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“A Study On The History, Economy And Society Of The Pangals Of Cachar District Of Assam”

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Abstract: The present study is an attempt to find out the migration, settlement and life of the Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) of Cachar District of Assam. Assam has seen the migration of different groups of people in its history since long past. The fusion of different languages and cultures has created the present Assam that we know today. The state of Assam has a distinct ecosystem with different tribal groups and communities and such is the community of Pangals (Muslim Manipuris). As a result of the devastating seven years of Burmese invasion (1819-1826) to Manipuri kingdom, many Manipuris fled to neighbouring states and countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar. The fleeing Manipuris to Bangladesh left a group of their population in undivided Cachar. At present, Cachar has the largest concentration of Manipuri Muslims outside Manipur with an estimated population of around 80 thousand.

Key Words: Pangals(Manipuri Muslims), migration, settlement, Cachar District.

Introduction: The Pangals are a small Manipuri speaking community who trace their origin in Manipur Valley. The word ‘Pangal’ was historically used by the Meitei people to denote Meitei Muslims. This community is also known as Manipuri Muslims, Meitei Pangals or Panggan. In Cachar, they are popularly called as “Moglai” by the local Bengali Community.

Methodology: The proposed research work is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data includes archival records. The secondary data were books, newspapers, journals etc. For collecting data and their analysis, basically empirical and analytical method was followed.

At different historical stages Manipuris came to Cachar and settled permanently in this region. With the passage of time, they became important ethnic group in the social structure of Cachar.

Barak Valley was a gate way to the west for the Manipuris. There were many trade routes and foot tracks which suggested communication between the two regions. Being a neighbouring kingdom, Manipur had close political, commercial and cultural connection with the Barak Valley. Barak Valley has been referred to as “Mayang Leipak” in the ancient Manipuri folklore. The Valley had been a shelter for the Manipuri revolting kings and princes. In different Manipuri Chronicles, there were the references of matrimonial alliances between Manipur and neighbouring kingdoms.

The origin of Pangals has multiple theories. Evidence of Muslim Manipuri Settlement can be found in Manipuri Royal Chronicles known as “Puyas”. Muslims became part of Manipur society during the rule of King Khagemba (1597-1652). It is recorded that Muslim soldiers led by General Muhammad Shani were part of a combined Cachari and Muslim force which invaded Manipur. There are contradictory pieces of evidence about their settlement, whether the Muslim forces were captured or there was a mutual agreement to settle the Muslim forces in the Imphal Valley.

These historical events were recorded in “Nongsamei Puya” and “Pangal Thorakpa”. There are records that suggest the existence of Muslims even before the reign of King Khagemba. It is believed that the

Pangals of Arabian Clan were the first Muslims of Manipur. Even after the death of King Khagemba, there were the migrations of Muslims in small number in different periods.

The Muslim forces were highly skilful in different crafts and vocations. King Khagemba appreciated their skills and gave them local women for marriage and land for settlement. The Muslim families were given family titles according to their vocation known as “Sageis”. There were administrative offices known as “Pangal Saglen” for Muslims under the king. The head of the institution was known as ‘Kazi’ who used to look after the affairs of the Muslims.

In course of time, the Muslims adopted the Meiteilon as their mother tongue. They integrated a number of local customs and traditions in their daily lives. The Pangals were inducted under the “Lallup System”. They took part in military services and utilized their skills in craft and vocation to boost the economy of the kingdom.

Pangals, like the Meitei community fled Manipur during seven years of Burmese occupation of Manipur mainly for fear of persecution. Both the communities live in close proximity showing their common lineage. Most of the Pangals are settled in Lakhipur, Sonai and Barkhola Constituencies. Singerbond, Sapormoina, Tolengram, Banskandi, Bhairabnagar, Dolugram, Badripar, Kontha, Tarapur, Moijing etc. are some of the villages where Pangals have been settled.

The Pangals have a number of customs and traditions similar to the Meiteis. Most of them are related to households like food habits, dress and habitation. The women folk of the community adopted Khudei, Phanek and Khwangnam Phi as their traditional dress.

The Pangals have food habits like Uti, Eromba and Ngari similar to the Meiteis. The marriage custom of Pangals is a combination of Islamic and Meitei traditions. Weaving and farming are the two sectors where the Pangal women have active participation other than from their domestic work. Phida, a traditional decorated carpet is one of the products which is closely associated with the Pangal community.

Rice cultivation is the traditional occupation of the Pangals apart from basket making and bamboo crafts. The Pangals have similar pattern of constructing houses like the Meiteis. With the passage of time, the Pangals have started to work in other professions for their livelihood. Many of them are now working as teachers, defence personals and some have travelled either South Indian cities or abroad. A few in numbers have opened their own enterprise in small towns and cities.

Like most of the communities of Barak Valley, the Pangals depend on Government jobs for employment mainly in education and other departments. Economically the Pangals belong to lower section of the society. Lack of education and opportunities are the main reasons for this backwardness of the Pangals. The poor families of the Pangals send their children to Middle Eastern Countries to earn livelihood for the families.

Like other communities of the Barak Valley, the Pangals also suffer from unemployment, illiteracy and lack of opportunities. These problems of the Pangals need to be addressed by the government for the socio-economic development of this special community.

Cachar welcomed many communities since times immemorial. It is for the liberality, generosity and tolerance of the people of Cachar that this Valley is considered as one of the most peaceful regions of Assam. Accessibility through land routes and commercial links have made this region a suitable land for the migration and settlement of the Pangals.

Conclusion: It is not possible to mention the exact year or century of the emergence of the Pangal Settlements in Cachar. However, the history of the Pangals from the 18th century is well documented and recorded. The growth of Pangal Settlements in Cachar was mainly due to the successive Burmese invasions in Manipur and its internal crisis. Development of different routes which linked Manipur with Cachar also contributed to the migration and settlement of the Pangals to Cachar. The Pangals should feel privileged to be a part of the vibrant ecosystem of Cachar. They should try to contribute in bringing development and prosperity in Cachar.

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