image of Govinda was

publicly consecrated with much ceremony in Manipur, by the grandfather of the present Rajah (Chandrakirti). This was the first national profession of that faith, though its votaries had previously been resident there. At the same time, a proclamation was issued by the Rajah stating that, in order to avert the recurrence of such calamities as then oppressed them (the invasion of the Burmans). He wholly made over his country to his celestial proprietor, henceforward holding the government in his name. Near the same time, an inferior image was consecrated, to whom was entrusted the presumptive heirship, and the Rajah positively enjoined that no descendant of his, without the possession of these images, should ever be raised to the royal dignity. Hence, the possession of them was a fruitful source of dissension between his sons, up to the accession of Gambhir Singh, in 1824.

Through his act of ceremonially ceding his throne to Krishna and linking future kingship to the deity of Govindaji, Bhāgyacandra reformatted Manipuri sovereignty into a devotionism bonded to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. The state of Manipur was in turn interconnected to Bengal, Orissa, and the Vraj region through religious networks. These connections would continue for the next two centuries.

There were six temples that were built for the other *mūrtis* supposedly carved out of the same jackfruit tree. According to Tombi Singh, after the initial carving was completed, Bhāgyacandra felt that something was amiss in the image (N. T. Singh 2007, p. 58). While it was beautiful, the figure did not exactly correspond to what he saw in his vision. He called for the carving of another image and named this one “Vijay Govinda”. Vijay Govinda was handed over to his uncle and senior minister, Anantasai, to worship. Other temples supposedly built for *mūrtis* carved out of the same tree include Śrī Nityananda Prabhu at Arambam Leikei in 1795,⁷⁰ Śrī Madan Mohan at Oinam Thingel, Śrī Anuprabhu in Navadvīpa, Bengal in 1795, Śrī Gopinath at Ningthoukhong, and Śrī Advaita Prabhu at Lamangdong in 1793.⁷¹ Like the Govindaji palace temple, they hosted the ritual worship of the *mūrtis* and devotional performances like the *rāslīlās*.

After the consecration of Govindaji at Langthabal in 1779, the first *rāslīlā*, later called the *Mahārās* was dedicated for five consecutive nights, starting from the full moon night of *Kārtik* (October–November). Nilakanta Singh suggested that since Bhāgyacandra had stayed for a long time in the court of the Ahom King, he might have been inspired by the *Añkīyā nāṭ* dance of Assam, which is attributed to Śaṅkardev (Lal 2004; Neog 1985)⁷² and was performed in monasteries called *sattra* (E. N. Singh 1982, p. 71).⁷³ According to traditional narratives, Bhāgyacandra himself participated in the *naṭa sañkīrtan* and *Mahārās* by composing songs, singing, and playing the *pung* (a Manipuri drum) (H. I. Singh 2009). Other members of the royal family were also involved in various roles. Bhāgyacandra’s uncles Ngoubtram Shai and Dhar Shai were the lead singers (Khoni 2018, p. 2). The ladies of the royal family participated in various roles as *Gopīs* (milkmaid consorts of Krishna). Consequently, this infused the *Mahārās* with a layer of power and authority as a bona fide religious expression in Manipur. No actor performed the role of Krishna. He was represented by the *mūrti* of Govindaji. Significantly, the traditional narrative says that an image of Rādhā, Krishna’s principal consort, had not been constructed in time for the *Mahārās*. Therefore, Bhāgyacandra’s young daughter Bimbavati (also known as Sija Laiobi) played the role of Rādhā. In my interview with him, Manipuri historian, Arambam Lokendra, said:

The *rāslīlā* was not just a dance event. It was a political event of the crowning of Bhāgyacandra’s lord as the king of this land . . . There is a Meitei coronation ritual that when the king is crowned, his wife has to sleep with him for five days in the bridal chamber. The institution of royal marriage was a ritual process to allow energy from the ancestors to flow to their sexual organs. Through that, they will be given powers to do good for humanity by producing offspring.⁷⁴

Lokendra was suggesting that Bimbavati’s playing the role of Rādhā had a symbolic meaning during the consecration of Govindaji. It was performed as part of the ritual to

enthroned Govindaji and to connect the royal family to their new deity for the welfare of the state. Scholars and the general Manipuri public often say that Bhāgyacandra dedicated two more *rāslīlās* to Govindaji. They are the *Kunjarās* (bower *rās*) and *Vasantarās* (Spring *rās*). However, the CK records during Bhāgyacandra's reign do not mention the names of these *rāslīlās*. Thus, it is not clear exactly in which year they were dedicated.

Bhāgyacandra's efforts in promoting Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and the traditional stories about his religious contributions earned him the title "Rājaraṣi" (saintly King), and he is still referred to by that honorific today. His story is still retold in the form of dramas, murals in temples, and festivals. Bhāgyacandra's patronization of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism enabled the tradition to become so widespread that it rose to prominence over the other existing Hindu and Meitei traditions. In fact, Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇavism gradually waned away and was replaced by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism as the state religion of Manipur. The social changes and political upheavals experienced during warfare with the Burmese were periods of social fragmentation in which the established order by Garibniwaz was suspended and a new form of sovereignty was constructed.

However, it was his adoption of a Vaiṣṇava–Meitei habitus that served as a crucial ingredient in the process of reintegrating a Manipur divided by Garibniwaz's controversial policies and humiliation suffered under the Burmese. Bhāgyacandra established his sovereignty as devotee-king of a newly defined Vaiṣṇava–Meitei framework that allowed him to unify his people, regain lost territories of Manipur, and impose law and order. Scholars have described how, in other parts of India, Vaiṣṇava traditions have had the capacity to absorb indigenous religions. Staal (1963) used the term "Sanskritization" to describe how indigenous religious traditions were absorbed into the purāṇic fold. In a similar vein, Bhāgyacandra's brand of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism absorbed Meitei practices to construct a blended religion with overarching Vaiṣṇava beliefs and practices.

While Garibniwaz more or less adopted a rigid exclusivist stance that emphasized the exclusive worship of Vaiṣṇava deities, rituals, and texts, Bhāgyacandra preferred an accommodationist approach and openness to acculturation. He shunned away from dramatic acts of sanskritization and displayed greater sensitivity towards the Meitei culture. The following anecdote of Bhāgyacandra, shared by Tombi Singh, further illustrates this point. Once a proposal was made that the main *mūrti* of Krishna in the palace temple of Govindaji should only be presented with types of food offered in Vṛndāvan. Bhāgyacandra rejected it and declared that the deity should be given the best of what Manipur has to offer, not only in terms of food but architecture, dress, and rituals of worship (N. T. Singh 2007, p. 58). His ecumenical approach to and endorsement of local culture paved the way for Manipuris to practice both religions simultaneously. Thus, Bhāgyacandra based his sovereignty on a complex mixture of native and foreign elements and practices.

Bhāgyacandra's transcultural approach would prove more successful and durable than Garibniwaz's stress on military domination and expansion. His approach enabled him to more organically unify different religious and political factions and attain a high level of hegemony without reliance on brute force and political power. Antonio Gramsci's (1973) concept of hegemony aptly describes the state's management of religion by characterizing hegemony as a form of domination which is performed in a coercive sense—"calibrated coercion" (Gramsci 1973). To stay in power, members of the ruling group need to persuade their subjects that they are working for the benefit of the citizens and that it is commonsensical and natural for the citizens to assimilate the values espoused by the state. Social control imposed by the ruling group is likely to be accepted voluntarily by the governed as necessary in order to achieve certain desirable objectives. Consequently, policies and actions are supported by the majority of the people and the power of the ruling group is uncontested.

The most salient aspect of Bhāgyacandra's blended model was the relationship between Vaiṣṇava deities and the *lais*. The introduction of Vaiṣṇava deities did not replace the *lais*. There are numerous instances that show the royal court patronized both Vaiṣṇava gods and the *Umanṅ* *lais*. It is recorded in the CK that, in 1783, Bhāgyacandra's uncle Anantashai

inaugurated a new pond and on that day both the images of Govindaji and Sanamahi and other gods were bathed in that pond:

On 5th Hiyangei (October–November) Saturday, Ibungsi (the king’s brother’s son) Anantashai Nongthonba started to dedicate the tank. On the same day *lai* Govinda, Sanamahi, and others, all the *lai* of the land, were made to bathe in the Lamlongei tank. The King, Queen, all the leaders, the Rāmānandī, monks, and Brahmins, the old men, and men of rank—all of them were made to bathe in the tank.⁷⁵

Bhāgyacandra’s sovereignty was based on kingship that sponsored the worship of important *lais*, such as Sanamahi and Leimaren, often side-by-side with Krishna, without the degree of tension that had marked the Garibniwaz period (Parratt 1980, p. 169). It was not uncommon for him to participate in rituals related to both and Sanamahi. For example, in February 1789, Bhāgyacandra presented an elephant to Sanamahi,⁷⁶ and in a rain-stopping ritual of Manipur, both Sanamahi and Krishna were invoked. More than a century later, Col. J. Shakespeare (1913, p. 63), British political agent of Manipur from 1905–1908 and 1909–1914, observed that the prayer chanted by a rain-stopper contained the names of both Hindu and Meitei deities: “*Sibo (Śiva) linga, Sri Swar Sanamahi, Sibbo linga Sri Swar Thangjing, Makei Ngakpa Viṣṇu He! Narayan.*” Unfamiliar with the Manipuris’ habitus of harmonizing diverse religions, he wrote “the mixture of Hindu deities, Śiva, Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa, with the Umang Lai is typical of the religious muddle in which the people are”, and “so in Manipur, Krishna is devoutly worshipped and Brāhmins are maintained, while at the same time every village has at least one sacred grove, the abode of the local god, who has his own priests and priestesses” (Shakespeare 1913, p. 63).

Some of the Umang *lais* were identified with Hindu gods and goddesses. Dr. Suresh, a researcher on the indigenous Meitei religion, noted:⁷⁷

Over time, Panthoibi was identified to be Goddess Durga and her lover, Nongpok Ningthou was associated with Śiva, even though their stories bear little resemblance to one another. Today, on Koubrou Hill, people go there to worship a stone which is believed to be an icon representing Śiva. Previously, it was probably a place dedicated to the Meitei gods.

The association of Umang *lais* with Hindu gods blurred the boundaries between the two religious traditions.

In general, the *lais* had a complex and subservient relationship with the new Vaiṣṇava gods and the ritual practices associated with them. In describing their interaction with Vedic religious practices, Colas (2005, pp. 229–70), for instance, wrote that “without being anti-Vedic or Tantric in character, [Vaiṣṇavism] tends to subordinate Vedic rituals to its own renunciative ideology which upholds non-injury (*ahimsā*) and rites without animal sacrifice.” Similarly, the worship of *lais* shifted to resemble Hindu ritual prescriptions that included substituting animal sacrifices for bloodless offerings (Parratt 1980, p. 169). In some cases, Vaiṣṇava deities were introduced into public Meitei festivals. Bhāgyacandra used his position as a religio-political authority to add Vaiṣṇava elements into Meitei rituals. One example is the *Heikru-hidongba*. *Heikru-hidongba*, a traditional Meitei festival observed since the time of King Irengba (r. 984–1074 CE). From the 16th century, during the reign of King Khagemba, a boat race was added to the festival, becoming an occasion of religious and social significance (Parratt 1980, p. 1). The day before the race, in the early morning hours, the leaders of each team offer items of silver and gold in a container to the *lais*. After Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism had become the state religion of Manipur, a *mūrti* of Krishna consecrated by Bhāgyacandra, called “Vijay Govinda,” became a participant in the festival. Before the race starts, Vijay Govinda is brought on a procession along the sides of the moat on two boats tied together and people make offerings of fruits and flowers, performing *pūjā*. Then, the boats are taken to the bay where the race begins, and the winner receives a garland worn by Vijay Govinda.

The integration of religious festivals was not a one-way process. Meitei practices were also added to Vaiṣṇava festivals. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism underwent significant changes that reflected a distinct Manipuri predilection. Arambam Lokendra referred to this phenomenon as the “Meeteization (sic) of Hinduism” instead of the “Hinduization of Meitei”.⁷⁸ In fact, in their course of their mutual encounters, Vaiṣṇavism and the Meitei religion were mutually transformed. This is reflected in the images and dresses of gods, life passage rituals, and public festivals. For example, during Janmaṣṭami, the festival celebrating Krishna’s birth, traditional games played in Meitei festivals, such as *yubi lakpi* (a rugby-like game, where each player tries to snatch a coconut and runs towards goal with it) and *likol sanaba*, a game played with cowrie shells, are also present (Parratt 1980, p. 39). During my stay in Manipur, I witnessed *yubi lakpi* being played in a field next to the Govindaji temple. A small *mūrti* of Krishna was brought out to the field in procession. Two teams of players would line up in front of the *mūrti* and offer their prostrations before and after the game. Mixing religion with entertainment in the form of boat races, martial arts, wrestling, and rugby has been part of the Meitei habitus for centuries.

Despite the religious hybridization that pervaded Bhāgyacandra’s reign, Meitei rituals and practices were retained only to the extent that they did not contradict Vaiṣṇava religious principles. While Bhāgyacandra was more favorable towards patronizing indigenous Meitei rituals and traditions as compared to Garibniwaz, some acts that were perceived to violate Vaiṣṇava norms were punished. For example, the practice of *potsem* (sorcery) was punished with exile.⁷⁹ However, there is no evidence that Bhāgyacandra extended these proscriptions to the hill tribes. Mapping the hierarchy of gods onto the rulership, with Krishna as the supreme deity and himself as the supreme ruler, he accommodated existing tribal traditions, and the different tribes continued to be led by their different chiefs, as long as they acknowledged the king as their ruler. Emphasizing Bhāgyacandra’s accommodative policies with the people of the hill, historian Dwijendra Narayan Goswami, points out that one of his names, Chingthangkomba, literally refers to “hugger of the hills (Ching)” (Gosvāmī 2022, p. 17).

In general, it can be said that the same scheme of fusion within limits was applied in diverse ritual and festive domains based on a centuries-old disposition which sought to harmonize and synthesize. The Meitei house, gods, rituals, festivals, and other aspects I did not discuss in detail, such as language and naming conventions, were restructured with the same socially defined logics. A complete assimilation of Bengali Vaiṣṇava culture did not take place. Rather, Vaiṣṇava thought and practice were absorbed into Meitei structures of practice through fluid cultural boundaries and relatively inclusive hierarchies, modelled after Bhāgyacandra himself who was seen as being simultaneously a devotee par excellence of Krishna and a loyal patron of the *lais*.

In 1797, Bhāgyacandra, accompanied by his family members, went on pilgrimage to the Ganges and delegated his duties to his son, Labanyachandra.⁸⁰ Along the way, he established Vaiṣṇava temples (Kamei 2007, p. 22). He visited Tripura, where he gave his daughter, Harisesvari, in marriage to the King of Tripura, Rajdhar Manikya (Sana 2010, p. 189). In Tripura, Harisesvari installed and worshipped her household *mūrtis*, Rādhā-Madhava, which was gifted to her from her father, and the consecration was followed by a performance of a *rāslīlā* (K. Singh 2011, p. 10). During his stay in Navadvīpa, Bhāgyacandra established a temple of Caitanya called Śrī Anu Prabhu, which was worshipped by his other daughter, Bimbavati, until her death (Kamei 2007, p. 22). That temple also has a *mūrti* of Bhāgyacandra.

In September 1798, Bhāgyacandra died in while still on pilgrimage in the Bengal region.⁸¹ For seven continuous days, *saṅkīrtan* was performed at the Govindaji palace temple in his honor.⁸² Bhāgyacandra’s son Labanyachandra was entrusted with the throne. By that time, the two religious traditions co-existed in a syncretic harmonized structure. This continued until the mid-20th century. There was no further attempt to eradicate Vaiṣṇavism or the indigenous Meitei religion. In fact, later kings supported both religious

traditions, even though Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism was the official state religion, following the framework of sovereignty established by Bhāgyacandra

It is difficult not to overstate the role that Bhāgyacandra played in shaping the Manipuri religious field and habitus, providing the rich terrain out of which the *rāslīlās* emerged. He promoted the inculcation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava ideas and Assamese Vaiṣṇava performances, which he internalized during the period of his exile. At the same time, the memories of Meitei religious practices, especially the indigenous dances were not abandoned. In particular, Bhāgyacandra invoked the Meitei disposition towards harmonizing (but within a hierarchical order) religions. He activated the institutions at his disposal to construct performances that resonated with the general populace. In this way, Bhāgyacandra grounded kingship in Vaishnava narratives which was inclusive of Meitei practices and transitioned the basis of sovereignty from narratives of conquest to devotion and accommodation.

6. Conclusions

In this article, I have discussed two forms of articulating religio-political power, which, while sharing some elements, show contrasting ways to regulate the relationship between Vaisnavism and local religious traditions. In the short term, both forms were successful in establishing sovereignty. However, one strategy seems to have had more durable and widespread effects.

In the 18th century, Manipuri kings, Garibniwaz and Bhāgyacandra, sought to transform the Meitei religious landscape to absorb Vaiṣṇava beliefs and practices so as to produce a new doxa for experiencing the sacred. Garibniwaz aligned himself with the Rāmānandī Vaiṣṇava tradition because he saw it as an effective way to increase his military prowess. He introduced new practices such as the Bengali writing system, the sanskritization of Meitei festivals, substituting the *lais* with Vaiṣṇava deities in official ceremonies, and promoting the position of Brahmins in the religious field. He also suppressed the Meitei religion by stopping the worship of some *lais*, imposing restrictions pertaining to meat and alcohol, reducing the importance of *Maibas* and *Maibis*, and burning some of their *puyas*. He met with opposition from his own family members, and the *Maiba/Maibi* institution for suppressing the Meitei religion. As a result, his strategy to establish rulership, while relatively successful in keeping invading powers at check, was ultimately unstable.

In contrast, Bhāgyacandra, exiled after a military invasion by the Burmese, received initiation in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition. On his return to Manipur, he introduced new additions to the Meitei religious landscape that included the performance of *saṅkīrtana* in life-passage rituals, the production and public recitation of Hindu texts, the borrowing of musical instruments and other aesthetic elements used in Assamese Hindu performances, pilgrimage to places held sacred by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, the creation of sacred geographies and new temples in Manipur, and the formation of new cultural productions such as the *rāslīlās*. Bhāgyacandra curated aspects of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava thought and practice that were already familiar with Meiteis, such as temple worship and dance dramas to create cultural products such as the *rāslīlās* that would resonate with Manipuris. He also continued to patronize indigenous Meitei religious rituals and aesthetics, and refashioning kingship as a devotee caretaker of the throne which symbolically belongs to Krishna (Govindaji) as well as patron of the *lais*. While Bhāgyacandra drew power from Govindaji for his sovereignty, it is also noteworthy that after Bhāgyacandra had inaugurated the first *rāslīlā*, Govindaji's importance in the social and religious life of Manipur increased. In the 19th century, when new bridges, markets, and roads were built, they were consecrated to Govindaji or Vijay Govinda.⁸³ The *mūrtis* of Rādhā and Govindaji also functioned as rainmakers, as they were beseeched to bring about rain by offering them gifts, milk, and performing *naṭa saṅkīrtan* in an open field.

As a result, Bhāgyacandra managed to construct a hegemony, with his subjects being more willing to accept the legitimacy of his power and the hierarchical order over which he reigned. He was able to achieve what Antonio Gramsci called hegemony, which is

built on the ideological, cultural, and moral consent given by the subaltern groups to their leader (Gramsci 1999, pp. 203–7). In fact, this hegemony was inculcated and made material through a panoply of ritual practices, performances of myths, architecture, the transformation of the Manipur geographic landscape, and the production and circulation of sacred texts, all of which resonated with the extant local habitus. This “in-corporation” of the religio-political authority made his enduring legacy possible. Bhāgyacandra used such hegemonic strategies to manage diverse religious and political groups in Manipur and be granted religious, political, and legal power over Manipur.

The hybrid Vaiṣṇava–Meitei religious practices introduced during Bhāgyacandra’s reign became new generative structures of practice in the religious field. Even the titular king in modern day Manipur continues to patronize both traditions. The involvement of Bhāgyacandra and the royal family in religious cultural products spurred further cultural innovations. Subsequent kings of Manipur, influenced by the *saṅkīrtanas* and the first three *rāslīlās*, contributed to further developments in courtly religious artforms, sometimes participating themselves. Some examples are as follows. It is recorded in CK that in 1869, another dance drama called *Shajenba* (or *Goṣṭhalīlā*, as it is now called), based on stories of Kṛishna playing with his cowherd boyfriends and killing demons was performed and witnessed by the king.⁸⁴ It is still performed in Manipur today, especially during *Janmaṣṭami*, the annual celebration of Krishna’s birth. Another play, which also continues to be performed today, *Kaliyā Dhaman*, or the punishing of the *Kaliyā* snake, was performed during King Chandrakirti’s (r. 1850–1886) presence in the village of Langthabal.⁸⁵ Chandrakirti is also famous for organizing and participating in a grand *saṅkīrtana* festival known as the *Rasa Humphumaree* (64 rasas). Sixty-four devotional emotions (*rasas*) categorized by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theologians were performed through song and dance, in sixty-four sessions over thirty-two days. In 1919, a new genre of dance dramas known as *Gauralīlās* were performed with King Churachand (r. 1891–1941)⁸⁶ singing in the performance.

Examining the outcomes of king fashioning by Garibniwaz and Bhāgyacandra through the lens of Kantorowicz’s concept of the king’s symbolic body, Garibniwaz’s corporeal body was destroyed by those who felt it was in conflict with their vision of the spiritual body of the king—the *Lai Ningthou*, god-king and patron of the *lais*. It did not resonate with their cultural habitus. Decades later, in Manipur, which had been ravaged by Burmese raids, Bhāgyacandra reconfigured the symbolic body of the king into a devotee-guardian of the deity Govindaji as well as patron of the *lais*. He was able to harmonize Vaiṣṇava beliefs and practices with Meitei sensibilities, mainly by honoring the deities of both traditions and through cultural productions that synthesized elements of Meitei rituals with Vaiṣṇava concepts. This new symbolic royal body was the result of a negotiation between Manipuri Vaiṣṇava and Meitei religionists. It was preserved and handed down by subsequent kings and generations through an incorporated and taken-for-granted aesthetics that becomes reinforced, revitalized, and re-invented every time Manipuris perform and witness a *rāslīlā* or any other ritual performance.

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Notes

- ¹ Parratt opined that the use of the term “Meetingu” (lord of the Meiteis) for ‘king’ indicates that it is essentially a writing of history from a Meitei perspective, over that of other clans. Later, after the Meiteis subjugated the other clans to form a confederacy, they came to be known as the Ningthoujas (royal), and the term “Meitei” was used to generally refer to all the clans.
- ² NB.CK, 51 (1608): “Meidingu Khagemba was known as ‘Laiyingthou’ from that time. He also introduced the social custom of bowing down to the king and those who observed this were rewarded with wealth”. SP.CK, vol. 1, 72 (1608): “They also started to address Meetingu Khakempa as Laiyingthou at this time. They also introduced the custom of kneeling down before him at this time”.
- ³ BP, vol. 2, 204: “*Ningthou Mathang Mathang Pallakpana (Pitambra) Carairongba chaktakta, nimānandī dharmā chatli asumba I Dharmā asida Banamali Krishnacaryana pibani I . . . māna leiramba śveta gaṅgā mapāndāgini*” (During the reign of the former King (Pitambra)

Charairongba, the guru Banamali Krishnacarya came from the place of śveta gaṅgā. The king learnt about the teachings of the Nimbārka lineage from him.) (My translation).

- 4 SP.CK, vol. 1, 116: “5 Wednesday, Ningthem Charairongpa and all those who were to accept the name of a Hindu lai (laiming loupā) fasted”.
- 5 They could be called by any of those names, but the nickname is most frequently used.
- 6 NB.CK, 80 (1708): “the 3 super-structured temple of Lai Kangla was inaugurated on Sunday the 14th”. SP.CK, Vol. 1, 119 (1709): “14 Sunday, the building with a three-tiered roof for the lai in Kangla was introduced”.
- 7 From the 9th century, the Burmese had moved toward the course of the Irrawady River. Their proximity to Manipur induced periods of conflict between the two kingdoms (R. K. J. Singh 2014).
- 8 NB.CK, 81 (1709): “The King performed a religious ceremony of keeping the head of his late father, King Charairongba inside a mound on Friday, the 21st”. SP.CK, Vol. 1, 121: “21 Friday, a memorial mound was erected for Ningthem charairongba”.
- 9 NB.CK, 82 (1710): “A stone was erected at Leishangkong in honour of Lai Warhaiba (Sanamahi)”. SP.CK, vol. 1, 121 (1710): “A stone was placed for a monument at Leisangkong for Laiwa Haipa”.
- 10 NB.CK, 82 (1711): “. . . and the construction of the temple of Lai Kangla commenced from that day and it was inaugurated on Friday, the 22nd”. SP.CK, vol. 1, 121 (1710): “On that day they began to build Lai Kangla’s shrine”.
- 11 NB.CK, 84 (1715): “He (the king) with his wife consecrated a new pond at Leishangkong to Lai Wahaiba (Sanamahi) on Wednesday, the 21st . . . ” SP.CK, 124 (1717): “21 Thursday, Ningthem and Sicha went to Leisangkong to dedicate a pool to Laiwa Haipa”.
- 12 SP.CK, vol.1, 122 (1712): “In the month of Wakching (December/January), it was said that there would be a solar eclipse that month. But the chief of the maipas, the one who was a hunchback, stopped it and it did not take place”.
- 13 NB.CK, 84 (1715): “The Kyong of Goddess Kalika was built on the 1st day of Wakching (January), Thursday”. SP.CK, vol. 1, 124 (1715): “On that day they began to build the temple for Kalika”.
- 14 SL 1973, 48–49. *noṅcuplā paṅgabramagi lākanba bāmon leṅgnā tinbālktagi brahmacārya lamchatnabā*) pramana banamāli athouheibanā śākta dharma . . . louge (will cultivate) . . . bāmon Gangadhar kaubada . . . “From the western direction, a Brahmin from the same place of brahmacāri Banamāli arrived. He, who was named Gangadhar, initiated the king into the śākta school”.
- 15 SP.CK, vol. 1, 126 (1717): Towards the beginning of the month Ningthem and some others accepted the Hindu religion from guru Gopal Das”.
- 16 SL 1973, 961: *Śākta ācāra lamchat hapna asum leiringaida haure noṅcuplā meitengguna Śrī Gopal Das Beiragi haure* athouheibanā lairel meitengguna *Śrī Gaurāṅga ahenba Caitanya Mahāprabhu ahoibagi Gaudīya maramchat achikpabu pukneng langpam thoina . . .* “When the king was following the Śākta tradition, a great missionary from the Gaudīya lineage of the excellent *Caitanya Mahāprabhu* arrived from the West, and initiated the dragon king”.
- 17 SP.CK, vol. 1, 129 (1719): “They completed (the building) for lai Prakhrapa . . . they began to build the royal building for Laiwa Haipa”.
- 18 SP.CK, vol. 1, 130 (1721): “17 Friday, Ningthem went down to Leisangkong to lay the foundations of a building with a domed roof for Lai Wahaipa”.
- 19 SP.CK, vol. 1, 129 (1720): “In that month eleven people led by a Vaishnava guru arrived in the country”. Goshai was used to refer to Śanta Dās Gosāi.
- 20 SP.CK, vol. 1, 126 (1727): “19 Wednesday, the guru, Ningthem and the Sicha went to Nungkei to feast on mangoes”. SP.CK, Vol.1, 137 (1728): “17 Wednesday, the guru, Ningthem and Yipungo the Lakpa (chief) of Wangkhei left to attack Sairem”.
- 21 SP.CK, vol. 1, 147 (1737): Full moon Thursday, the Maharaj and others, a total of 300 people, took the sacred thread”.
- 22 SP.CK, vol. 1, 148 (1738): “5 Sunday, most of the people in the country were made to take the sacred thread”. SP.CK, Vol. 1, 149 (1739): “5 Saturday, Yipungo Thangka Sai and others took the sacred thread. Also many who were told not to take the sacred thread did take it”.
- 23 SP.CK, vol. 1, 133 (1724): “20 Sunday, Ningthem, after having exhumed the bones of most his male ancestors, left for Ningthi river (Chindwin) to cremate them completely by the river”.
- 24 SP.CK, vol. 1, 131 (1722): “Seven Sageis (extended family) of the Keiroi who ate flesh of cattle were all arrested, beaten and made a public spectacle”.
- 25 SP.CK, vol. 1, 133 (1724): “Addressing Ningthem as Maharaja also began at this time”.
- 26 SP.CK, vol. 1, 131(1722): “22 Wednesday, the temple for Krishna was inaugurated. Gifts were distributed to all the noble and the brave, skilled and the unskilled
- 27 NB.CK, 93–94 (1729): “The temple of Hanuman was inaugurated on Wednesday, the 11th”. SP.CK, vol. 1, 138 (1729): “11 Wednesday, the temple for Hanuman was inaugurated”.
- 28 SP.CK, vol.1, 144 (1734): “Ningthem went to the area where Ram and Lokhon were housed and worshipped them”.
- 29 According to Jhalajit Singh, in a text called the Takhel Ngamba (Conquest of Tripura), it is written that Tripura waged a war on Manipur in 1723. I was not able to access the text.

- 30 The Kangleipak Historical and Cultural Research Center, 2015 (anonymous author) using the BK argued that even descendants of migrants who worked as washermen and fishermen were designated as Brahmins by Śanta Dās Gosāi.
- 31 NB.CK 239.
- 32 NB.CK 293–294.
- 33 NB.CK 309.
- 34 SP.CK, vol. 1, 31 (1074 CE): “In his reign the humans overpowered the lais, whereas before, the humans and lais were serving together in the Lallup. The lais disappeared. The humans took over the control of the land and the land was divided into six panas (or divisions) and they all served in the panas”.
- 35 NB.CK, 92 (1727): “The people had to work for 3 lallups on account of heavy pressure of works”. SP.CK, Vol. 1, 135 (1727): “Lanlup were to report in three groups”. NB.CK, 93 (1729): “The whole country was divided into 4 panas and the people were asked to discharge the duties of lallup by two groups on Tuesday, 7”. SP.CK, vol. 1, 137 (1729): “Tuesday, the whole country was divided into four panas and the people (males) were made to report in two groups for Lanlup”. In the 19th century, British political agent James Johnstone (1877–1878) observed that the *lallup* system also allowed for public works, such as construction to be carried out, which otherwise would have been an expensive affair for commoners (Johnstone 1896, p. 13).
- 36 According to Pierre Bourdieu, a person’s habitus is the relatively integrated cluster of tendencies or dispositions that enable him/her to respond to the environment and engage in concerted action with other individuals located in the same space. The habitus is an embodied product of history in the sense that it is inculcated upon the body of a person by the experiences s/he has by virtue of his/her social location(s).
- 37 NB.CK, 94 (1729): “He established the two offices of ishei (song and music) and pena (a stringed musical instrument/harp)”. SP.CK, 138 (1729): “Professional singing and the Institute of Pena (playing) were established at that period”.
- 38 SP.CK, 170 (1752): “5 Yinga (May/June), Yipungsi Aananda Sai left for Tomphang watering place, to collect the head of his royal father, Mayang Ngampa (alias Mayampa alias Garibniwaz). With the singing of Hindu religious songs in a Kirtan, he also performed a sratha ceremony”.
- 39 NB.CK, 90 (1723): “As per order of the King, the temples of the Umang lais and two Lammabis were demolished as they were not to be treated as lais”. SP.CK, 132 (1723): “It was declared that nine Umang lais, two Lammapi lais were not to be regarded as lais and all their shrines were demolished.
- 40 NB.CK, 92 (1726): “Seven idols of Laiyingthou, Panthoibi, Lai Wahaiba, two Lammabis, Shoraren, Hoiton Pokpi were broken on Monday, the 23rd and round Sels were made out of them”.
- 41 SP.CK, vol. 1, 138 (1729) “2 Thursday, as the king agreed to acknowledge Laiyingthou Wahaipa as a divinity, he also agreed to acknowledge the area of Yimthei as a sacred ground . . . Friday, an idol was inaugurated in the shrine of Laiwa Haipa”.
- 42 NB.CK, 94.
- 43 SP.CK, vol. 1, 140 (1731): “18 Wednesday, the shrine for Laiwa Haipa at Laisangkhong was inaugurated and a stone was also erected”.
- 44 NB.CK, 96 (1733): “The image of Laiyingthou Fallou Khomba once destroyed was recast and installed”. SP.CK, vol. 1, 142 (1733): Lainingthou Phalloukhomba (the divinity), which was made unclean, was ordered to be established once again (and worshipped)”.
- 45 SP.CK, Vol. 1, 131 (1723): “Friday full moon, Pamons (Brahmins) were made to attend Laiyingthou Nongsapa, Yimthei Lai, Panthoipi and Taipang Khaipa, for these four Lais the Pamons were allowed to conduct the appeasement rites”.
- 46 Meiteis believe that if the body of Pakhangba is hurt and blood oozes out of the hole, it signifies the destruction of the kingdom.
- 47 NB.CK, 111.
- 48 NB.CK, 107 (1744): “Mahapurush died on Tuesday, the 27th in Ava”. SP.CK, Vol. 1, 159 (1744): “Mahapurush died in Aawa”.
- 49 NB.CK, 113 (1748): “Garibniwaz handed over the throne to his son Chitshai (Sanahal) on Wednesday the 10th of Kalen (May)”. SP.CK, vol. 1, 167 (1748): “10 Kalen (April/May), Maharaja Garibniwaz abdicated the throne in favour of his son Yipungo Chit Sai . . . in the month of Yinga (May/June) the Katwan of Moirang built a place for Ningthem Mayampa in Ramnagar”.
- 50 NB.CK, 114 (1751): “On Sunday the 26th of Poinu, Ningthem Chitshai carried away Garibniwaz and his sons . . . to a place called Tomphang Hiden situated on the bank of the Brahmaputra (Ningthi or Chindwin) river where he killed all of them including Garibniwaz Maharaja and an earthquake occurred forthwith”. SP.CK, vol. 1, 169 (1751): “26 Poinu (November/December), Garibniwaz Maharaja along with his eldest royal son . . . , all these men were killed at Tomphang watering place by the bank of the Brahmaputra (river)”.
- 51 SP.CK, vol. 1, 172 (1758): “The Aawas stayed nine days (in the country) and the Aawa armies who were both in the hills and the plain established themselves in the Land of the Meiteis”.
- 52 NB.CK, 115 (1759): “He also destroyed the temple constructed by Ava to commemorate their victory over the Meiteis and Ningthem returned”. SP.CK, vol. 1, 172 (1759): “They also destroyed the temple which was built by the people of Aawa to commemorate their victory over the Meiteis”. The CK, does not mention what kind of temple it was, but presumably it was a Buddhist temple.
- 53 He recounted this incident as follows:

“In his distress the Rāja had recourse to Bengal, and in 1762 a treaty of alliance, offensive and defensive, was concluded between him and Mr. Verelst, in consequence of which six companies of sipahis (sic) were dispatched to his assistance, with the declared purpose of not only clearing Manipur of the enemy, but of subjugating the kingdom of the Burmas. The advance of the division was retarded by heavy rains, and its numbers were so much reduced by sickness, that it was recalled long before it had traversed Kachar (sic)”.

- 54 Princess Kuranganayani (also known as Sija Phongta Lokpi) is Bhāgyacandra’s niece, whom he later gifted in marriage to King Rajeshwar Singha.
- 55 Traditional accounts say that only Bhāgyacandra could see Krishna riding on top of the elephant and taming it like a mahout. By the time the charging elephant approached the king, it bowed down for him to mount it.
- 56 Later, non-Brahmin Meitei men would have ‘Singh’ suffixed to their name. Bhāgyacandra’s legendary story is still celebrated in Manipur today.
- 57 NB.CK, 117 (1767): “On hearing the news that Chingthangkomba Maharaja started from Tekhao (Assam) with 80, 000 troops to regain his kingdom of Manipur, Bhabananda, his uncle Senapati, Khwairakpa and Moirang Masemba, etc. left for Sangai them to receive the Maharaja . . . Chingthangkomba Maharaja arrived at Sangai then on Thursday, the 6th”. SP.CK, Vol.2, 4 (1767): “The royal maternal uncle, the Senapati, . . . and the majority of the people of the land went out from Moirang as far as Sangai then to meet the Maharaj, taking with them most of the royal regalia, when they heard the news that the king had marched from Tekhao with an eighty thousand strong army . . . 6 Thursday, Maharaj Chingthangkompā arrived at Sangai then”.
- 58 NB.CK, 119 (1764): “The Meiteis took out their holy threads called Nogun and an earthquake occurred on that day”.
- 59 NB.CK, 125 (1781): “On Monday 5th, a religious ceremony was performed wherein all the people who had thrown away their sacred threads were allowed to use new ones in a prayaschitt (atonement) held at Pukhri and Wangkhei Bindaram was also one of them”. SP.CK, vol. 2, 15 (1781): “All those who had discarded the sacred thread, including Bindara from Wangkhei, were made to take the sacred thread at a ceremony held at a pond”.
- 60 For example, the record for CK 1770 reads: “Yipungsi Nanda marched from Aawa (Burma) with an army of Aawas and after killing Keipram on the street and after appointing his younger brother, Yipungo Kukila Nanda as the protector of the land, he tried to gather up and capture the Meeteis as prisoners. But the Meeteis killed seven hundred of them in that battle”. (SP.CK, vol. 2, 5 (1770)).
- 61 NB.CK, 134 (1787): “Madhuchandra, the son of Ngangbam Chanu arrived from Ava on Monday, the 7th and he met his father, the Maharaja at Naosekpa Lok on Wednesday, the 9th”. SP.CK, vol. 2, 29 (1779): “7 Monday, Yipungsi Mathuchantra whose mother was Yipi, the Ngangpam maiden, arrived from Awa. 9 Wednesday, the royal son Mathuchantra and the Maharaj met at Naosekpalok gorge”.
- 62 NB.CK, 127 (1783): “In the function, Chamaset read Bhagabat”. NB.CK, 143 (1793): “The Maharaja invited all the ministers, Sirdars, and noblemen of the country on Tuesday, the 20th to hear the reading of holy book of Sreemad Bhagabat at Kangla”. SP.CK, vol. 2, 42 (1793): “20 Tuesday, Ningthem made all the courtiers of the country listen to the public reading of Shri Bhagavad at Kangla”.
- 63 SP.CK, vol. 2, 49 (1796): “25 Sunday, Ningthem attended a kirtan given by the Kalaraja (Bishnupriyas) at Lammangtong”.
- 64 NB.CK, 141 (1791): “On that day of Holi festival, Palas (singers) of Louremba Krishnachandra quarreled with the Palas of Chourajit resulting in fierce fighting on the 18th, Sunday”. SP.CK, Vol. 2, 39 (1791): “On that day it was reported that two male choirs of Chourajit and Louremba Krishnachandra became involved in a brawl as they went to celebrate the Holi festival”.
- 65 NB.CK, 143 (1793): “Rani Yangambi Leimakhubi went to Brindaban on Wednesday, the 19th with the idol of Radharaman”. SP.CK, vol. 2, 42 (1793): “19 Wednesday, Yipemma Yangampi the Leimakhupi left for Shri Brandaabon carrying the image of Ratharomon”.
- 66 This incident is recorded in the CK as follows. NB.CK, 120 (1775): “He . . . went to visit the jackfruit tree at Kaina and was pleased to relieve the lallup for the family of the Panganbam as they helped him locate the jackfruit tree which was seen in his dream”. SP.CK, vol. 2, 8 (1775): “On that day (they) went down to Kaina to inspect jack fruit trees. The Panganbam family of Kaina was exempted from the compulsory service to the state as it was regarded as the paternal home of Gobinda”.
- 67 NB.CK, 120 (1776): “The first day of the month of Hiyyangei (Novemeber) was Thursday. The idol of Shri Govinda installed in the morning of Friday, the 12th”. SP.CK, vol. 2, 9 (1776): “The month of Hiyangkei (October/November) began on Thursday. 12 Friday, after the dawn *yuthak* at about one pung hour which was reckoned as the *Mahendra* hour of the following Monday, Shri Govinda was installed”.
- 68 Curiously, this incident is not recorded in the NB.CK or the SP.CK.
- 69 *The Chinese repository* is a periodical published between May 1832 and 1851 for Protestant missionaries working in Asia. It contained news about current events and the history and culture of China. This account was from vol V, from May 1836 to April 1837, 214–215. Available at <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101048166969> (accessed on 12 November 2021). Original from Princeton University, digitized by Google.
- 70 NB.CK, 146 (1795): “Jibanas (restoration of life) to Nityai Prabhu was held on Sunday the 13th”. SP.CK, vol. 2, (1795): “13 Sunday, Nityaiprabhu was deified”.

- 71 NB.CK, 142 (1792): "A religious ceremony for the restoration of life to Adbeita Prabhu was performed on Tuesday, the 7th". SP.CK, vol. 2, 42 (1795): "7 Tuesday, they deified the carving of Apteita (Advaita) Pravu".
- 72 Śāṅkardev (1449–1568) and his disciple Madhavadeva (1489–1596) had propagated a neo-Vaiṣṇava movement in Assam through music, dance, and dramas, which they wrote and choreographed.
- 73 Śāṅkardev utilized dance dramas and poetry to propagate Vaiṣṇava in Assam in the 16th century.
- 74 Recorded interview with Lokendra Arambam, 10 September 2011 at Imphal, Manipur.
- 75 NB.CK, 127.
- 76 SP.CK, vol.2, 31 (1788): "20 Monday, Ningthem dedicated an elephant to Lai Snamahi".
- 77 Recorded interview, 12 February 2016. Imphal, Manipur.
- 78 Recorded interview with Arambam Lokendra, 10 September 2011 at Imphal, Manipur.
- 79 NB.CK, 128 (1784): "Soraisam Potshemba [sorcerer] was transported to Loi village on the first day of Ingen (July) Sunday". SP.CK, vol. 2, 21 (1784): "Soraisam who practiced sorcery was deported to Loi".
- 80 NB.CK, 149 (1797): "The Maharaja and Maharani with royal family members went for a holy bath in the Ganges on Monday, the 20th". SP.CK, vol. 2, 52 (1797): "20 Monday, the Maharaj, Maharani and many ladies from the royal household left for a pilgrimage to the Ganges". NB.CK, 150 (1798): "During the absence of Maharaja (Cingthangkhomba) on pilgrimage, Ibungshi Jubaraja Wangkheirakpa Labanyachandra was in charge of the administration of Meitei Leipak . . ." SP.CK, Vol. 2, 53 (1798): "After Ningthem had left for his pilgrimage and while the Jubraj Yipungsi Labeinyachandra (Labanyachandra) the Lakpa of Wangkhei was in charge of defending the country (and acting on behalf of the King) . . .".
- 81 NB.CK, 150 (1798): "Shri Maharaja Chingthangkhomba died on Friday, the 3rd at Shripat Kshetra after reigning for 40 years and during the period, Meitei Leipak was devastated 3 times". SP.CK, vol. 2, 53 (1798): "3 Friday, Shri Maharaj Chingthangkhomba expired at Shri Batkhetra. He reigned on the throne for forty years and during his reign the country was devastated three times".
- 82 NB.CK, 151 (1798): "The sad news of the death of Maharaja Bhagyachandra was received on Tuesday, the 17th, and kirtan of the Maharaj was performed in the palace for 7 days starting from the new moon day". SP.CK, Vol. 2, 54 (1798): "17 Tuesday, the news concerning Ningthem (his death) was received. From new moon Sunday there was the singing of kirtan for seven whole days".
- 83 For example, NB.CK, 241 (1854): "On Wednesday the 10th, the pucca bridge of Khwairamband Keithel (market) was completed and consecrated to Shri Govindajee by the Maharaja in the presence of the public . . .".
- 84 NB.CK, 277 (1869): "On Thursday the 8th, the Maharaja witnessed the festival of Shajenba held at the pologround".
- 85 CK 304.
- 86 NB.CK, 433 (1919): "On Wednesday the 3rd, the Maharaja sang in Manipuri language in the play of Gour lila staged at the mandap of Shri Govindaji".

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