

Spread of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Manipur: A Comprehensive Analysis and Historical Study

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Abstract: Manipur (Ancient name Kangleipak) is often referred to as the “Land of Jewel” due to its natural charm and cultural significance. The state is known for its distinctive art, literature, and spirituality. Manipur has diverse inhabitants with different ethnic groups, and Meithei is one of the leading languages in the state. A profound and sensorial connection with the Bhagavat divinity, particularly with Lord Krishna and his devotion, was established during the Puranic period. In the 15th century, an influential King Kiyamba, established a significant connection between Manipur and Bengal. He actively patronized and promoted both Vaishnavism and Shaivism in Manipur. After Kiyamba, Garib Nawaz Singh ascended to the royal throne. He initiated the transition from Manipuri’s complex script to the widespread use of the Bengali script. But, the foremost popularity of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Manipur was introduced by King Ching Thang Khamba (Bhagyachandra Joy Singh), and his daughter Princess Bimbavati. She was adorned in Manipur as the replication of Mirabai. Once, Bhagyachandra received a divine message and was fascinated by Chaitanya’s devotion, leading him to visit and settle in Nabadwip. Bhagyachandra abdicated the throne, passing on his royal responsibilities to his eldest son. He devoted his life to Krishna Bhakti and was bestowed with the title ‘Rajarsi,’ symbolizing a ‘sage in the form of a King.’ Krishnachandra Roy, the then king of Nadia, granted a piece of land measuring sixteen bighas on the bank of the Ganga at Nabadwip as ‘Manipur Rajkunja’ at the request of Maharaja Bhagya Chandra Singh. This sacred place is commonly recognized as the ‘Anumahaprabhu Mandir.’ His daughter, Bimbavati, also installed the Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (Anumahaprabhu) icon, crafted from jackfruit wood. The prime objective of my research paper is to illuminate a thorough comprehension of Manipur’s rich cultural and religious heritage, with a focused exploration of the enduring tradition of Anumahaprabhu shrine and its contemporary significance.

Keywords: Assimilation, Anumahaprabhu temple, Bhagyachandra and Bimbavati, Chaitanya deva, Mikhai, Nabadwip

The spiritual doctrine initiated by Chaitanya Deva was in contrast to traditional wisdom and Vedic scriptural activities, and the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement gained immense popularity in society as an alternative to the customary Pauranic Vaishnavism. Chaitanya Deva, a spiritual saint and social reformer in India, extensively travelled across the northern and eastern regions of the country. He was born in Nabadwipa (1486-1533) and later settled in Nilachal, Odisha, where he established hermitages and temples, and became a divine personality in spiritual teachings. Throughout his life, he travelled through Bengal, including Nadia, Santipur, Murshidabad, and Ramkeli¹ (Malda), spreading his spiritual message. He also visited Brajabhumi (Vrindavan), a holy place attached to Lord Krishna, and engaged in intense devotional practices while interacting with local saints. In Varanasi, an archaic city, he engaged in philosophical discussions and exchanged views with scholars of great intellect. His remarkable 'South India visit' took him to pilgrimage sites like Tirupati, Kanchipuram, and Rameswaram, where he shared his ideas and connected with followers across diverse regions. Historical evidence does not document that Chaitanya Deva ventured into any specific regions in northeastern India, apart from his visit to *Ramkeli*. During his lifetime, the Neo-Vaishnavism movement commenced in Assam, led by Sankar Deva (1449-1568). This Neo-Vaishnavism movement played a considerable impact on the spiritual and cultural history of Assam and its neighbouring regions. However, the ideas of Chaitanya Deva's Gaudiya Vaishnavism had an inherent implication on Manipur, especially in the realm of its religious and cultural practices. The amalgamation of Gaudiya Vaishnavism with Manipuri traditions gave birth to a unique variant of Vaishnavism that became deeply intertwined with Manipuri culture and spirituality. From the time of King Gharib Nawaz Singha of Manipur (1709-1748), the Manipuri people through the influence of the Bengali Vaishnavas of the Chaitanya school from Nabadwip and Sylhet, accepted the Bengali script for their language (c. 1740), and now this has become full established. This has enabled Manipur to come in intimate touch with Bengali in its literature, and with Sanskrit.²

Manipur, a unique territory abundant in the natural diversity of eastern India, has been closely associated with Vaishnavism since ancient times, as vividly depicted in mythology. Due to the deep cultural integration with the indigenous society of this soil, particularly with the Meitei community, Manipur's statehood witnessed the emergence of a distinct unity. This fusion, combined with the Meithai culture, contributed to the formation of an incomparable identity within the land of Manipur. The land originally was named Shiva Nagara after Shiva: after the *Maha rasa* dance, it came to be known as Manipura.³ Warrior Arjuna the third Pandava and a prominent character from the Mahabharata, was indeed married to Chitrangada, the daughter of King Chitravanu and a princess of Manipur. This marriage is an important episode in the Mahabharata, and it's a well-known part of the epic's narrative. Their son was Babruvahana. As a consequence, the folklore

of Arjuna and Chitrangada is a very popular and erotic narrative in Manipur.⁴ A warrior, a queen, a lover—Chitrangada epitomized these roles. She was a loyal wife, despite the lack of royal privileges. Contemplating her strength and authority, her presence in the epic remains relatively negligible. More than the main texts of the Mahabharata scriptures truly unfolded her voice, her place, and the depth of her character. The tradition of Manipuri culture emerged through the amalgamation of distinct narratives from the Mahabharata and the Meithei Purana, creating a unique and unparalleled cultural heritage.

The mythological narrative illuminates when Devi Parvati expressed her desire to witness the Raas Leela, the divine dance of Lord Krishna with the Gopis. But Lord Krishna eagerly requested Hara Parvati to perform the Raas Leela elsewhere. Har Parvati then appeared in Manipur with the seven celestial deities (Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn). However, the land near the Kautru mountain was waterlogged and unsuitable for the performance of Raas Leela. Upon Shiva's request, Lord Krishna appeared with ten divinities including Indra, Kubera, Yama, Varuna, Agni, Aswinikumar, Isaan, Vayu, etc., and dried up this territory, which is now known as "Bishnupur." Henceforward, Harparvati performed the Maharasaleela at that place. The territory was denominated Manipur or Shivanagara because Anantnag, the serpent deity, illuminated the area with the gem on his head during this Maharasa Leela. Over time immemorial, Shivnagar came to be known as Manipur.⁵

Manipur has been recognized in the ancient period by the rest of India. Panini, who lived in the 5th or 4th century B.C.E, included a significant number of Indian places in his illustrious grammar. The important name, he mentioned is Surmasa, which we identify with the Surma Valley. The Surma Valley is considered the western gateway to Manipur.⁶ The Tibeto-Burman or Sino-Tibetan-speaking Meiteis, Nagas, and Kuki-Chins of Manipur, which trace their heritage back to an ancient nation-state in Southeast Asia, embody a distinctive Southeast Asian identity throughout history, spanning from the prehistoric period to the contemporary era. Watts noted that "the Manipuris (Meeteis) appeared to be a mixed-race between Kukis and Nagas".⁷ B.C. Allen mentioned that the hill tribes fall into two prime segments, the Nagas and the Kukis. So, it is to be said that the people known as Manipuris, or those who identify as Meithei, are often seen as a mixed ethnicity with characteristics that reflect a blend of both the Kukis and the Nagas. It is believed that in the fifteenth century, the Meithei were drawn towards and influenced by Hinduism or Brahminical culture. Indeed, over time, the Kukis and Nagas also assimilated and integrated with the Manipuris through the adoption of Hindu culture especially in Vaishnavism. In this manner, the god Mai came to be associated with Brahma, Ishing with Vishnu, Nung-Shit with Shiva, and Shorarel or Shoraren with Indra. Similarly, Marjing was linked to Kubera, Khoriphaba with Varuna, Wangbrel with Yama, Irum with Agni, and Taoroinai associated with Ananta, the Naga king.⁸

The origin and history of the Meitei people are shrouded in mystery. The Meiteis of Manipur (Ancient name Kangleipak) are a group of people who speak the Meiteilon (Mei talion) language, also known as Manipuri, which is a Tibeto-Burma language spoken by approximately 53% of Manipur's population. They migrated from the Yunnan province of China, bringing their local beliefs and customs with them. Interestingly, before the arrival of mainstream Hinduism, the indigenous Meitei people of Manipur practised their own religion known as 'Sanamahism.'⁹ This religious belief is the indigenous traditional or customary belief of the Meitei people of Manipur. It is a complex and archaic spiritual thought that predates the advent of mainstream Hinduism in the region. It is deeply rooted in nature and the worship of various supernatural elements, spirits, and ancestors. It involves the devotion of Supreme Almighty deities amalgamated with different aspects of the natural world such as hills, rivers, and forests. Sanamahism is a significant aspect of the cultural and religious heritage of the Meitei people, reflecting their deep connection to nature, and their incomparable spiritual beliefs. The spiritual faith of the Meitei people, known as Sanamahism, flourished in the Meitei kingdom and was practised as the state religion for a long period. Over time, the influence of mainstream Hinduism has led to some syncretism with Sanamahism. Some Meitei people practice a blend of Sanamahism and Hinduism, incorporating Hindu deities and rituals into their religious practices. "Manipur Hinduism gradually becomes a synthesis of the old Meithei religion with its gods and goddess and myths, its legends and traditions, its social customs and usages, and its priests and ceremonials, and of Brahminical Hinduism with its special worship of Radha and Krishna."¹⁰

Concrete evidence of Hinduization through the proliferation of Vishnu worship can be traced back to Manipur as early as the 15th century during the reign of King Kiyamba over the Meithei, corroborating traditional narratives that extend this influence to ancient times. During his reign, a significant connection was established between Manipur and Bengal. King Kiyamba actively supported and promoted both Vaishnavism and Shaivism in Manipur. Bishnupur, originally known as Lumlangdong, saw its name change after King Kyamba of Manipur conquered the Shan kingdom of Kyang in the Kabow Valley in 1467 A.D. Upon this victory, Kyamba assumed the title "Kyamba," meaning the conqueror of Kyang. During Kyamba's reign, there was a strong and positive relationship between the Pongs and the Meities, especially with Pong King Khe-Khomba. Indeed, King Kyamba's effective foreign policy played a crucial role in maintaining and sustaining positive relationships with neighbouring states. Indeed, it is believed that an image of Vishnu was gifted by the Pong king, along with the fruit pong "Hei" Ton (guava) and the *Ponghawai* (a kind of pulse). Kyamba placed the bestowed "Vishnu" image in Lumlangdong, which subsequently became known as Bishnupur, meaning the abode of Vishnu. So, we may say that Vishnu worship was initiated during Kyamba's reign in Manipur. Bishnupur is the place where the king and Brahmins preserved the deity "Vishnu," and

it also witnessed the immigration of Manu Brahmins to Manipur. King Kyamba sought the assistance of a Brahmin and initiated regular worship of Vishnu in Bishnupur. He constructed the Vishnu Temple using bricks, which is now a designated protected historical monument under the Ministry of H.R.D (Archaeology), Government of India.¹¹

An eminent historian G. Kamei states that "since the beginning of the fifteenth century, Vishnu worship was patronized by Manipur chiefs." As is often the case, the alignment of the ancient Meithei religion with Hindu Brahmanical belief was introduced with the correlation of deities from both belief systems. This process likely coincided with the advent of the initial Hindu preachers. Initially, these preachers were Brahmins, who were not sent by any organized institution but were individuals who had travelled on their own from neighbouring regions such as Sylhet, Kachar, and beyond. Later, Vaishnava mendicants, who were affiliated with the North Indian Ramananda order and the Bengali Chaitanya order, also played a role in this transformation. It's worth noting that both of these orders had established themselves in Sylhet.¹² Meidingu Charairongba (1697-1709) was the first Meitei king to adopt a Sanskritized name, Pitambar Singh, which he received after his conversion to Hinduism.¹³ Charairongba was indeed known as a generous and effective ruler in Manipur. In 1704, he formally initiated Vaishnavism, particularly the Nimandi Sect which emphasized the worship of Lord Vishnu. This transformation occurred when a Brahmin named Krishnacharya, along with his wife, arrived in Manipur from Puri. Krishnacharya became the ruler's religious preceptor, guiding him in the practices and beliefs of Vaishnavism. Under his rule, Hindu spiritual practices and rituals gained prominence in Manipur, alongside the indigenous Meitei traditions. King Charairongba's reign saw increased cultural exchange between Manipur and other Hindu regions, including Bengal. This exchange influenced the art, literature, and religious practices of Manipur.

During the reign of Garib Nawaz Singh (1709-48), a remarkable expansion in this familiarity took place. He introduced the transition from Manipuri's complicated script to the comprehensive use of the Bengali script. Garib Nawaj Singh Vaishnavism was the state religion during his reign. He also played a pivotal role in the construction of several significant Hindu temples dedicated to Lord Krishna.¹⁴ In most historical accounts of Manipur, it is widely acknowledged that Brahminical Vaishnavism experienced extensive expansion within Manipur with generous support. His endorsement of this religious propagation had a far-reaching impact on Manipur's religious landscape. He also embraced the Vaishnava faith during his reign and became a part of the Ramanandi spiritual doctrine (Vaishnavism) through Shantidas. Furthermore, he actively encouraged and promoted this new faith among his subjects. Later on, during ceremonial occasions, the influence of the Ramanandi cult, as well as the doctrine of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, can still be observed and touched even today. After the advent of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Bengal, Ramananda had

comparatively few followers on this adjacent of the region. Sylhet was the ancestral home of Chaitanya Deva; Jagannath Mishra was born in the village of South Dhaka in Sylhet. His grandfather, Madhu Mishra, had four sons: Upendra, Rangada, Kirtida, and Kirtivasa. His parents, Upendra Mishra and Kalavati, had seven sons: Kamsari, Paramananda, Padmanabha, Sarveshvara, Jagannath Mishra, Janardana, and Trailokyanath. After spending his childhood in Sylhet. In his contemporary times, Jagannath Mishra was very much captivated by the wisdom and academic opportunities available in Nabadwip, attracting him to waive the illusion of his motherland in Sylhet (now in Bangladesh) and settle permanently in Nabadwip. Undoubtedly the doctrine of Gaudiya Vaishnavism spread in Manipur under the hypnotic attraction of the illustrious personality of Chaitanya Deva. It is visible that the Chaitanya Vaishnava spiritual philosophy, especially from the Sylhet region of present-day Bangladesh, entered into the land of Manipur. A short time before the reign of Gureeb Nawaz, Hindooism began to be introduced, but it made very little progress, and the frequency of inroads of the Burmese often the Rajassdeath could not have tended to its improvement. The mass of the people had no care for it, but Jae Sing in 1798 having abdicated in favour of his eldest son, set out to Nuddea on a pilgrimage, and there died in the following year.¹⁵

Bengal Vaishnavism, which emerged and flourished rapidly from the Chaitanya ideology, did not obtain any favour or active support or patronize from state administrative power or royal authority. The proponents of Gaudiya Vaishnavism sought to expand the horizons of spirituality by illuminating the divine Leela play of Radha-Krishna through practices such as listening, kirtan, remembrance, universal brotherhood, worship, veneration, servitude, friendship, etc. That is, instead of being confined to particular mythical Vaishnavite activities, these practices were made accessible to the masses straightforwardly and ubiquitously, without consideration of caste, class, or race. Although, Chaitanya's devotional (Bhakti) movement underwent numerous changes, and complexity was created during the post-Chaitanya era. Hence, various untouchable communities and the downtrodden people strata in Bengal were drawn to Chaitanya Dev's philosophy. Even after being initiated into the Vaishnava divine thought, they integrated themselves into different social contexts, often adopting and assimilated forms of *Jaat Vaishnavism* or *Shahajiya Vaishnavism*.¹⁶ As a consequence, several Sahajiya branches, such as Bauls, Nera-Neri Kartabhaja, Khushibiswasi, Panchasakha, etc., were inaugurated in Nadia and its surrounding territories. All of these groups and traditions contributed to the rich tapestry of spirituality and cultural heritage in Nadia and the surrounding areas. They often emphasized distinctive spiritual experiences, devotion, and the pursuit of inner truth. This propaganda had a long-term impact on the religious and cultural landscape of Bengal and has followers and practitioners to this day.

The "*Kheturi Mahotsav*" was an important Vaishnava festival celebrated in East Bengal (Bangladesh). It was a Vaishnava spiritual and cultural

assimilation dedicated to the worship and celebration of Lord Krishna and Radha. The activities undertaken during the *Kheturi* festival included Chaitanya Puja, Krishna Puja, Kirtan, *Mahotsava*, and the year-long recitation of Vrindavan Das's '*Chaitanya Bhagavata*' and Krishnadasa Kaviraj's '*Chaitanyacharitamrita*'. Ballabhikanta, Brajamohana, Sri Krishna, Radhakanta, and Radhamohana were worshipped as divine forms. During the *Kheturi Mahotsav*, leading Vaishnava Mahantas or Gurus and a large number of disciples were gathered to sing bhajans (devotional songs), perform kirtans (devotional chants), and participate in various spiritual activities. "In the *Kheturi* festival, under the leadership of Jahnadevi (wife of Nityananda Mahaprabhu), there were twenty-nine Vaishnavas from various places, in addition, three from Nabadwipa, nine from Shantipur, thirty from Bardhaman and Murshidabad, two from Medinipur, and sixteen from other places joined the *Mahotsav at Kheturi*. Prominent among them were Jahnadevi, the poet Gnanadas, Kamalakar Pippalai, Meenketan Ramdas, poet Balaramdas, Vrindavandas, Achyutananda, Vishnudas Acharya, poet Govindadas, poet Lochandas, Mangal Thakur, Vyasacharya, Jagannath, Kastokata of Dhaka, Bikrampur, Shyamananda, Rasikananda, poet Karnapur, and, of course, Srinivas Acharya and Narottam Dutta. Many people attended this festival along with these prominent Vaishnavas.¹⁷ This festival had very historical significance in the context of the spread of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. We are already familiar with the spiritual assimilation between Manipur and Bengal is very ancient. The task of propagating Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Manipur was initiated by Narottam Das Thakur after the completion of the grand *Kheturi Mahautshav*. Under the influence of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, a significant number of Manipuri embraced Vaishnavism. The impact of this transformation was prominent as five devotees of Narottam Das Thakur—Ganganarayan Chakrabarti, Nidhiram Acharya, Krishnacharan Chakrabarti, Kunjabihari Chakrabarti, and Ram Kamal Chakrabarti—visited Manipur. Through their dedicated and sincere efforts, Vaishnavism gained a strong foothold and spread throughout Manipur. That is why Kantichandra Radhi, the prominent author of the book '*Nabadwip Mahima*,' has narrated that the inhabitants of Manipur are deeply devoted to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Not only that, they also belong to the family of the Param Vaishnava, Narottam Das Thakur.¹⁸ So, the visit of Narattam Das Thakur played a pivotal role in the propagation of the Vaishnava tradition in this territory.

Ningthou Ching-Thang Khomba, who was also recognized as Bhagyachandra Jai Singh (1759-1798), embraces a historical reputation in Manipur as a visionary and equitable monarch, much like his grandfather, Garib Nawaz. Jai Singh's fearlessness, sagacity, and spiritual devotion likely inspired or stimulated his efforts to inspire Vaishnavism in Manipur. His respect and devotion to the Radhakrishna cult indicate a deep commitment to this particular aspect of Hinduism, and he may have believed that spreading this doctrine, would strengthen the spiritual and cultural identity of his kingdom. So, he tried to intense energies to disseminate the ideals of

Vaishnavism among the common masses of Manipur. A considerable portion of the royal family in Manipur, including the prince and princess, proclaims their lineage from Jai Singh. This implies that they strongly believed they were descendants of Jai Singh, indicating the unquestioned recognition of the social hierarchy in Manipur. In the social fabric of Manipur, the significance of Bhagya Chandra was extraordinary. There are numerous narratives about heroism and prevalent popularity in Manipur. While not all of these can be adopted as concrete historical authenticity, they also provide some valuable pieces of information for the knowing history of Manipur.

Indeed, King Bhagya-Chandra Singh was recognized as the last incredible administrator in Manipur. He was known for his effective administrative understanding as well as political acumen, and he also had considerable popularity among his subjects. King Bhagya-Chandra was a pious disciple of Krishna and Radha, embodying saintly virtues. He had also deeply patronized and encouraged music, dance, and the fine arts during his reign. Most notably, he was nominated for nationwide recognition for the popularity of Manipuri Dance across India. With the active support of his daughter Maharajkumari Bimbabati, Bhagya Chandra initiated the Manipuri Rasa Dance, leaving an indelible impression on the art form's promotion and recognition. Bhagya-Chandra is believed to have experienced a divine vision of Krishna with Radha and the Gopis performing the Rasa Leela. Princess Bimbabati, who was not only a proficient singer and dancer but also deeply devoted to Krishna and Radha, performed a remarkable role in translating her father's vision into the enchanting and graceful expressions of the Radha-Krishna Rasa Dance. Through her creation of artistic intuition, she meticulously crafted the impressively beautiful costumes for Radha, the Gopis, and Krishna for this Rasa dance. In doing so, she bestowed upon India and the Hindu world a unique mode of aesthetic and mystical expression. This innovative form of artistry has now captivated spectators beyond the borders of Manipur, resonating widely throughout India. Bimbabati the princess of Manipur rightfully deserves an esteemed place of honour in the realm of Indian devotional mysticism, culture, and art. Princess Bimbabati was deeply immersed in Vaishnava's spiritual doctrine, to the extent that she withdrew from subjective objects and devoted the remainder of her life to serving Lord Krishna and chanting or singing his sacred names. She gained renown as '*Sija Lairoibi*,' which meaning to 'the princess who owned the Lord.' The golden deity of Radharani at the Govindaji temple was subsequently fashioned in her icon. In these circumstances, Bimbabati is adorned in Manipur as the replication of Mirabai.¹⁹

Once, Bhagyachandra received a divine message and was attracted to Chaitanya's (Biswambar Mishra) devotion, leading him to visit and settle in Nabadwip. In 1798, after a rule of thirty-nine years, Bhagyachandra abdicated the throne, passing on his royal responsibilities to his eldest son. He devoted his later years to Krishna Bhakti and was bestowed with the title

'*Rajarsi*,²⁰' symbolizing a 'sage in the form of a King.' Krishnachandra Roy (1710-1782). The then king of Nadia, granted a piece of land on the bank of the Ganga at Nabadwip as 'Manipur Rajkunja' at the request of Maharaja Bhagya Chandra Singh. Kantichandra Rarhi mentions in '*Nabadwip Mahima*' that during the period when the ruler of Manipur, Bhagya Chandra, visited Nabadwip, Nabadwipadhipati Krishnachandra Ray, the Shakta ruler of Nadia, was still alive. Krishnachandra had established a friendship with the Manipuri ruler and, as a token of love, bestowed Bhagyachandra 16 bighas of land in Teghri Mauza (Nabadwip) in exchange for a nominal rent. The fact that the erudite ruler of *Nabadwipadhipati*,²¹ Krishnachandra Roy, granted land to Bhagyachandra for Chaitanya worship was indeed surprising because Krishnachandra Ray strongly opposed Chaitanya worshippers. On the other hand, he couldn't accept Chaitanyadev as an incarnation of Krishna. In his prominent book '*Khitish Bangshabali Charitam*,' Kartik Chandra Roy mentioned, "The rulers were Shakta, but they had special reverence for the Vaishnava faith."²² They also erected metal and stone iconic figures of the different incarnations mentioned in the Puranas and donated extensive tracts of land for their worship. They had unwavering devotion to both Kali and Krishna. However, they held strong animosity or hatred towards the followers of the Chaitanya community. This had far-reaching consequences, and the worship of Chaitanya was almost prohibited during their reign. 'Even after Ganga Govind Singh, the founder of the Kandi Royal dynasty and a Dewan of the British East India Company embraced the Vaishnava spiritual doctrine and came to Nabadwip, he constructed a Ratna temple at the birthplace of Chaitanya using black basalt stones. However, due to a lack of royal approval, he couldn't establish the Chaitanya idol there'. Unexpectedly, Bhagyachandra the king of Manipur came to Nabadwip and was distressed to see the Chaitanya idol being worshipped in utmost secretly underground at the residence of Pitambara Goswami in Malanch Para.²³ Maharaja Krishnachandra was a vehement opponent of Chaitanya Deva and its worshippers. He focused extensively on promoting Shaktism to ensure that Chaitanya's influence did not gain prominence during his reign.

In this holy and divine land of Nabadwip, the Supreme Lord Sri Chaitanya Deva incarnated on the auspicious day of Dol Purnima in the year 1486. In this sacred land, the eruditions of Navyanyaya (Neo-Logic), Navya Smriti (Dharmashastra), and Tantraism not only originated but also developed through continuous and dedicated practice. Nabadwip became the ideal university of the Sanskrit language (University of Debobhasha) and it was possible due to distinguished pandits like Basudeva Sarvabhauma, Raghunath Shiromani, Biswambhar Misra (Chaitanya deva) Raghunandan Smarta Bhattacharya, Krishnananda Agambagish. Pupils from diverse regions of the country used to gather at Nabadwip to explore knowledge. Hence a large number of *Toles*²⁴ and *Chatupathis*²⁵ had been established throughout Nabadwip and its surroundings. In this immaculate soil of Nadia and at the focal point of supreme knowledge and spirituality in

eastern India, the ruler of Manipur, recognizing its significance, established an Anumahaprabhu temple dedicated to Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu for the worship of divine spirituality. This historical establishment stands as an unquestionable example, leaving no room for uncertainty. This sacred place is commonly recognized as the 'Anumahaprabhu Mandir.' Bhagyachandra's daughter, Bimbavati, had the Anumahaprabhu icon crafted from jackfruit wood and installed it in a temple. At present, this icon receives daily worship at the temple. The area was named Manipuri Road after the temple built by the rulers of Manipur, located at Nabadwip. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das (1870-1925) was a prominent lawyer, educator, and a key figure in the Indian National Congress, his daughter, Amaladevi, donated a significant amount of money for the construction of this temple.²⁶ The architectural style of this temple is influenced by Manipuri culture. Almost all Vaishnava festivals are celebrated in this Anumahaprabhu temple. That's why Vaishnav devotees from Manipur arrived at this holy place almost throughout the year. *Chaitanya Bhagabat* was described as a city where hundreds of thousands of people bathed at various bathing places, and it was renowned as a centre of learning, not being the main city of Bengal or a trade hub. In fact, in terms of learning, it was considered the most renowned city in the world. The prime focus of the city's respectable citizens was acquiring knowledge. Elderly as well as young men and women from the higher classes were constantly engaged in intellectual pursuits, with no attraction towards wealth, politics, war, pleasure, or amusements. In the opinion of the citizens, man was born only to acquire knowledge which was the ultimate aim of human life. Education for children began at the age of four, and most people in Nadia dedicated their time to the pursuit of wisdom. The learned individuals had no panic about facing difficulties in society, as they received festival gifts and support from the community. The main responsibility of a wealthy person was to protect and support those engaged in intellectual and spiritual pursuits for the benefit of their followers.²⁷

The concept of Kirtan, generally sung by disciples or followers of Chaitanya Deva, also developed its method into Manipuri society. The singing of Kirtan in Bengali style commenced. This transformation occurred during the reign of King Bhagya Chandra, an ardent adherent of the Chaitanya school of Vaishnavism. The songs and Kirtan during his era predominantly featured compositions based on the lyrics of Rasa-Krishna Leela, a form of devotional dance and song depicting the divine love of Radha and Krishna. All these cultural and religious developments took place within the valley of Manipur. The process of Sanskritization eventually reached its culmination by the end of the nineteenth century.²⁸

Manipuri Kirtan is a devotional and musical application performed by Vaishnava devotees and disciples in the Manipuri tradition. It involves the singing of divine songs and hymns, often accompanied by different and unique traditional musical instruments like drums, cymbals, and stringed instruments like the esraj or Pena. These ceremonial Kirtans are typically

dedicated to Lord Krishna and Radha. In the present context, Vaishnava followers and disciples are an integral part of Manipuri's religious and cultural life. The devotees participate in these devotional or sensorial songs and dances as a means of revealing their deep erotic feelings and devotion to the divine. Manipuri Kirtan is known for its attractive melodies, graceful dance movements, and deep spiritual significance.

At present, the Gaudiya Vaishnavism represented by ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness), has obtained prominence as an international spiritual movement. The establishment of Gaudiya Vaishnavism as a universal spiritual path has been facilitated by its foundation on both the philosophical and spiritual teachings of Lord Krishna Chaitanya during the post-Chaitanya era. Extraordinary personalities like Kedarnath Datta (Bhaktivinoda Thakur), Bimala Prasad Datta (Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati), and Abhay Charan Dey (Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada) played pivotal roles in bringing worldwide recognition and identification to the Gaudiya Vaishnavism movement. It seems to me that after the advent of Buddhism in the sacred soil of India, the Gaudiya Vaishnav spiritual philosophy is the unique one that has gained worldwide achievement with such a unique perspective.

The story of Kedarnath Datta's divine dream in 1894 leading to the naming of the village Miyapur as Mayapur near the confluence of the Ganges and Jalangi rivers is indeed significant in the history of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Mayapur has since become a highly revered and iconic location for followers of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Kedarnath Datta stirred controversy by renaming the village Miyapur to Mayapur and by constructing temples, publicly proclaiming it as the birthplace of Lord Chaitanya. This controversy remains unresolved to this day. It is nearly impossible to predict whether it will be resolved or not. Most scholars agree that Kedarnath Datta established the name Mayapur, based solely on the reference to Mayapur in the *Bhaktiratnakara*, an important book composed by Narahari Chakravarti. Presently, the world's largest Krishna (Chandradoya) Temple is under construction on the sacred soil of Mayapur. In 1966, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada sparked a revolution in the propagation and spread of Gaudiya Vaishnavism through the establishment of ISKCON in New York City, it was a far-reaching initiative.

Over time, ISKCON has expanded its branches and sub-branches significantly. It has even established branch temples in northeastern states of India, known as 'Seven Sisters'. The branch temple of ISKCON has also been built in Manipur state. In Manipur, the ISKCON temple also known as Sri Sri Radha Krishnachandra Temple is located near the banks of the Imphal River. The temple boasts a distinctive architectural style, constructed using bricks coated with white cement, creating the illusion of white marble. Enhancing its uniqueness is the dome-shaped roof adorned with beautiful paintings depicting various pastimes of Lord Krishna. The temple is also equipped with a natural lighting system that illuminates the Sankirtan area, the central space for prayers and offerings. Atop the

Sankirtan area, you'll find an array of vibrant precious stones, specially imported from France, adding to the temple's beauty. However, there is no doubt that long before the establishment of Mayapur or ISKCON, Manipur was closely associated with the birthplace of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

Manipur and Bengal Vaishnavism are two distinct yet related divine and philosophical heritage under the broader patronage of Vaishnavism, centred around the worship of Lord Krishna and Chaitanya Deva. Both traditions maintain significance in the cultural and spiritual landscape of India and have influenced each other in various ways. Despite their distinct characteristics, they have also interacted and assimilated elements from each other, enriching the spiritual and cultural heritage of the regions where they are practised. Over time, there has been interaction and integration between Bengal Vaishnavism and Manipur Vaishnavism, particularly through the exchange of devotional literature, art, and cultural practices. Manipuri Vaishnavism has been transformed by the bhakti ideals promoted by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition in Bengal.

Notes and References (Endnotes)

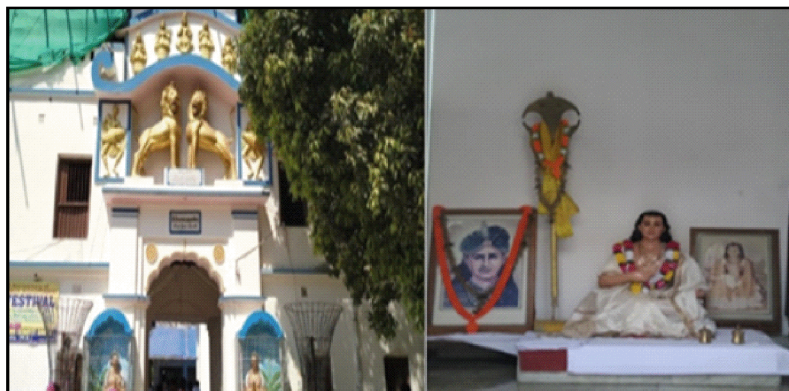
1. Ramkeli is historically significant for being attached to Chaitanya Deva's advent and propagation of the divine ideas on this soil. In 1515, Sri Chaitanya Deva was traveling to Vrindavan, and for a short while, he stayed at Ramkeli (Gaur the old capital of Bengal now in Malda). Two brothers, Rup and Sanatan Goswami were deeply inspired by Sri Chaitanya Deva's spiritual doctrine and divine manner as a consequence both of them decided to embrace Vaishnavism after listening to his discourse. It remains an important pilgrimage destination for devotees and followers of this tradition, and the historical and spiritual legacy of Chaitanya Deva continues to thrive in this region.
2. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, *Kirat Jana Kriti*, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1951, p. 153
3. Ibid, pp. 146, 147
4. Sipra Sen, *Tribes and Caste of Manipur*, Mittal Publication, Delhi, 1992, p. 12, 13
5. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, *op, cit*, pp. 45, 46
6. R.K Jhalajit Singh, *A Short History of Manipur*, Manipur, 1992 p. 4
7. George Watt, *The Aboriginal Tribes of Manipur*, The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol. 16 (1887), pp. 350, 351
8. Anuradha Bandyopadhyay, *Purba Bharoter Baishnab Andolon O Sahityo*, Calcutta, 1983, p. 39
9. Sanamahism is an ethnic-religious doctrine of the Meitei people of Manipur. Sanamahism is the ethnic-religious belief of the Meitei people of Manipur. Essentially, basically it is a polytheistic spiritual belief. Sanamahism is an animistic, ancestor-worshipping religious heritage with a supernatural good or goddess known as Sidaba Mapu or the Immortal God. In Sanamahism, there are five prime deities." 1. Asheeba or Protector and the guardian god of mankind. 2. Atingaa Koilou Sitapa or Creator of the univers. 3. Apanba or Ruler of the universe and destroyer of the evil power. 4. Leimarel Sidabi or

Earth Goddess. And 5. Imoinu Ahongbi or an incarnation of Leimarel, and a goddess of wealth and prosperity.

10. Anuradha Bandyopadhyay, *Purba Bharoter Baishnab Andolon O Sahityo*, p. 42.
11. Government of India Ministry of MSME Brief Industrial Profile of Bishnupur District (Manipur), Takyelpat Industrial Estate, Imphal, p. 4
12. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee. *op. cit.*, p. 144
13. Spectrum: *An International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Jan-Jun 2018 Vol. 6, Issue 1 p. 75
14. R.K Jhalajit Singh, *A Short History of Manipur*, p. 148
15. W McCulloch, *Account of the Valley of Munnipore and of the Hill Tribes*, Calcutta, 1859, pp. 7, 8
16. The term 'Sahajiya' can be illuminated as 'those who are easy' or 'spontaneous'. This practice is mostly amalgamated with the Bengali region, particularly in West Bengal and Bangladesh. Sahajiya Vaishnavism emphasizes extreme veneration of Lord Krishna and places powerful features on the wisdom of miraculous affection and ecstasy (bhakti). Sahajiya Vaishnavism, like many other mystical traditions, places a powerful emphasis on the inner divine feeling and may have practices and beliefs that differ from conventional or mainstream Vaishnavism
17. Romakanta Chakrabarty, *Bonge Baishnab Dharma*, Ananda Publishers, Calcutta, 1996, pp. 88, 89
18. Kantichandra Rarhi, *Nabadwip Mahima* (Edited by Jajneswar Chaudhury), Pustak Biponi, Calcutta, 2011, p. 251
19. Anuradha Bandyopadhyay, *Purba Bharoter Baishnab Andolon O Sahityo*, p. 44
20. 'Rajarshi' or 'Royal Sage' is a term used in Hinduism to describe a king who, while holding the position of a ruler and bearing all the responsibilities that come with it, also follows the path of devotion (Bhakti) and righteousness (Dharma). Rajarshis are highly respected figures in Hindu tradition, often regarded as exemplary rulers who harmoniously combine both temporal power and spiritual wisdom. They serve as inspirations for others, illustrating that one can be a capable and just ruler while maintaining a profound spiritual connection. This concept has significantly influenced Indian culture and heritage.
21. Nabadwipadhipati was a title used by the rulers of Nadia, a historical region. Nadia has a rich history, and it was an important cultural and spiritual hub in ancient and medieval India. The title 'Nabadwipadhipati' essentially means the "Lord of Nabadwip," with Nabadwip being a significant town in the region. The king of Nadia, Ramkrishna, arranged and bestowed a monthly honorarium of two hundred rupees on the learned scholars and wisdom pundits from the government treasury. Ramkrishna adorned the title of Nabadwipadhipati upon the scholars of Nadia as a reward for their assistance. Through generations, the rulers of Nadia considered this title as a symbol of their association with the learned and wisdom society.
22. Dewan Kartikeyo Chandra Roy, *Khitish Bangshabali Charit*, Natun Sanskrit Jantra, Calcutta, 1932, p. 29
23. Saibal Sarkar, *Maharaja Krishnachandra O Samakal*, Mudra, Krishnagar, 2019, p. 117
24. In medieval India, 'tole' or 'pathshala' referred to an informal indigenous school or a place of learning. These schools were typically situated in areas associated with holiness and education, such as the region of Nadia. It's noteworthy that Nadia boasted a significant number of such 'toles', provided

its rich educational and spiritual heritage. These 'toles' played a pivotal role in imparting knowledge, particularly in matters of religion and spirituality, to the local population. They were often closely linked to temples, monasteries, and other religious centres, making them hubs for both religious and secular learning.

25. 'Chatuspathy' refers to higher learning institutions where instruction in *Nabya Nyaya* (logic), Rhetoric, *Dharmasastra* (the science of ethics and duty), or *Smritishastra* (ancient legal texts) Grammar and Vedic Literature was provided. Higher education provided foundational education through domestic instruction.
26. Mrityunjoy Mondal, *Nabadwip Itibritta*, Deys Publishing, Calcutta, 2013, p. 335
27. Sishir Kumar Ghosh, *Lord Gaurango Salvation for All*, Vol-I, Calcutta, 1923, pp. 3, 4
28. G.P. Singha, *Hinduism in Manipur*, Gyn Publishing House, Delhi, 2012, p. 89



Anumahaprabhu Temple (Established by the Manipuri Rulers) in Nabadwip, Nadia