



## MANIPURI LANGUAGE MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATION AND EIGHTH SCHEDULE IN ASSAM

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### ABSTRACT

Language plays a great role in our life and education, as it is the mode of expression in every aspect of our transaction in any society, wherever we find since the evolution of mankind is a social product, a kind of societal activity. It is through language that human society is organised and engaged in productive and creative activities. Thus Language and Society is intimately connected and related to each other. The history of a language is a product of the history of the human culture and civilization. Its growth and development are interlinked with the socio-political and cultural movement of every society. The importance of historical study of socio-political movements lies in the fact that, it not only lays out the events chronologically but also shows various implications of such movements and struggles in the course of human developments particularly in the field of education. As such the paper makes an attempt to focus on outbreak of Manipuri Language Movement and its impact on the field of Education and Eighth Schedule in Assam.

### KEYWORDS :

#### 1. INTRODUCTION :

Language plays a great role in our life and education, as it is the mode of expression in every aspect of our transaction in any society, wherever we find since the evolution of mankind is a social product, a kind of societal activity. It is through language that human society is organised and engaged in productive and creative activities. Thus Language and Society is intimately connected and related to each other. The history of a language is a product of the history of the human culture and civilization. Its growth and development are interlinked with the socio-political and cultural movement of every society. The importance of historical study of socio-political movements lies in the fact that, it not only lays out the events chronologically but also shows various implications of such movements and struggles in the course of human developments particularly in the field of education. As such the paper makes an attempt to focus on outbreak of Manipuri Language Movement and its impact on the field of Education and Eighth Schedule in Assam with historical facts.

Language movement generally means an organised effort of a linguistic community, either to assert their linguistic identity or to establish their own language as per with other advance languages in a given social structure. Language movement refers to an organized and persistent effort of a speech community to influence the development of language and the policy and planning of the government with respect to the language. The language movement may arise out of a form of domination by another linguistic group to the other linguistic group. Therefore, language movement ingrains within itself the elements of subordination and repression.

#### 2. The Manipuri (Meetei) People :

The Manipuris call themselves by the name Meetei or Meitei, etymologically, the term 'Meetei' is derived from the words 'Mee' + 'Atei', 'Mee' means 'Man' (person) and 'Atei' means 'Other',<sup>1</sup> so the word 'Meetei' means 'other person'. The Meetei community is a heterogeneous community consisting of the Meeteis 'with its seven exogamous clans i.e Mangang (Ningthauja), Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Moirang, Khabangamba, and Sarang-Leishangthem', Manipuri Bramhins (Meetei Bramhon), Manipuri-Muslims (Meetei Pangals) and Lois (Manipuri SC) etc. Prior to the formation of the Meeteis, there were seven different clan dynasties, which merged into one; the dominant one was the *Mangang* or *Ningthauja*, who ruled the state up to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Meetei is

an accumulation of seven distinct tribes who united under the leadership of legendary king Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, who ruled the state in (33-154 A.D.).<sup>2</sup> Manipur state was known as Meitrapak or Kangleipak from earliest time and up to the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The present name Manipur is less than 300 years old; the name was replaced during the reign of King Pamheiba alias Garibniwas (1709-48 A.D.) in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The Manipuris belongs to the Indo-Mongoloid groups of the people and the language remains as a Tibeto-Burman group of language.

#### 3. Manipuri language (Meeteilon) :

Manipuri language (*Meeteilon*) is a direct descendent of the accumulation of Kuki Chin group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. *Meeteilon* has its dialects consist of seven different clans namely Mangang (Ningthauja), Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Moirang, Khabangamba, and Sarang-Leishangthem.<sup>3</sup> *Meeteilon* is the only T.B (Tibeto-Burman) language in India with its own script – Meitei-Mayek, which has been in existence from 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (coins of Wura Konthouba (568-658). In connection with Meitei Mayek Dr Kriti (1980) writes – "Meiteilon has been the state language of Manipur since 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., coins were struck, royal chronicles recorded, edicts and copper plates issued in this language."<sup>4</sup> Ancient Meitei records were in Meitei-Mayek only. However, some of this rich heritage of Manipuri language was destroyed as a result of Hindunisation in 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>5</sup> it has been influenced and enriched by Indo-Aryan languages of Sanskrit origin from 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards and by English language from 19<sup>th</sup> century respectively.

#### 3.1. Manipuri Script (Meitei Mayek) :

Manipuri is the only language which has its own script amongst the Tibeto-Burman group of languages in the North East India. Manipuri Script is popularly known as *Meitei-Mayek*. The coins of Wura Konthouba (568-658 A.D.) and Lairenba (1394-99 A.D.) containing archaic Manipuri Script gives valuable information about the introduction of Manipuri alphabet before the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Epigraphically records and old Manuscripts available today suggest that Manipur is the cradle of literate civilization. This was evidences by the stone inscription written in Meitei script which was discovered in different part of Manipur like Khoibu, Konthoujam Laimaremma and Ngapur Chingjin, Ningel, Leisangkhang and 1<sup>st</sup> BN Manipur Rifles etc.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2. The Importance of Manipuri Language (Meeteilon) :

Manipuri language (also called *Meeteilon*, *Meiteilon*, *Meiteiron*, and *Meithe* in Linguistic literature) is the official language of the state of Manipur, India. Its synonym form *Meeteilon*, *Meiteilon*, *Meiteiron*, which etymologically means 'language of the Meeteis'. Manipuri language is one of the oldest languages in Southeast Asia, which has its own script and written literature, its literature is very old with a rich and variegated history and traditions. Its script is known as Manipuri Script or *Meetei-Mayek*. Manipuri Language belongs to the Kuki Chin group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages (Grierson, 1904, Vol. III, part III).<sup>7</sup> The detail picture of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages are shown in (Fig: 1). It is the only Tibeto-Burman language in India with its own script. Manipuri language is the state official language of Manipur and it is one of the scheduled (eight) languages of India. Manipuri language is the mother tongue of the Meeteis and the Meitei Pangals, which is a conglomeration of a large number of closely related languages and dialects with numerous cross ties in all directions. In India, the total number of people who speaks Manipuri as their mother tongue numbers 1,270,216 out of which 1, 110, 134 speakers reside in Manipur (census of India, 1991) and 1,466,705 (2001 census). There are Manipuri speakers in Bangladesh and Myanmar as well. The Manipuri population was 6000 in Myanmar in 1931 and 92800 in Bangladesh in 1982 as reported in <http://www.ethnologue.com>. There are approximately 1.9 million speakers of Manipuri language, which used it as a lingua franca among the 29 different ethnic groups of Manipur. It also used among some ethnic groups in North Eastern India, who use it to communicate among themselves by using this language.

Manipuri language has been recognized by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, as the language of AIR, Imphal (1963) with coverage of 78% of the programmes and Silchar (1978). The language has been internationally recognized since 1762 A.D. (in the treaty between Gourashyam, the king of Meekly (Manipur) and East India Company), in Walter Hamilton's Report on Manipur, 1820 A.D. It has been recognized as a subject of Modern Indian Languages of India (MIL) by CBSE, Board of Secondary Education, Assam, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Calcutta University, Calcutta, Delhi University, Delhi and Assam University, Silchar. Manipuri language has been taught as a subject of MIL and Elective language up to the Graduate Level and as a MIL Language up to Post-graduate, M.phil and Ph.D., apart from being a medium of instruction up to High School Leaving Certificate (H.S.L.C) in Manipur, Assam and in the Manipuri dominated areas.

### 4. Manipuri Language Movement and its Impact on Education in Assam :

It may be worthy of mention that Hinduism (Vaishnavism) was introduced as a state religion only in the reign of Meidingngu (the King) Pamheiba alias Garibniwaj (1709-1748.A.D.) in the late eighteenth century. In fact, after the adoption of Vaishnavism during the reign of the King Pamheiba, the Manipuri people started to use Bengali script for writing purposes with a strong instruction from his highness. The advent of Hinduism in Manipur had a considerable influence on the language, in that a lot of Indo-Aryan elements entered the language as borrowings. The Standard dialect, which is based on the Imphal dialect (Grierson, 1904) is significantly different from the dialects spoken in Kakching, Andro, Sekmai, Kwatha and the Yaithibi dialect. The later dialects are comparatively not influenced by Bengali or Sanskrit. The Pangal (Manipuri Muslim) dialect is another main dialect of Manipuri language.

Hinduism came to Manipur in its various forms (sects) by the

beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Since most of the sects came from Bengal and Sylhet (now in Bangladesh), it was quite evident that Bengali script was associated with the practice and propagation of the religious doctrines. The Bengali script was later enforced by the Meetei King as the State-owned-script that replaced the earlier Meitei script (after the burning of all the pre-Hindu religious texts called *Puyas*; Holy books of Meetei) the event is still observe as 'Puya Meithaba'. This marks the Hindu dominance in the socio-cultural and religious life of the people, though there was resistance from the people; consequently, the Meeteis have been discarding the use of their own scripts for more than 250 years. Manipuri Script was in use till the 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. But after second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Manipuri language left their own Script and began to use Bengali script for official purpose as well as writing purpose in their literature. And again with the arrival of the British rule in 1891 A.D, retained and adopted the Eastern Nagari or Bengali script for Manipuri language. This Bengali script is being used till date; however, at present there is a strong desire and movements among the populace for reviving the old script (Meitei Mayek) and to introduce the same in the schools to eventually replace the Bengali script. This new movement for the revival of their own script can be traced back to first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century A.D., when with the establishment of socio-religious organizations like *Apokpa Marup* (1930 A.D.) in Cachar (Assam), *Meitei Marup* (1944 A.D.)<sup>10</sup> in Manipur started a movement to revive their culture, religion and script. Subsequently, many educated youths also started to initiate the movement for reviving and developing of the Meetei script. At the same time, they also wanted to replace the Bengali script by the Meetei script. This was followed by the demand for acquiring constitutional recognition of Meetei script in the Eight Schedule of the Indian constitution, and to introduce and regulate the script in both primary and higher education in Manipur. Thus, the script has been introduced to many govt., convent and private schools by providing training to the school teachers by script experts in collaboration with State Council of Education Research and Training (SCERT). Further, the demand for recognition of the language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution and introduction of the same in schools is a major effort to fully implement till higher education is achieved; therefore the development of their society and identity is to be ensured. The Meeteis also believe that 'language is 'father' and script is 'mother', and that script is part and parcel of a particular culture. Lack of knowledge of the script will deprive the younger generation from understanding the traditional texts (*Puyas*; Holy books of the Meeteis) and the underlying philosophy therein.<sup>11</sup>

### 4.1. Movement for the introduction of Manipuri language as a Medium and Subject on Education in Manipur :

Since the inception of Modern Education in Manipur, the medium of instruction were through English and Bengali. As, far back in 1902-03 A.D, efforts were made for the introduction of Manipuri language (*Meiteilon*) as a medium of instruction. In 1907 A.D. his Highness Maharaja Churachand Singh, being the President of the Durbar passed a resolution for the introduction of mother tongue in the lower primary stages of education. There was a decline in the number of boys attending schools.<sup>12</sup> For the purpose of medium. Then again "Bengali has been since re-introduced as it is no doubt the wish of the people to have their children taught that language".<sup>13</sup> Since then, translation of Bengali literature into Manipuri language started. On 15<sup>th</sup> May, 1907 A.D. Sir Churachand Singh took the responsibility of Durbar as a Chairman took resolution to teach mother tongue as the medium of instruction in lower primary schools. Manipuri Language was first introduced as a vernacular language up to Matric (H.S.L.C) Level in 1924 A.D. in Manipur under Calcutta University according to Order no 101, Senate House on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1924 A.D. Manipuri be added to the list of Vernacular language from translation into English.<sup>14</sup> Manipuri

Language was first introduced as a Medium of Instruction up to HSLC level in Manipur was affected from the year 1977 according to the Notification No CS/7 Dt Imphal the 26<sup>th</sup> October, 1976. Then taught as a subject up to Post-graduate level, MPhil and PhD levels in Universities of India.

#### 4.2. Movement for the introduction of Manipuri language as a Medium and Subject on Education in Assam :

The Constitutional recognition to the Medium in Mother Tongue for the Linguistic Minorities emboldened the Manipuris living in the state of Assam in early part of the 1950s to move the Govt. of Assam for the education of children of age group below 10 years in their Mother Tongue.

#### I. Manipuri Language as a Medium in Lower Primary level of Education:

The movement behind the introduction of Manipuri Language as a Medium of Instruction in Assam was started in 1950s under the banner of NGOs like Naha Marup (1953), Lakhipur, Cacha and Thaugan Marup (1956), Jaffirbond, Hailakandi . The Naha Marup, Lakhipur was led by (i). Sri Haubam Gaurahari Singha, President, Naha Marup. (ii) Sri Oinam Narendra Singha, Joint Secretary, Naha Marup. (iii) Sri Laishram Joykumar Singha (iv) Sri S, Gaura Singha. (v) Sri Nanda Kishore Singha, MLA. (vi) Sri Keisham Punshi Singha. (vii) Sri Nanda Kumar Singha Ex MLA. The Thaugan Marup, Jaffirbond, Hailakandi was led by (i) Sri Khaidem Akendra Singha General Secretary, Thaugan Marup, (ii) Sri Sajau Tombi Singha. (iii) Sri R. K Gopalsana etc. From the Govt. side Assam Govt.'s representative Shree Radhika Ram Das, the Deputy Minister of Education after visited to the different areas of Assam inhabited by the Manipuris also recommended for the approval of Introduction of Manipuri Medium in Primary Level Schools of Assam. As a result of the movement, The Govt. of Assam organized a Cabinet Meeting of the Ministers under the Chairman Sri Bishnu Ram Medhi, Chief Minister of Assam. Manipuri Language was first introduced as a Medium of Instruction up to L.P level Schools in 1956 A.D. in Assam. And according to the letter no EMI 211/53/10, PF Shillong, the 7<sup>th</sup> June 1956 A.D from Under Secretary to the Govt. of Assam to the Director of Public Instruction, Assam.<sup>15</sup>

#### II. M.E (Upper Primary) Level:

The movement behind the introduction of Manipuri Medium in the M.E level was started in 1960s A.D. The Manipuris started to establish M.E Schools in 1963 A.D in different areas of Assam by their own cost for the education of those pupils who completed lower Primary in their own mother tongue. Different organizations placed demand before Sri Bimola Prasad Chaliha, the Chief Minister of Assam on different occasions for departmental recognition to those M.E. Schools of Manipuri Medium. On 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1964 A.D Sri Debakanta Boruwa, Education Minister of Assam when he visited in Silchar different Manipuri leaders meet with him and requested for the recognition of the Manipuri Medium in the M.E level of Education in Assam. After that it started as a Medium of instruction in H.S.L.C level Schools in 1963 A.D in Assam and finally from 1979 A.D is now being taught as a medium of instruction up to High School Leaving Certificate (H.S.L.C) level schools in Manipur and Assam.

#### 4.3. Movement for the Script :

However, the movement for Manipuri Script has faced several challenges from different corners, both from within and outside. From within, the controversy over the actual numbers of alphabets has arisen. One of the schools of thought claims that the Meitei script has only 18 alphabets. Whereas another school claims that it has 27 alphabets. And again another third school claim of 35 alphabets, yet again another Fourth School claims that of 36 alphabets. To provide a solution to this internal crisis, different research committees were formed

at various levels. Some of them are 'Kangleipak Eyek Kanba Phamthou Lup' (1958 A.D), 'Mayek Luptin Committee' (1958 A.D), 'Lon Amasung Mayek Neina Apunba Marup' (1968 A.D) and Apokpa Marup (1930 A.D.) etc. The main objective of these committees is to find out the actual number of alphabets. On the 16<sup>th</sup> November 1978 A.D, the organization 'Kangleipak Eyek Kanba Phamthou Lup' in collaboration with 'All Manipur Students Union' (AMSU) formed a 'Meitei Mayek Expert Committee' (MMEC). The committee, after analyzing some of the Meitei scriptures and Puyas, finally approved 27 alphabets consisting of 18 major alphabets and 9 derivatives called 'Lom Eyeks'. In pursuance of the policies of the organization, the Government of Manipur passed 'The Manipur Official Language Bill' on 12th April 1979 A.D. declaring 'Manipuri Language' to be the language for official purposes. The Government of Manipur approved the script (recommended by the MMEC) and listed it in the Manipur Gazette dated April 22, 1980. A.D<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, Manipuri Script (*Meitei Mayek*) is now begun to use in the Primary and Upper Primary level Schools of the state of Manipur and also to be use for the official purposes in the state.

#### 4.4. Movement for the Recognition of Manipuri language into the Eight Schedule Languages of India :

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the movement for the recognition of Manipuri language in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule Languages of India started, Manipuri people staying in Manipur, Assam and different parts of the country participated in the movement. The Manipuri People launched a series of Democratic way of movements by organizing Public Meeting, Symposium, Seminars, etc. Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Imphal organized exhibition of the century old Books and Modern literary treasures of Manipuri Language from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> November 1987 in New Delhi in support of the issue and to justify the cause of the movements thus it led to various rallies and Bandhs as a mode of demands and people whole-heartedly supported the call for the movement. As the momentum increased the Boycott Movement of Hindi Language followed. In this movement various Voluntary Organizations and Associations of Manipur participated among them are namely The Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, The All Manipuri Students' Union (AMSU), The Naharol Sahitya Premi Samiti, The Cultural Forum, The Teachers' Forum, The Universal Literary Association, The Ipathoukok and All India Youth Federation (Manipur Unit) etc.<sup>17</sup> In the year 1989, a new mighty Coordinating Committee was formed on 25<sup>th</sup> December at Imphal under the nomenclature of The Manipuri Language Demand Coordinating Committee. It has played great role in the Eight Schedule Movement of Manipuri language in collaboration with other sister voluntary Organizations and Associations of Manipur, the support extended by organizations from Assam and Tripura also gave the soul to the movements. As a result of the movement on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1992 A.D. Manipuri language was recognized as one of the Eight Scheduled Language of India by the 71<sup>st</sup> amendment of the Indian constitution. The lists of the Eighteen Official or Scheduled Languages of India amended by the Parliament in 1992 are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu.

#### 5. CONCLUSION :

From the above findings and discussion we may say that Manipuri Language Movement has strong implications in Education of the Manipuris in general and in the state, during the period 1924 to 1992 A.D. Thus, the kind of movement which started in Manipur has it influence in the state of Assam and Tripura where the Manipuri populace is seen vividly, the movement was mainly related to Manipuris for social, educational and cultural development and for the implementation of their aspiration on the issues of language

and education in particular. As such, the basic objectives for a prosperous Manipuri society and intellectual development, where the very notion of egalitarian society which the Manipuris have been enjoying is maintained through such implementations in the line of the other languages like Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu etc.

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