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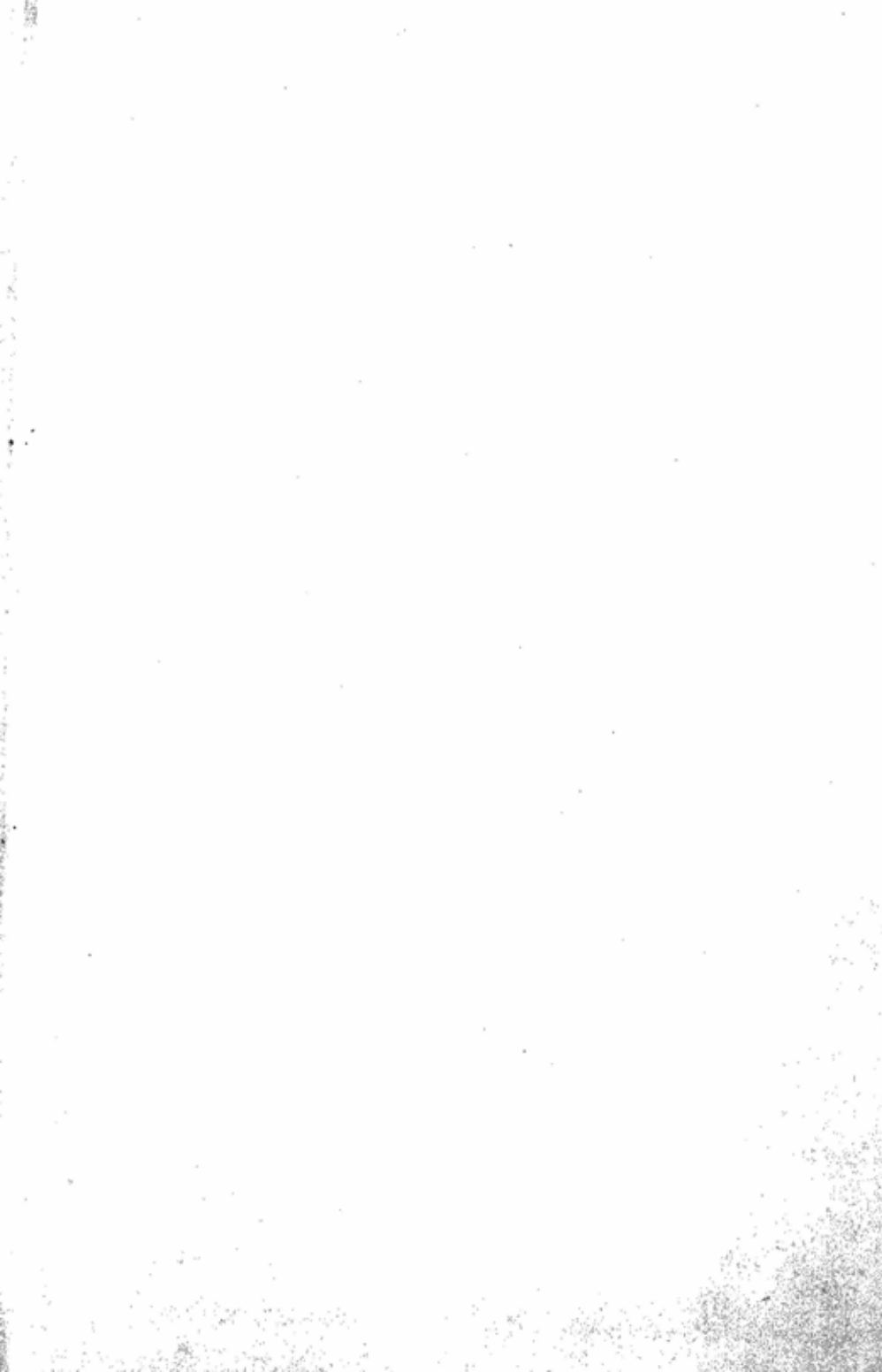
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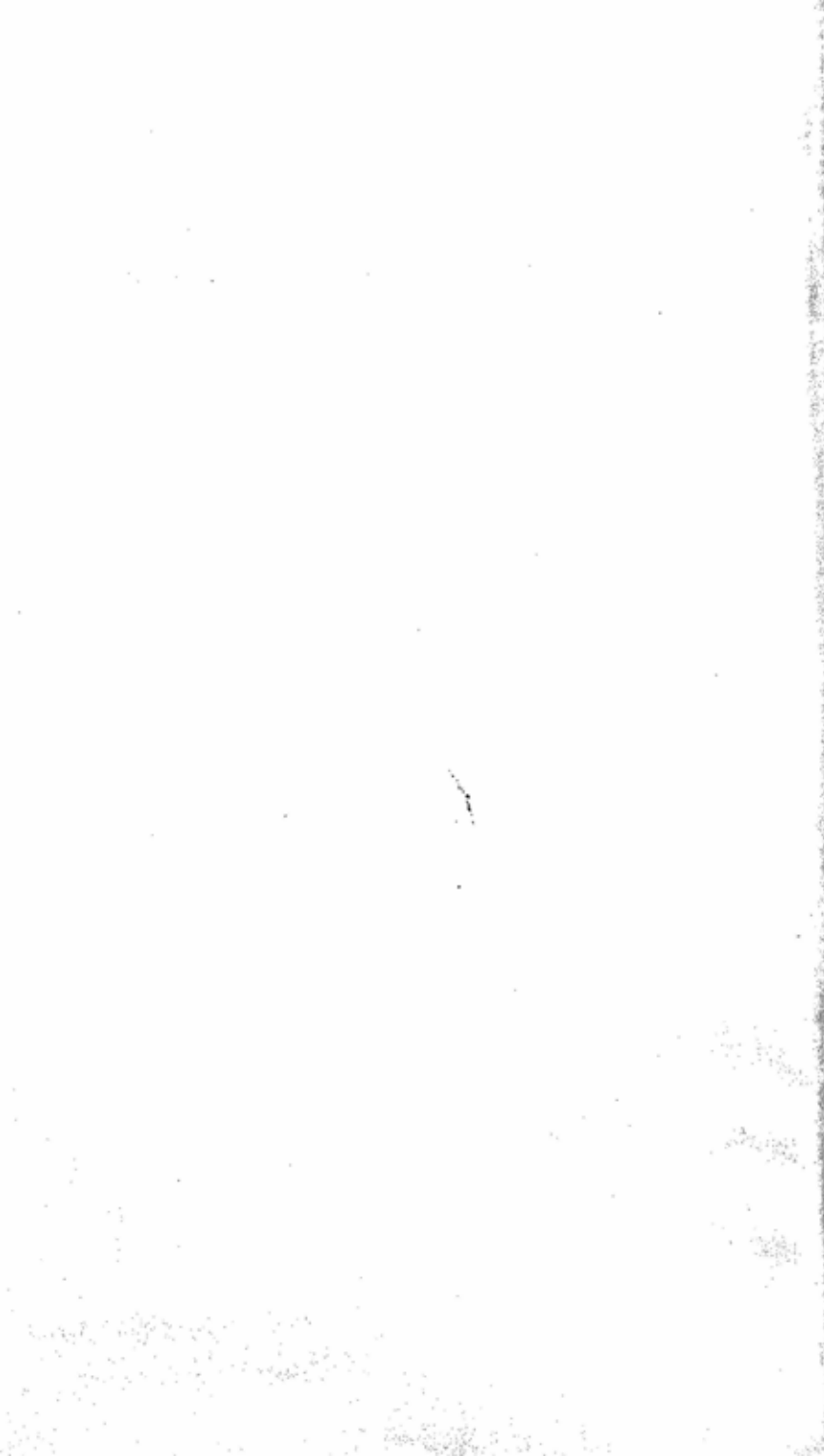
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RELIGION AND CULTURE OF MANIPUR



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M.A. LL.B. Ph.D. D. Litt.



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FOREWORD

Dr. Kirti Singh has done a pioneering work in the area of contemporary Manipuri religion and culture. His monumental monograph shows that in the Meitei religion and culture, there is a synthesis of the East and the West and the culture of Manipur is in more ways than one ahead of the contemporary religious connotations.

The Manipuri religion is open, universal in outlook and without any founder prophet or holy book. It synthesise the essential truths of Buddhism, Vaishnavism, Christianity and the tribal religion assimilating into one and pursuing the ultimate truth and godhood in such a way as if they belong to it as its different aspects and parts. The ancestor worship, the Burmese Buddhism and the Hindu cults have been welded together in the Meitei religion, whose aim is the realisation of God and its reflection in human beings.

The deeply philosophical Manipuri religion propounds that the indeterminate Absolute (Sidava/Hari) and God are not two distinct entities. The Absolute and God extend into polytheism and henotheism. We observe that the religion has absolute-theistic system of philosophy, which is quite a new approach and innovation in the field of contemporary metaphysics. The concepts of soul, *karma*, bondage, salvation and the socio-religious movements have been knit together in the organic system of Meitei Religion. The spiritual stream comes from the Vaishnavite school of thought and finds effulgence in Krishna-Radha *bhakti* movement. Its catholicism, humanism, positive attitude to the world, and its caste and classless form of society leaves the living faiths of the Twentieth century far behind.

Dr. Kirti Singh has highlighted the special features of Manipuri folk-dance which uplift man to a union with God. Like the tide of the oceanic waves rising high, the dancers, surcharged with the divine love, ascend for communion with God. The spiritualisation of humanity forms a cardinal part of the Manipuri culture and imparts the social life and thought a high pedestal found nowhere else.

Dr. Kirti Singh's memorable work on the Manipuri culture, philosophy and religion is of an abiding value. The book will not only serve as a valuable reference book for the post-graduate studies but will throw light to mankind searching for truth, faith and path for the realisation of God. I am sure Dr. Singh will long be remembered by posterity for floodlighting the dark alleys of Meitei religion and thought.

R.S. Srivastava

PREFACE

In the following pages, an attempt has been made to present the dominant aspects of Religion and Culture of Manipur which will open up the real Manipuri mind to all and familiarise them with finer points and provoke deeper study.

The book is divided into two parts. The first is devoted to the study of religion and philosophy and the second part strives to deal at length with culture. There are chapters on political conditions, salient features of Manipuri thought, metaphysical principles, socio-religious movements, etc., interspersed with chapters on philosophical themes and various methods of God realisation, ethics, social philosophy, comparative study of Meitei faith and contemporary Indian thought and culture, etc. Based on original sources and careful field-work, these will surely stand the readers and researchers alike in very good stead. It has been my endeavour to shed as much light as possible so far as the comparative and critical study of Manipuri faith is concerned. Though important publications such as government publications and research-project-sponsored works have appeared in the field of Manipuri culture and religion over the last decade or so, their writers have omitted to discuss metaphysical concepts on the ground that its religion is a primitive faith which is based on superstition and dogma. In this book, I have worked on the subject in a modern and pragmatic way. For the first time, the Meitei concepts of God and godhood, soul, the relation between god and soul, *karma*, different ways of salvation, etc., have been discussed in an enlightened manner.

Two chapters on the philosophy of the Meiteis in relation to classical Indian thought and contemporary Indian thought is my humble contribution and they seek to answer the needs of students of social sciences, cultural anthropology and Indology. Many opine that these concepts are the result of Hindu influence and the pre-Vaishnavite beliefs and adverse to sound philosophical concepts. In order to correct these misconceptions, I have collected the relevant points from the sacred texts and also from the day to day community and social life of my people and knit them into a system along with my own interpretation and substantiated the same with quotations and reputed opinions. Happily, some of the concepts and main features clearly show that Manipur represents the confluence of the East and the West. And this is of great importance to the students of Religion, Philosophy and Culture.

The second part is devoted to an up to date account of culture with its form and contents. After a short survey of contemporary literature, I have recounted its contribution to dance, music, drama, painting, architecture, institutions, etc. They are discussed both in their theoretical and practical pre-Vaishnavite and Vaishnavite aspects. They not only connote a religious perception but also stand as notable contribution of the Manipuri culture to Indian culture. Items of Manipur dance, polo and martial arts are significant examples in this regard.

I wish first of all to thank the authorities of Ranchi University, for allowing me to work in the University. I owe a profound debt to Dr. R.S. Srivastava, Retd. Head of the Department of Philosophy and Dean of Humanities, Ranchi University, who indicated to me the main line of research and led me to its successful completion. Dr. Srivastava has been kind enough to write a foreword to the book and enhanced its value. I am indebted to the officials of the Government of Manipur, Shri B.C. Roy, Retd. Additional Director, Shri Y. Gopal, Deputy Secretary (Education), and N. Shamu Singh, Deputy Secretary (Education), for their co-operation in granting me study leave. I must also thank many scholars

of *Meitei Paya* (Lore) with whom I discussed many aspects and doubts and who supplied me with a wealth of invaluable information from the pages of holy texts. I am also beholden to many of my friends for their secretarial and other help in preparing the final manuscript.

Kongba Uchekon,
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Manipur.
10 August, 1987.

DR. M. KIRTI SINGH



ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations of the titles of works have been used in the footnotes of this book.

AARA	Annual Administrative Report of the Manipur Agency
AARMS	Administration Report of the Manipur State since 1907 (to 1984)
AIOC	All India Oriental Conference
CK	Cheitharol Kumbaba, ed. by late L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, Imphal, 1st edition, 1967
ERE	Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics ed. by James Hastings, Vol. II
JASB	Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
JAMJA	Journal of all Manipur Jatra/Sumang Lila Association
JMSP	Journal of Manipur Sahitya Parisat
ICHR	Indian Council for Historical Research
ICSSR	Indian Council for Social Science Research
ICPHR	Indian Council for Philosophical Research
IPC	Indian Philosophical Congress
ISCA	Indian Science Congress Association, Calcutta
ISKCON	International Society for Krishna Consciousness founded by Prabhupada A.C. Bhakti Vedanta

MS	Manuscript of Meitei Puranas written in Manipuri script
MCIC	Manipur Cultural Integration Conference
MSU	Manipur Students' Union
SAMLMC	Souvenirs issued by All Manipur Light Music Conference in 1979, 1981, etc.
SASM	Souvenir-cum-seminar papers published by Arts Society, Imphal (on contemporary Art in Manipur, 1980-83)
SJNMDA	Souvenir of Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy, Imphal, 1964

INTRODUCTORY

It is supposed that human habitation in Manipur valley took place in the remote past. Apart from folk stories and legends, there is historical evidence of a stable kingdom with Imphal as its capital under Pakhangba, the first historical king of Manipur, in the First century. Seven *Salais*/clans carved independent principalities from this time to the later centuries till the Ningthouja dynasty absorbed them by degrees. A line of 74 kings succeeded Pakhangba one after another till it was integrated with Indian Union in 1949.

The history of Manipur since the First century right up to the end of 1891 A.D. was mainly the history of expansion of Ningthouja rulers at the expense of the said *Salais*, hill tribes (Nagas and Kuki groups) and also at that of the neighbours such as the Burmese, Tripuries, Cacharies (Assam), etc. But the Ningthouja dynasty have suffered from internal revolution (of the princes of Maharaj Chandrakirti) and rebellion during the reign of Surachandra Maharaj. The British intervened into the quarrels of the princes and attempted to punish Yuvaraj Tikendrajit alias Koirang who had been the brain behind the war. The British troops defeated the Manipuris and hanged the Yuvaraj and General Thangal who were responsible for killing five Englishmen. After the historic war of 1891, Manipur came under the British rule as a princely state. According to the terms of *Sanad*, the British selected Raja Churachand Singh, a boy of five years as the ruler of Manipur.¹ The purpose was to make the future king of Manipur to be more or less a puppet. Churachand's reign may be characterised as the days of serfdom, slavery and British colonialism in the socio-economic structure

of the state. He was under the control of British Political Agent and the Governor of Assam in all practical matters.² The old institutions and titles were replaced by English type models.

The Investiture ceremony was publicly held in April, 1892, under the guidance of Major Maxwell, the then Political Agent. It was announced that slavery, *Lalup* (a kind of labour), etc., were abolished, and in its (forced labour) place a house tax of Rs. 2 per year was levied. A land revenue of Rs. 5 per year was also levied. The British reduced the jurisdiction of the Raja to the valley and assumed the administration of the hill areas as per their desire.³

During the minority of the Raja, the political agent was given more powers. Under the direction of the Government of India the political agent sent him to receive some training in Mayo College, Ajmer, befitting his position as a practical ruler under the British (He was a keen sportsman, a fine polo player and a good shot).⁴

On the 15th May, 1907, the administration was handed over to the Raja after completion of his education. The Raja was helped by a Darbar consisting of 8 members including himself. He was the President of the Darbar. The Vice-President was an I.C.S. British officer lent from Eastern Bengal and Assam. Besides them, there were 6 Manipuri members. After the introduction of Reform of 1919, the Maharaja (no longer Raja after 1918) was responsible for the administration of the state. He was assisted by a Darbar with a British I.C.S. as its President. The Darbar had at least 5 Manipuri members. The Maharaja was given veto power, revisional powers and pardoning of criminals subject to the approval of the Political Agent and the Governor of Assam.⁵

The First World War broke out in Europe in the middle part of his reign. He gave his support to the British in the shape of war efforts. He sent a team of 50 people under Assam Military Police to Mesopotamia.⁶ His collection of 2000 hill people for joining labour corps in France created a great commotion in the hill areas. The Kuki (Khongjai) tribes

such as the Thadous, Shimlon, Haokap, Dougel, etc., did not support the move.

The hill Kuki Khullakpas (chiefs) under the influence of Chingakhram Sanachaoba, a Manipuri from Kongmong whom the Haokaps believed to be a scion of the old ruling branch of the royal family on account of his name as Sana, (golden) a title of royal family, prepared themselves to such an extent that they snapped the tie they had developed for the Maharaja. This resulted in the Kuki rebellion of 1917.⁷ Whether this rebellion is a freedom struggle or not is a controversial issue, the details of which we need not go here. The British with their forces, Burma Military Office and Assam Rifles helped the Maharaja to suppress the revolt. Chingakhram Sanachaoba was arrested in Kabaw, all the hill chiefs who were involved in the revolt were arrested and tried according to law. For his loyal service Raja was given the hereditary title of the Maharajah in 1918. He was made a C.B.E. in December 1917, afterwards KCSI on 1st January, 1934. His connection with the British Viceroys was quite intimate.⁸ The British Government made him a Knight in 1934.

An event of great political significance took place under the leadership of Jadonang and Gaidileu (priest and priestness) in Kambiron district of Tomenglong sub-division of Manipur. They belonged to the *Kamei* or Ningthouja Royal clan of the Kabui Nagas. Both of them had some spiritual powers in connection with the treatment of the sick, prosperity of the community and rich harvest. Jadonang saw in his dream not only the girls, but men and women, who had been killed in the Kuki rebellion. Under the instruction of his god he asked the Kabui Nagas to take revenge and establish a separate Kabui Raj. The Nagas under his leadership began to react to the British rule, the Kukis and the Manipuri Meiteis in a positive way. An air of hostility and suspicion prevailed in the Naga inhabited areas between 1930 and 1940. His influence for a separate Kabui state had widely spread in certain parts of Cachar and northern hills of Manipur. However the effort was not successful as Jadonang was arrested by British troops and sentenced to death for the unfortunate murder of four Manipuris who

went to Kambiron for betel leave trading. Gaidileu was sentenced to life imprisonment. They were tried by the British court. Jadonang was hanged on August 29, 1931. The feelings roused on this day among the Kabui Naga tribe were indeed universal and the British could not nip them in the bud. The socio-religious changes effected by Jadonang's movement on the primitive life of the Kabui Nagas are of great consequences, to which I beg to invite your attention later. Rani Gaidileu Nagini is still alive with the award of Padma Bhushan, holding the prestigious position among the Nagas after her release from the jail by Congress Government in 1947.

Maharaja's contribution in transforming Manipur into a modern state with British support is noteworthy. The opening of hydro-electric plant, printing press, hospitals, electricity supply, establishment of four high schools including one girls High School and upgrading of Johnstone M.E. School into High School, development of Manipuri vernacular and improvement of roads added to the modernisation of Manipur. The British administration brought not only greater law and order but also educational and administrative changes (not in the same sense in which education was done in other parts of India). The people thanked the British for putting an end to some of the tyrannical practices like the *pothang*, *Yairek* (forced labour) and *Santri* in 1938.

The state had some financial embarrassment in as much as it had a small civil list and the annual tribute of Rs. 50,000 to the British Government.⁹

GROWTH OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The politically minded people learnt about the reform movements and their effects in other parts of the world. Moreover the larger movement of Indian National Congress now began to whirl around Manipur in one mighty sweep. Voices of dissatisfaction and criticism were articulated by the members of a new political organisation (established in 1933) called Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha and Women's War (great agitation of women in 1939-40). The Mahasabha submitted

petitions to the ruler urging him to set up a legislative council, later universal legislature, to introduce a vote by ballot, formation of ministry on parliamentary lines and the fixing of the civil list at a fixed ratio to the revenues of the state. In 1939 leading ladies demonstrated to have the rice export (by the Marwari merchants) stopped.¹⁰ The elites and educated Manipuris in general were keen to criticise the subversive role of Brahman Sabha, deplorable condition of land record, slow progress in lower courts, and the revisional court of the Maharaja. By and by the same forces that produced the administrative reforms produced social reforms through H. Irabot, N. Phulo, etc. The agitations brought about the establishment of a separate chief court, setting up of an appointment board, reduction of civil list to 10 per cent of the state revenue and establishment of police stations in different parts.¹¹

Religious condition : After the fall of Kangla (old palace which is associated with the traditional sanctity of the Meiteis) at the hands of the British a new palace was constructed for the new Raja. He occupied it in 1908 as his headquarters which remained until Manipur was integrated with Indian Union. The old palace and fort were occupied by the British troops (now by 4 Assam Rifles) as a punitive measure to show their might. It is a place where the Maharajas of the state must be installed according to Meitei custom. The sentimental attachment of the Manipuris to this place is very strong. Around the ancient fort and the palace in the centre of the old palace revolved the cultural life of the people for many centuries.¹² The Kangla with the sacred tank Nungjeng Pukhri, the old palace built on it with temples of state buildings, and the ditch were declared to be the British Reserve Area as they were used for attacking the British Residency.¹³

Manipur was for the greater part of the 20th century rather in the background in connection with the question of freedom and self-respect. But Churachand's reign saw the religious and cultural integration of Manipur with the rest of India. By virtue of his right as the king of all Meiteis he claimed jurisdiction over all cultural and religious affairs. He was invested

with full powers in customary matters for the Manipuri Hindus living outside Manipur. True to the tradition of the Hindu kings he made munificent grants to the temples of Nar Singh Tila Akhara (now in East Bengal) and Malugram in Cachar (Assam) which would denote themselves to his popularity.¹⁴ It was in his day that pilgrimage and dedication of temples became a passion with the kings, queens and the upper class people.

He made a religious pilgrimage lasting many months to *Charidham* (4 sacred places) Nabadwip, Kashi, Prayag and Vrindavan and then to Hardwar, Rameswar, Dwarka and Puri. Then he came to the Abor hill near the Mishmi river in Assam. He then took a dip in the Parsuram Kunda before his return to Manipur. The pandits of the western places offered him the title of *Bhakta Rajarsi*, *Sri Kumda Seva Vinoda*. The pair of bells which king Chandrakirti had dedicated to Govindji was damaged. He dedicated a pair of bells afresh to Lord Govinda. Churachand built a temple in the Radhakunda of Vrindavan. It is known as Gopalji *Kunja*. On the full moon day of *Mera* (September-October) 1932 he dedicated a *Maharasa* (dance of Sri Krishna) to Govindaji in this temple. The road to Radhakunda was constructed for the pilgrims under the managership of Vraja Mohan Das with the munificence of Maharaja Churachand.¹⁵ His queen, Dhanamanjari Devi, built a temple known as *Sanar Mandir* (golden temple) in Nabadwip out of her own resources. The Vaishnava Sampradaya group of Visnupriya Thakurani in Nabadwip paid a glorious tribute to him by calling him *Gourabhakti Rasarnava* in 1937. They also characterised Manipur as the second Vaikuntha.¹⁶

In 1933 the grand *pūja* of Lord Pakhangba, the divine ancestor of the royal dynasty was performed under the supervision of Moirang Thabal, the great court Pandit in a befitting manner. *Mera Haochongba* (a national festival of the kings held in the month of Mera/Sept.-October) was accomplished for the purpose of feeding the hill people with rice-beer and meat. It is to be noted that it had been a kind of festival to integrate the two groups of people—the plain dwellers and the hill tribes—under the initiative and

patronage of the kings since the 18th century. It was held in the capital of Kangla in which the hill tribes came from different parts of Manipur.¹⁷ The Manipuris in the times of war and of minority of the king did not observe the customary worship of the *Umang lais* (forest gods) through *Laiharaoba* dance and music. But the British rule had never been a taboo for their rites and beliefs. Through the effort of Princess Sanatombi, eldest daughter of Maharaja Surachandra, ex-ruler of Manipur (wife of Maxwell, the then Political Agent) and timely attention of Maharaja Churachand, the traditional practices were renovated amid great enthusiasm. Important *Umanglais* (traditional gods) and royal Hindu deities of the Meiteis were invested with rent free lands called *Lairous* for their maintenance. At the instance of H.H.'s mother and grand-father, the British Political Agent allotted revenue free land and sites to temples. The pre-Vaishnavite deities were made to hold not less 6 *paris* of land (1 *pari* = 2½ acres). The *paris* of land for royal Hindu deities were higher in quantity ranging from 25 *paris* to 50 *paris*. The State Government provided sufficient financial grant for the celebration of royal festivals and functions with the approval of the Darbar and Political Agent. He convened the first sitting of new organisation called Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha under his chairmanship, around 1940 for discussing problems of Manipuri Hindus, a method which was utilised for political goals later.

Brahman specialists in different branches of Sanskrit learning were appointed as *Ratna* in his Sabha. The Sabha had the exclusive right of deciding disputes in connection with *Sastric* injunctions, traditions of Manipuri Hindus and legal matters. Great orthodoxy on the part of the Sabha could not take kindly to the lower section of the people. The Darbar could not remove the untouchability and promote assimilation of the hill tribes and the *Yaithibis* (sweeper groups, scavengers). The conservative attitude of H.H. Churachand was a great menace to the social and cultural integration. They were even prevented from entering the law court and public places by his veto power. He remained by the side of the British all through his life as he always

suspected the Congress policies and the rival sections in his kingdom as possible sources of danger to his regime.¹⁸

Maharaja Churachand abdicated the throne in favour of his eldest son in September, 1941. He died in Nabadwip on November, 6, 1941.

POLITICAL HISTORY

Maharaja Bodhachandra (1941-55) : He became the ruler of Manipur ceremonially on the 15th Sajibu/March-April, 1941, on the approval of the Viceroy of India. He is the only monarch known to the whole world in the long history of Manipur as his reign almost coincided with the coming of war to Asia and in view of the strategic importance of his state during the Second World War. Manipur became the first line of communication and later a war zone. Flushed with victory against the British in East Asia, the Japanese occupied Burma, Andaman Islands and reached the vicinity of Manipur as the ally of I.N.A. (raised by the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose). The state was all but destroyed by the horrible scenes of the bloody war and consequent troubles of air operation. Japanese planes made a series of air raids on Imphal between 1942 and 1944.¹⁹ Civil administration was paralysed ; inhabitants of Imphal fled to villages for fear of life. Imphal looked like a deserted place. The I.N.A. and Japanese troops had occupied 2/3 of Manipur and Nagaland from the clutches of British imperialism. A large number of young Manipuris, hill chiefs of the Nagas and Kukis, because of their security reasons, went to the Japanese. They distributed I.N.A. leaflets; secret meetings were held. In their estimate, a happy life was promised with the quickest capture of Imphal by the Japanese. They knew the differences of complexion and character between them and the white men. The people believed and repeated what they were taught by the old *purana* saying "Nongpok Thong Hangle" (the eastern gate has been opened) by which they meant the Western rules and culture would be replaced by the Eastern rule through Japanese invasion. They started spreading propaganda about the immortality and invincibility of the Japanese. Shah Nawaz

Khan was the first to hoist I.N.A. flag in Moirang (28 miles to the south west of Imphal).

The Allied powers strengthened the defence of Imphal by means of terrible intelligence, anti-aircrafts and forces of SEAC. Some I.N.A. officers defected to the British side and gave all secrets resulting in the setback to the Japanese. There were sharp fightings in Bishenpur, Nambol Maibam Lokpaching, Palel, Kohima and Dimapur Road after which the Japanese showed signs of losing ground. They thought that once they got across the Manipur's border the Congress people in Imphal valley would help them in capturing Imphal. But things were not happening as they had expected. They were driven out of Imphal after a series of reverses. It is estimated that about 26,000 brave I.N.A. soldiers laid down their lives on the soil of Manipur and Nagaland. The Japanese left Imphal leaving thousands of their comrades dead in the battlefields. Terribly gloomy and difficult were the days as the war showed its cruelty to the people and the land.

The Maharaja co-operated loyally with the Allies in all phases of the war effort. The Indian refugees who passed through Manipur from Burma were housed in Korengei camp, entertained by the Maharaja and Maharani Iswari Devi, and many thousands of troops received the fullest help even at great trouble to the state in 1942. The morale of the people was high enough in the dark period.²⁰ It was the privilege of the Maharaja to receive Lord Mountbatten, Air Marshal John Baldwin, General W. Slim, British war officers and Indian rulers of British India. The bombardment in Imphal killed many civilians and destroyed their properties. Whatever remained after the war formed only a part of the treasures of art and letter. Victory celebration of the British was held in Imphal on the Vijaya Dasami day in 1944. They were immensely helped by Assam Relief Association. Compensation for war damages was paid to the affected people by the British Government. The war brought in great changes for the people of this land as they learnt how to adjust themselves in such a situation. Roads and bridges to enable the Allies to move their army were constructed in different parts.²¹

Remission of tribute : As an act of grace and in recognition of the steadfast loyalty displayed by Manipur state and people, the annual tribute of Rs. 50,000 payable to the British Government was remitted in perpetuity in 1945 by His Majesty, the King Emperor.²² It changed the gloomy face and misunderstanding between the British and Manipur. The scene was occupied with bright and joyous hearts of *Visnu Jagrata* (invocation to Lord Visnu). H.H. declared the 8th October of every year as a state holiday under the name of *Bodha-Leisemba* ("Renovation of Manipur during Maharaja Bodhachandra") in commemoration of this gift from His Majesty. The people of Manipur decorated the ruler with the title of *Meidingu Leisemba* (Maker of Manipur).²³

By 1947 Manipur became a part of Indian union. Manipur State Darbar was redesignated as Manipur State Council and its members were named Ministers from July 1, 1947. The inner line permit system issued by the Political Agent for the outsiders visiting the state was transferred to the Home Minister of State Council.²⁴

The Maharaja ushered in a new era in the state by his administrative reform for associating the people with the state work to the most possible extent. He announced the formation of a Constitution making committee with 17 members, 6 such members from the hill areas and 5 official members. It formed two sub-committees to draft the Constitution. The reports of them were duly passed. They obtained the approval of the Maharaja and Interim Government of India. It became an Act called the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947.²⁵ Manipur was the first native state in India to introduce Assembly election on adult franchise.

Elections were held in March, 1948. The elected Legislative Assembly met thereafter. This act would have been democratic had the person having the largest majority been appointed Chief Minister. But the Chief Minister was appointed by the H.H. in consultation with the elected ministers of the council although they were elected by the Assembly. It is clear that 90 per cent of full fledged democracy was introduced on a somewhat imperial model.²⁶

With the lapse of British paramountcy on August 15, 1947,

the treaty lapsed after 56 years. Captain F.F. Pearson, the former President of Manipur Darbar and sometime Chief Minister handed over the formal charge to Captain M.K. Priyobrata Singh, the second son of H.H. Churachand Singh. The portfolios were distributed among the ministers with the approval of Governor of Assam. The post of Political Agent was abolished and in its place a post of Union Agent (later Dewan) was created as a temporary arrangement. With the transfer of power there was a corresponding increase of responsibility for the Maharaja and his new ministry. The Maharaja became the master of hill areas which were so long administered by the President of the Darbar on his behalf. The silent departure of the British had been predicted as the unsound firing of the gunshot in the *puranas* of the Meiteis. It was implied that the British would leave the country without any gunshot.²⁷ The Maharaja celebrated Indian Independence Day by hoisting Pakhangba flag in front of the Council Hall and with ceremony of *pujas* in the old Kangla capital.

From his announcement of orders on August 28, 1947, it is known that when the questions of enforcement of Martial Law and cow slaughter during the war time came before the Government, the objectionable issues were, after a determined opposition from H.H. cancelled it in the interest of the Manipuri Hindu Vaishnavas.²⁸ He heralded a modern era in the political and educational changes by recognising Manipuri as the court language of the state and dividing Imphal valley into 5 sub-divisions under S.D.Os and establishing a college called Dhanmanjari College and changing State Military Police into Manipur Rifles and opening a Chief Court.²⁹

His reign extended upto 1949 and the state for a brief period functioned as an independent kingdom with him as the ruler and his council of ministers, later only to merge either with Burma or Indian union. Many voluntary political parties were formed. Strikes, *Satyagrahas*, etc., were adopted from the Indian way of life for the first time. The movement for merger against its independent status gained momentum among such political parties as the Congress, Communists and Socialists, etc. The Congress workers of West Bengal and Assam moved the merger

of Manipur with West Bengal and Assam, the Socialists for its merger with Assam. Congress party of Manipur was in favour of merging Manipur with India or *Purvanchal* (Eastern States comprising Manipur, Tripura, Cachar and Lushai Hills).³⁰ In the last week of November, 1947, the leftist group of Manipur State Congress launched an agitation for a responsible Government of Manipur on non-violent lines as the state council fell short of their demand. In August 1948, the Mao Nagas demanded the merger of Mao area with the Naga Hills. In the same year Manipur Kishan Sabha under H. Irabot Singh started agitation for cession of north-eastern part of Manipur from Manipur and establishment of an independent Government with headquarter in Nongda.³¹ In addition to their agitation in the valley areas, the Communist leaders went to Rangoon to meet the Burmese leaders for inclusion of Manipur in Burma.³² Only ruling local party, namely, Praja Santi Sabha, was opposed to the integration of Manipur with India. The Maharaja went to Shillong in September, 1949, for clarification of pending election cases. Shri Sri Prakash, the then Governor of Assam, forced him to merge Manipur with India as the fulfilment of Indian Government desire.

Maharaja Bodhachandra signed Merger Agreement of Manipur with India in Shillong the undue pressure of the then Home Minister, Sardar Patel. He was given an annual pension of three lakhs of rupees from noon of October 15, 1949.³³

The Constitution Act, 1947, became inoperative, Legislative Assembly was dissolved, Council of Ministers dismissed, the chief court abolished by order of the Government of India.

It raises certain legal questions as to why the then Assembly accepted the order of dissolution although the Maharaja signed the merger agreement without getting the opportunity of consulting his council of ministers and the Assembly. The Maharaja was fully assured of the betterment of the people by the free India's Government and the people hoped then that they would get a political set up not inferior to the one they had already enjoyed up to the date of merger. But the unceremonious abolition of the hard earned full-fledged

Assembly had produced some adverse effect on the people. The present history of Manipur is the history of the struggle of the people, both of hills and plains, for restoration of Assembly and statehood as their legitimate claim.

Maharaja Bodhachandra died on December 9, 1955. The Rulership was given to his second son, Okendrajit, by his second Rani, Kamalabati Devi, on the recommendation of the Chief Commissioner. A case of dispute for the successorship was instituted by the sons and near relatives of the deceased Maharaja. A high judicial enquiry was appointed with the Judicial Commissioner of Manipur by the Home Ministry of India. The judicial officer expressed his desire to receive all applications from all the interested people having a right to the *gaddi* of ruler. There were as many as nine candidates including the sons, brothers of Maharaja Bodhachandra, some Rajkumars and Ningthouja clan on the ground that they were the descendants of the ancient line of princes. The judicial court started examining them along with witnesses which were presented to it regarding the customs, traditions and manner of the Manipuris.

It took sometime for the order of the Government of India to come after receiving the judicial report. The recognition of Okendrajit was upheld. After the abolition of the privy purses of the rulers, he became a citizen of Manipur and the chairman of Sri Govindaji Temple Board.

Religious and customary affairs: Like his father, Maharaja Bodhachandra and his Darbar ruled the kingdom with only the least interference from the British authority, that is, the Political Agent and the Government of Assam. The Manipuri ruler is the head of two major religious creeds—Pre-Vaisnavism and Vaisnavism of Bengal (as it appeared in the state). The ancient deities have been honoured as the Hindu deities since the 18th century. The Manipuri king insisted that every god in Meitei calendar should be celebrated with a public ceremony. There was not much distinction between the religious and secular functions. The people had spiritual and temporal allegiance to the king in an unavoidable way. The Governor of Assam had been conscious enough to dissuade the ruler from the purely religious course of action as it would mean

nearly one day in three as holiday. The Darbar made allotments of funds for the state in connection with the celebration of the following festivals³⁴—(1) Chandan Jatra, (2) Nar Singh Janma, (3) Jalakeli, (4) Ratha Yatra, (5) Radhastami, (6) Bamon Janma, (7) Durga Puja, (8) Sri Panchami, (9) Sivaratri, (10) Rama Navami, (11) Charak Puja, (Meitei Cheiraoba, (12) Varuni, (13) Dolyatra (Yaosang), (14) Pakhangba Chenghongba, (15) Sanamahi Chenghongba (16) Nityainanda Chenghongba (17) Kali Puja, (18) Pakhangba Leikatpa (offering of flowers to Pakhangba, the originator of royal dynasty and (19) Lai Haraoba (20) Krishna Janma. It is to be noted that Hindu festivals are observed in a modified way and a day later as determined by their calendar. Some of them were exclusively conducted by the court *maibas* and *maibis* of the court. The Maharaja's approval was necessary for all cases covering disputes, social and religious irregularities and admitting outsiders into Meitei community except the Muslims and the Yaithibis (scavengers). The court Pandits and physicians conducted the annual worship of great gods on behalf of the Maharaja and the kingdom as customary functions.³⁵ There were various taboos connected with the person of the ruler. He was not permitted to go north on Tuesday which was considered inauspicious for travel. Some of the hill tops and sacred groves were not visited by him as the presiding deities were inimical to the royal family. The effigy of snake god Pakhangba was worshipped by the king in the royal temple; the image was never allowed to be moved in a western direction, because to do so would have implied retreating from Burma, the traditional enemy. The king thought that it was his duty to safeguard the trust which the people entrusted 2000 years ago unto Pakhangba who happened to be the founder of Ningthouja (royal) dynasty. The kings safeguarded the sacred trust with honour and full consciousness.³⁶

Maharaja Bodhachandra (when he was the Yubaraj) was exiled to Banaras for about three years and one month (1934-37) for his action against his father by Churachand with the consent of the British Government of India.³⁷ In his exiled period, he drew inspiration from a Hindu monk

and led a pious life according to the Vedic method. He became a devotee of Lord Viswanath as is evident from his poems written there. One will be struck by the way of life he lived as King of Manipur in later years. His long, black hair and *jata* (coil of hair on the head) and use of Banarasi cotton cloth of soft and thin texture reminded certain features of *sadhus* in the holy city.³⁸ He was a fine composer of poems. In fact, his *Singel Nachom* (collection of fine poems) full of literary qualities appeared in a book form before he became the ruler.³⁹ He himself too was a *pung* player (drummer) of considerable merit. True to pious generation of Vaishnava rulers he acted as the main singer of *Kirtans*, *Manoharsahi* type of songs in connection with the state functions and sacred days of his favourite people.

During the period of Second World War he is credited with having brought the idol of royal deity Sri Govindaji to the safer places (Khongman and Uchekon), and keeping the daily devotional service of the Lord of the universe intact.⁴⁰

Under orthodox Hindu influence important state functions were usually marked with *pujas*, *Sankirtans* and chanting of the *slokas* of *Srimad Bhagavat*. Pure Manipuri games of great interest such as polo, foot hockey, boat race, wrestling (*Mukna*) and dances and cycle polo were played; various other activities were also carried out. The ministers were obliged to take oath in the name of the *Bhagavat* before Sri Govindaji. The ruler continued to be the authority in giving national awards like *Khamen chatpa* (printed silk *dhoti*), *Sana Khuji* (gold bangle), *tal* (*jari* beads and sequences) to the deserving persons, appointing persons in his court and conferring titles on them.⁴¹ He also undertook a pilgrimage to the hill villages of different tribes who were neither Manipuri nor Hindus.⁴² They enjoyed his protection and were required to obtain his recognition in their affairs. Some of them had begun to embrace Christianity offered to them by the missionaries with the consent of the British. The Muslims of Manipur valley did not look as active in religion as in the politics. The *Meitei Marups* had started a number of propaganda activities by the time of merger agreement.

The Maharaja was regarded as the incarnation of God Visnu

or Pakhangba in Manipuri belief. Most of the office-holders were the princes nearer to the throne; near relations of the ruler were also regarded as divine.⁴³ The customary and religious rights of the ruler were enshrined in the Manipur State Constitutional Act, 1947. Article 8 says, "The Maharaja's prerogative (a) All family matters which are the Maharaja's sole concern as head of the ruling family, all matters which are his sole concern as the Defender of Faith and all matters connected with Titles, Honours and palace ceremonial shall be deemed to fall within the Maharaja's personal prerogative and in such matters the Maharaja shall exercise full discretion subject to the provisions of the Constitution and the laws of the state. The Maharaja's prerogative shall not, however, be taken to compromise any matter wherein the legitimate interests of the state administration or civil right sustainable in a court of law is involved. It will be within the prerogative of the Maharaja to remit punishment and pardon to offenders subject to the provisions of the Manipur State Court Act provided that this prerogative shall not prejudice the right of any individual to confirmation; (b) It shall be prerogative of the Maharaja and Maharaja's first wife that neither may be made answerable to law nor subject to any legal proceeding in the State Court. Their persons and property shall be inviolable."

The relation between the Maharaja/the Rajkumar of ruling house and the people was governed by *Thougallon* (court manners and language).⁴⁴ This use was a courtesy which contributed to the social solidarity and a charm all its own to the Raja's regime. It is one of the aspects of Bhakti Yoga. Formalities like touching the foot, prostration, covering the women's head with a piece of cloth, etc., came into vogue by this time. The use of separate vocabulary lent colour and dignity to the ruling king and princes. Manipur has the unique distinction of having given right to such constitution and court manners.⁴⁵ The dignity of the Maharaja was also guaranteed by the popular council vide Resolution No 2 (b) of June 22, 1949.⁴⁵ The merger agreement gives the ruler to enjoy the authority as follows: (2) "H.H. the Maharaja shall continue to enjoy personal rights, privileges, dignities, titles, authority

over religious observances, customs, rights, ceremonies and institutions of the same in the state which he would have enjoyed had this agreement not been made". (6) "The Dominion Government guarantees the succession according to law and customs to the Gadi of the State and to H.H. the Maharaja's rights in charge of the same in the State".⁴⁶

But the merger agreement and World War II gave the ex-Maharaja and the people a chance of change, change in social outlook, way of life, change for a new ideal—ideal of equality and justice—hailed by the modern mind. The people who were orthodox before the war were radically changed. Inter-dining, going to hotels, new dresses, cinema, theatre, etc., have increased. Band party has become an essential part of socio-cultural life such as marriage, ball dance and *Laiharaoba*.⁴⁷ But as for the prestige and influence of the ruler, it rested wholly on the political power and once it was taken away, his eclipse was inevitable. Under Congress influence, attempts were made by some interested groups to disown his religious rights and authorities over the *Ningthou Lai* (gods of the king whose *seva* is done by him for all Manipuris) and rites. The rulers in the administration by this time violated the agreement of 1949 in their actions and decisions. They held that the old time rights lapsed with the accession of the State to Indian Union. The Deputy Commissioner instead of referring the matter to the ex-Maharaja undertook to fix the date of *Moirang Laiharaoba*. The Police Superintendent spoke to the gathering of Moirang to forgo all rights and titles with a view to carve out a society of equals. The D.C. and the Officer of Police attending the festival ignored Maharaja's ceremonious visit and did not show the simplest courtesy of greeting that he could expect of them. The Congress agitators began to spread the news that the ink of the agreement was dry. The Maharaja made complaints to the Governor of Assam over the head of local authorities in Manipur for not according him the courtesies that were due and proper. But the new rulers ignored even to reply to his petitions.⁴⁸

It takes time to change the traditional state. The old institu-

tions and customary court titles were never abolished as they offered opportunities to satisfy the religious needs of the people or to provide the posts nearer to custom and religion. They retain some status till today. Under his able assistance and encouragement, the H.H.'s *pandit loisang* continued to be the authority to shed light on the history of the clans, hierarchy of the clans, concept of common seat and common pipe smoking.

Important events of his reign were entered in the royal chronicle and *Cheitharol Kumbaba* under his order and every page of it was authenticated by his seal. His *loisang* (office) prepared the sacred compilation which has now ceased to be so.⁴⁹

Maharaja Bodhachandra began to live the typical life of a pious and orthodox Vaishnava, the life of a *yogi* who renounced the mundane pursuits and devoted himself solely to spiritual quests. He sought solace through pious works and prayer though he was not consulted by the new rulers in later life. He retired to the sacred hill of Nongmaiching (Vindyagiri as its Hindu name) which is traditionally associated with the cult of Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi (Siva and Durga).⁵⁰ On 10th Wednesday, January-February (Phairen), 1944, the *Jivanyas* ceremony of Goloknath and Raseswari took place in the palace on a grand scale. The idols were carved out of the *Champaka* and jackfruit tree (grown on Kaina Hill) by his order. On 22 Wakching, December-January 1948 he beatified the sanctuary of Nongmaiching and with his worship of Siva evolved the sanctity of this hill. He dedicated a brick temple to Mahadeva on the top of the Nongmaiching hill on 28th Wednesday, *Lamda* (Feb.-March, 1947) a stone temple in Gouranagar, on 15 *Phairel*, 1954, (foothill of the same hill) and another at Khalong on 7th Sunday, Ingel/June-July, 1955.⁵¹ Roads, tanks, *kundas* like *Visnu Pada Ashram*, *Visnu Kunda Sarobar*, *Narada Kunda*, *Saraswati*, *Laksmi Kundas*, etc., were renovated in Nongmaiching, Kabru Hills which were sacred to the Meiteis.⁵² With due *sankalpa* he arranged the hearing of sacred Vaishnava texts in the hall of Sri Govindaji. In the function which lasted for one (from Ist Sajibu, 1953 to 12

Sajibu/March-April, 1954) year, texts like *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Vijay Panchali*, *Vayu Puran*, *Laksman Digvijoy*, *Govinda Lilamrita*, *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, *Radhamadhadatya*, *Govinda Itihash*, etc., were discoursed in the traditional manner. One person recited the musical metre of the texts according to *Raga* and *Ragini* while another translated the passages and the ideas contained in Manipuri. There were no writings in Manipuri in these themes by his time. He patronised this form of art.

The Maharaja, as the sole authority, presented the participants with coveted rewards and conferred on them suitable titles.⁵³ It was on 18 Friday *Hiyangei*, 1955, just 8 days before his death that the Maharaja performed the memorable *Mahakirtan* of Khallong and on 21 Monday he performed royal feeding of the people with 8 types of *palas*. He died a sudden death on 26 of the same month.⁵⁴

He was in constant touch with the Manipuris living in Hojai, Cachar, Vrindavan, etc. On his way to Shillong in *Hiyangei*/Oct.-Nov., 1951, the Meiteis living in 42 villages of Hojai (Assam) requested him to establish religious and customary courts like *Cheirap* (civil court), *Garod* (military court), *Brahmasabha* in that area on the model of his ancient courts. He appointed the head of the *Brahmasabha* and deputed the officials of his court to introduce the system of introducing four *panas* (divisions) and set up customary departments so that they might look after their customary affairs.⁵⁵ The Meiteis in one respect or another turned their feet towards him even after the integration of the state to get their custom and belief stamped with his approval as a pre-requisite towards their practice. So far as the common old people were concerned they did not know much of the administrative and religious changes. In conformity with the pious ideal, a well-to-do man used to instal a temple, a congregation hall, etc., to organise *Sankirtan* and visit holy places in his life-time. They made several promises to various deities in the form of dress, ornaments, furniture for temples, in the event of their wishes being fulfilled. It is customary for a high status family to promise Sri Govinda that in the event of fulfilment of its wish, it would organise a *Rasa*

dance as a mark of gratitude to Him and also that his or her son would play the role of Krishna/Radha in the profound *Rasa* dance. Sometimes a pious man had a small temple built in a corner of his house. He offered the food which he prepared in a separate kitchen to the favourite deity inside the temple and he alone took the *prasad* (rice and vegetable products alone forming a variety free from fish) at the altar. Sometimes a Brahman is requisitioned for the *seva* of the deity on payment of paddy/salary. Such was the emotional pattern of the time. With the confirmed Vaishnavas they are still popular.

Thus the analysis of the time of Maharaja Bodhachandra enables us to have a glimpse of the generation gap, to compare the situation of the one prevailed on the eve of the war and the merger agreement with the new developments in all fields.

They are involved in making a synthesis between the old and new culture and making some phenomenal developments.

ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES SINCE 1947

Manipur became a part C State under a Chief Commissioner. The annual allowance of Rs. 6270 payable to Manipur for Kabaw valley (a part of Manipur ceded to Burma)⁵⁶ was continued by the British Government and the Government of free India up to 1958. The former Maharajas (H.H. Churachand and H.H. Bodhachandra) urged upon the chamber of princes, Government of India and the British authorities for suitable measures for the restoration of the valley to Manipur.⁵⁷ A delegation met the Defence Minister and Sardar Patel who refused flatly to open the issue afresh.⁵⁸ Under the Chief Commissioner all Central acts had been extended in Manipur.

In 1950-51 an advisory form of Government was introduced. Socialist party in alliance with some local parties organised an agitation for installation of Assembly against this advisory Government in 1954. In 1957 following the recommendation of S.R.C. Report, a territorial council of 30 elected members and two nominated members replaced the advisory rule. The whole state was agitated from time to time for the restora-

tion of an Assembly. The Naga hostiles' activity under A.Z. Phizo was also fairly widespread in the Naga inhabited areas of Manipur. The belief in the formation of a separate state had been nicely given expression to by Pan Manipur Youth League, Meitei State Committee, United Natural Liberation Front, Revolutionary Government of Manipur, Kanglei League and political organisations of the hill people. In 1963 a Legislative Assembly of 30 elected members and three nominated members was restored under the Union Territories Act. They had been functioning for some months. It had to be dissolved on October 16, 1969, on account of the unstable party position and the President's rule was introduced. Manipur was inaugurated as a full-fledged state on 21 January, 1972, by Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, in fulfilment of the North Eastern Areas Act, 1971. There are 60 members in the Assembly directly elected by the people. Out of these 19 seats are reserved for the scheduled tribes. With the attainment of statehood Manipur has once again come to its own. Manipur has contributed its quota of two seats in the Lok Sabha and one seat in the Rajya Sabha. One seat in the Lok Sabha is reserved for the scheduled tribes. In joining the mainstream of India and the civilised world, Manipur is marching ahead with other states and people of India.⁵⁹

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Vide the full text of the *Sanad* extracted from Sir Robert Reid, *History of Frontier Areas bordering on Assam*. pp. 71-77.
2. CK. pp. 495-500; see also foot note—3.
3. From October 1919 the Political Agent of Manipur transferred the hill areas to the President of Manipur State Darbar who controlled them without any authority from the Maharaja and his Darbar. The system continued even after the participation of the native state of Manipur in the Indian federation under the Government of India Act, 1935 and till the formal handing over the hill areas to the Maharaja of Manipur on August 10, 1947.
4. A.A.R.M.A. : 1905-7. Being a keen sportsman he won many medals during his stay in Ajmer. He also joined Imperial Cadet Corps.
5. Extracted from the rules for the management of the State of Manipur.

6. *War Diary* by Pandit Mutua Jhulan, Ex-Habildar, Imphal, 1943, contains detailed picture of this.
7. Political Agent's Diary concerning Kuki Rebellion, 1917-18.
8. Vide the *Sanad* issued by Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy and Governor General in India, dated Delhi, the 1st January, 1918.
9. The meagre resource of the State could not meet Maharaja's Civil List amounting more than a lakh of rupees every year and the annual tribute of Rs. 50,000.
10. *AARMS*. 1939-40, pp. 1-2. The Marwaris are here mentioned as foreign merchants by the P.A.: *AARMS*, 1940-41, p. 3; Interview with Rajni Devi, who played a leading role in *Nupilal* (Women Gherao/War). Also Infra chapter on Social Philosophy of the Manipuri Faith, Chapter—VI.
11. The author's observation.
12. Concerning the ancient capital of Manipur (Kangla) as the ritualistic and archaeological site the following are quite good—(1) Files of Kangla in Manipur Secretariat Library, (2) Recent Archaeological advances in Manipur presented by the author at the 69th session of Indian Science Congress Association held at Mysore University from January 3 to 8, 1982; Kangla Amasung Kangla Pat (Manipuri), an article by Th. Netrajit dated June 3, 1892.
13. Pandit Mutua Jhulan, *Vijaya Panchali*, Imphal, 1943, pp.—160-162.
14. Vide files in connection with the petition of the Manipuri Hindus of Malugram to H.H. Churachand and Darbar Resolution on the maintenance grant to temples of Nar Singh Zilla Akhara, Sylhet (East Bengal) and Radhakunda (U.P.).
15. R.K. Sanahal Singh, *Manipur Itihas*, Imphal, 1947, pp. 146-147.
16. See foot note 15.
17. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, pp. 611-612. All the persons who participated in the royal festival were suitably rewarded and separate posts appointed to discharge the different customary functions of his office. This was a great incident for the Meitei people who had been disturbed for some years by the British authority after their victory in the War of 1891.
18. Vide Infra, Chapter—III, Section on the Loi and Yaithibis, Chapter—VIII, Section on the comparative study of Gandhiji with Manipuri Faith. Also the author's paper "The Scheduled Castes of Manipur with special reference to the Loi Community" presented and discussed at the 71st Session of ISCA held at Ranchi University, 1984. H.H. Maharaja Churachand Singh did not approve the resolution of the Darbar allowing the Yaithibis to embrace Manipuri Vaishnavism. For the rules of the *mangba* (degradation) and purification approved by the Darbar vide No. 1 of June 22, 1938.
19. Evan, Lt. General Geoffrey and James Anthony Brellt, *Imphal* London, 1962. p. 39; *A.A.R. Manipur State*; 1943-44, pp. 11-12. In

the holy sayings Manipur is called *Hantre Hunpham* which means the place where the ball will be tossed in centre on the field. The fight means World War II.

20. *Hindustan Standard*, November 5, 1945.
21. *A.A.R.M.S.*—1944-46, pp. 2-9, Singh, S. Gouhari, *Manipur and Second World War, Imphal*, 1981, pp.—24-28 (Verses 118, 66 & 70).
22. Loc. Cit :
23. H.H. Memorandum No. 816-P(II)—(VII) D/412-45 addressed to the Governor of Assam. The Darbar resolution No. 3 of 12-12-45 approved the inclusion of "Bodha Leisemba" in the holiday list for permanent remission of tribute. Maharaja Bodhachandra wanted to institute an order of the Holy *shaka* of Manipur, with two classes, one gold, onesilver. A list of recipients (leading warriors of united forces and leaders of Manipur during the fighting in Manipur) was drawn up. But he was not allowed to go ahead with his plan by the British.
24. Files in the Secretariat Library.
25. Records—*New Constitution of Manipur State*, 1947-48, File No. 8.
26. Loc. Cit. : The author's estimate.
27. The sayings often made by Meitei saints as recorded in the sacred *Puyas*/manuscripts.
28. See *Infra*, Ch. VIII. Section on cow killing and Vinobaj's teaching.
29. *A.A.R.M.S.* 1946-47, 47-48. Manipur had the experience of strike by the public servants for the first time.
30. Memorandum submitted by the different political parties to the Government of India and the Governor of Assam. At the suggestion of Congress Party, Dr. P.C. Ghose, Chief Minister of West Bengal, visited Manipur and addressed the people at Imphal Pologround.
31. *History of Manipur Police*, Police Centenary 1961, Imphal, pp. 25-28.
32. Extracts from Burmese newspaper :
The Guide Daily, dated 18th November 1946 received from D.I.G., C.I.D. Dr. Layden (Leiren), leader of the Communist Party, interviewed U. Tham Pet, proprietor of the shave-mijent non-Film Company, in Imphal and spoke against the British and the Maharajah. The Mandalay correspondent of the paper reports the arrival of some Manipuri leaders in Mandalay with a view to go to Rangoon to interview Burmese leader, Bogyyoke Aungsun, for merger of Manipur with Burma as in the old days. For the activity of H. Irabot vide chapter VI.
33. Vide the merger agreement signed between the Maharaja of Manipur and the Dominion Government of India. As is evident from the public meetings resolutions and reaction from different quarters and newspapers. It was only the Manipur State Congress (and no other political parties) which was in favour of merger with India even before independence inspite of the absence of this tone in the election manifesto of 1948. Maharaja Bodhachandra was popularly called bubble king for the short duration of his regime.

34. Lt. General Sir Gerffrey Evan op. cit., pp. 14-15, Darbar Resolution on Pujahs, dated 19-6-46.
35. Dr. M. Kirti Singh, *Religious Developments in Manipur in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Imphal, 1981, Chapter VII. Also his paper "Manipuri System of Astrology and Astronomy" presented at the 30th session of All India Oriental Conference, 1980.
36. Vide Ch. VIII in connection with the comparative study of Manipuri Faith with Gandhiji's Philosophy. Rulers according to their practice consider that all their powers and properties are God Pakhangba's (Visnu) and that they are agents for a brief period. They have to utilise them properly and take care not to use them for their own benefit.
37. *AARMS*, 1934-35, 36-37 pp. 2-4. each. Vide the files of Maharaj Kumar Bodhachandra during his exile in Kashi. *Cheitharole Kumbaba*, pp. 615-623.
38. See footnote 36.
39. The author personally possessed a copy of the said book. The origin of cycle-polo also is traced to him during his period of Yubarajaship vide *CK*, pp. 608, 664.
40. *CK*, p. 635. Uchekon is author's place of stay. It is also called Makha Konung on account of the temporary stay of Sri Govindaji and the Royal family during the turmoils of World War.
41. *Ibid*, pp. 586-593, 638-650. Relevant passages of the text reveals the same tendency.
42. *Ibid*, pp. 646-647, 656, the strong tradition of the hill tribes testify to it.
43. The ms. called *Phamlol* throws interesting light in this connection.
44. Captain E.W. Dun, *Gazetteers of Manipur*, Calcutta, 1886. Section on manners and courtesy, Parijat, *Meitei Sahitya*, Imphal pp. 5-11.
45. The constitution is a product of the time. The idea that king is the incarnation of god and none can live in a monarchless state is deeply rooted in the mind of the people.
46. *Manipur State Constitution Act*, 1947.
47. N. Tombi Singh, *Manipur and the Mainstream*, Imphal, 1975, section on Four Generations at a glance, pp. 120-179.
48. Sri Rawal Amar Singh, the new Chief Commissioner's order No. 001/CC dated the 15th Oct., 1949. H.H.'s letters of May 16, 24 and 29 addressed to Sri Prakash, Governor of Assam, and his successor, Jairamdas Daulatram, on the above subject.
49. *CK*, Imphal, 1967 pp. 665, 667, 669.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 683.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 641, 652, 674, 680-690.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 660-661.
53. Vide *Infra* Ch. IX section (A) in connection with the culture of Manipuri Dance.

54. CK p. 691.
55. Vide Infra Part II of the same chapter. Also chapter IX Section B.
56. The Agreement between the British Government and the Burmese Government dated the 25th January, 1834.
57. The author says that Maharaja Churachand's and Maharaja Bodhachandra's objections to the cession of Kabaw valley to the Burmese on the 7th March, 1933 and from 1947 to 1953 are coupled with the demand of Pan Manipur Youth League. The case filed by H.H. Bodhachandra and proposal to go to London is weakened by the resolution of Council of Ministers and a note submitted by Sawbwa of Thandut State dated 20th November, 1921. In this context Ibohal Singh's *The History of Manipur*, pp. 326-327 may be consulted.
58. Sardar Baldev Singh agreed to take up action on defence grounds but Sar Jar Patel, the Deputy Prime Minister, held that India had a good neighbour in Burma. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, handed over the same to Burma in 1954 against the wishes of the people. The members of Pan Manipur Youth League are observing Kabaw Valley Remembrance Day every year in strong protest against the unjust action of the Government of India. The final boundary demarcation between India and Burma is yet to take place. From the tour diaries of the cultural integration team it became known that the Burmese entered the Indian boundary forcibly and physically occupied the villages of Indian territory and boundary pillars No 64-68. For details vide Regional Integration, quarterly journal, September, 1982, pp. 1-9.
59. This remark has remained the author's credo substantially from the beginning till the end of the present book.



PART I

RELIGION



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1

THE MANIPURI THOUGHT

Manipuri thought is often identified with Hinduism in the form of Vaishnavism although there was a basic philosophy in existence outside Hinduism. It is a composite culture in which ancestor worship, Burmese Buddhism and different Hindu cults were welded together into a peculiar belief. Ancient Meitei religion unlike that of China and Islam is not contained in any one sacred book, nor does it have a single historical founder. The legends declared in dreams and the utterances of the *Maibis* (priestesses) gave order to all sorts of affairs thus legislating through the mouth of dreamers.

In Manipuri thought there is nothing like culture separated from religion and other social traditions. Whatever is culture is also religion or philosophy. Every aspect of life such as politics, fine arts and crafts has never maintained separate existence from religion. Worship of the deities by the help of music and dances to ensure the community welfare is part of their belief. Even polo, of which Manipur is famous as its motherland, as also *Rasalila* and *Lai Haraoba* (Merry-making of god) and other games and forms of art such as rowing and fishing are understood on the basis of religious beliefs. The background of Manipuri thought is to be sought for in religion or metaphysics and their accurate manifestations are discernable in this context.

The concept of god and fire as a holy symbol are also unique. The ancient Meiteis worshipped most of the Vedic natural deities such as the sky, river, sun, moon, the stars and the fire under

non-Sanskritic names. They were classified under three dieties such as *Imunglai* (household deities) *Lamlai* (gods of the countryside) and *Umanglai* (forest deities). Another feature is that fire never becomes the forest deity nor is it the god of the countryside.¹ It is worshipped in the centre of a dwelling house with an iron tripod called *Yot Sabi* and husks. To them it stands for the substitute of the sun. The flame that burns upwards reminds man his nobler nature. It is invoked at the time of formal entry into a house.

At the popular or common level there is a great deal of local or regional variation with respect to the worship of innumerable *Umanalais*. In the rites and offerings, they are so installed that one is never mixed up with other. But the hedonistic tendency is important in its philosophical level. The particular deity, who is being worshipped, is praised above all others. Pantheism prevails, but all deities are considered to be the manifestation of the same Almighty who has no direct dealing with man and the world. These ideas enabled them to accept all other cults as true. The identification of non-Sanskrit gods with Sanskrit names in Hindu period makes possible the acquisition of Hindu ideas by the primitive deities.

All important gods and goddesses are associated with shrines and sacred groves. The lesser deities have only mounds, bush in the past, but temples nowadays.² Hindu temples said to be built in the 18th century occupied a prominent place in the temple and there are also a few minor deities, family members, associations, represented by smaller images or symbols in different parts of the temple. Thus in a Rama temple, Rama would be the principal diety and Sita, Laksman and Hanuman the minor dieties, whereas in the Govindaji temple, Govindaji and his wife Rajeswari (as is the case with most of pre-Vaishnavite deities) would be the principal ones and all other Hindu deities the minor dieties. Image worship in the form of wood and metal mouldings was beyond the sway of time as the passage of *Sanamahi Thirel* throws light on it according to some. But some of the extant images of different divinities are dated as early as the 15th century when Kyamba Maharaja discovered *Kabaw Lai/*

Sembi Lai (image of Vishnu from Pong in the form of *Salgram*).

One peculiar feature is that all sylvan deities (*Umanglais*), are supposed to come from water. They are alive to the point that the gods are eternal and present everywhere. In their belief gods are in a state of quiescence in ordinary times and must be brought into a state of activity through a particular ceremony called *Lai Themgatpa* (enticing). By this ceremony gods are persuaded to show their power by taking possession of their pronounced worshippers. The community festival of *Lai Haraoba* is supposed to strengthen the god and make him more capable of helping the worshippers. It is the choicest product of Meitei intellect.

The universe of Meitei tradition is similar to that of any theistic system. God *Asiba* created everything on the order of the *Mopu/Almighty* who guarantees the good order of the universe. The Biblical conception of the creation of the world in seven days is not known to their mind. There is the story about creation according to which *Haraba* (Pakhangba, the youngest son of the Almighty) broke the creation twice. This was narrated to the Immortal One who then sent goddess of Lightning to hypnotise *Haraba*. In the meanwhile, i.e., third time the earth was created by solidifying the liquid. Like the Hindu belief the early Meiteis subscribe to the cyclic theory of universe. The Almighty comes out at every crack of the muntane cycle and recreates the world in a cyclic order. There are infinite number of self development or falling into evil in this system. The idea of eternal damnation hardly occurs. We also come across stories regarding the resurrection of dead lovers to reciprocate their love and the signs of the end of a particular age (as set forth in the sayings of the pandits).

The concept of Angels and Devils (evil spirits) is a significant trait of Meitei thought. The worship of *Sanamahi* (sun-god) as a tutelary deity along with his mother *Leimarel* (earth-goddess), the existence of seven progenitors of seven clans along with their wives (which compose the Meitei confederacy), are in line with the concept of Fravasi in Persian thought. Their function is to promote birth, nourish, and welfare of the

people. The adoration of *Laibangthous* (important male deities), may be compared to the ministering angels to attend to His call. The ancestral spirits are the group leaders through which the relationship between the living and the dead can be established. The four *Umanglais* known as *Maiki Ngakpas* (to protect the directions of Manipur), i.e., Thangjing, Marjing, Kaubru and Wangbarel are supposed to be the tutelary deities.

Neglect of the adoration of the ancestral spirits is the source of all evils. They are believed to show bad omens, white ants, *Khoibiningthou* (hornet), deformed banana and fruit to the concerned people. The destructive aspects of *Sanamahi*, *Apokpa*, (three immediate forefathers), etc. were changed into harmful dieties which have long occupied an important place in their belief. The pantheon inform us how the *Sarois* (attendants of Great Gods), *Apoiabas* (destructive aspects of god), *Soirel* (evil spirits) and *Helois* (apsaras) put obstacles in human efforts, in anger and vengeance. This belief has made the Meiteis worship them with sacred *puja* materials in prescribed manner.

Social interpretation of religion by Durkheim and Weber provides a helpful guideline in Manipuri belief. The idea of Meitei community consisting of seven *Yeks* (sib or clan and family) collectively is typical of its socio-religious thought. As in China and Japan, religion is a family rite rather than a personal creed. Our record shows a close connection between the right of keeping the family name and the claim to share in the worship of family gods such as *Sanamahi* and *Apokpa* (ancestors). This explains the disputes in worshipping an indigenous divinity of a new home by a new comer or a family of exiles.

Religion was used as a control measure by kings and nobles. The cult of the ruling Ningthouja dynasty became the cult of the people of Manipur. The ruling class descended from God *Pakhangba*, the divine ancestor, whose reign is co-equal with the country's culture and civilisation. It may be mentioned as an emphatic expression of the values the Meitei people attach to god-man relationship preferences about the responsibility for all sinful acts (such as war, flood, etc.), as well as

prosperous acts (abundance of food, good rainfall and good of all beings) in society and nature are found in a well known text called *Loina Sillon*. The king's sacred person is protected by many taboos pertaining to his royal office and priestly sanctity in view of his direct association with the great snake god *Pakhangba*. His presence was supposed to drive away the evil spirits from the spot.

The king was deified as *Lainingthou* (king of gods), which means a particle of god Vishnu and an agent of Lord Govindaji (the royal deity). Some of the kings such as Naotherkhong, Khagemba, etc., were deified after death. The pandits maintain that their spirits were emanations from one of the original gods. From time immemorial the Meitei people have been venerating kings, princes and the titleholders as divine-beings to be adored by the common people. The kings as the head of the polity continued to provide emotional security through the social upheavals. This theory continued to be propagated for ages by the writers, scholars and poet-singers. No wonder one can regard Manipur as the kingdom of great kings like Garibniwaz, Jaisingh, Chandrakirti Singh, etc. So great was the respect accorded to the Ningthouja dynasty that the ruling family on the male line of *Pakhangba* was never replaced till 1891 A.D. The two Maharajas appointed by the British during their paramountcy and continued up to 1949 were also the descendants of *Pakhangba*. This is a fine example of Durkheimian model as we see the political, religious and social structure unified under God *Pakhangba*. So long as the unification was perfect, religion could be equated with society.

The loyalty to the king, unstinted faith in the statesmanship of princes and the diligent pursuit of one's occupation according to one's station were shaken by the release of thought control during World War II. After the merger of Manipur with Indian Union in 1949 and the abolition of privy purses of the princes the people became wedded to democratic ideas. Even now some privileges of the former rulers, and titles in religious matters have not yet disappeared completely.

The performance of various rituals and rites as a means of spiritualising human life is a trait shared by the Meiteis. Manipur being a *Tantric* belt of north-eastern India

bespeaks about the *tantric pujas*. There are no rituals without the art of poetry, singing and inner metaphysical meaning. The rites along with them represent the origin and progression of the world and man's relation to god and the world. A careful scrutiny of incantations as revealed in numerous treatises lend a considerable support to its association with the magic and origin of religion for the people of south west of China and of Himalayan region bordering Tibet. Under the guidance of the *Maibas* and *Maibis* (priests and priestesses), the large mass shared the worship and sacraments of the deities so that sickness and trouble might be kept out of the state. The words—*dharma*, *Laining* stand for profound sense of incantation and *karma* in the sense of *shraddha* ceremony.

They endeavoured to please god by meritorious deeds, gifts of money, land, the temples, or places of pilgrimages. They also undertook the perilous journey to sacred Hindu places of Bengal and U.P. with their relatives and neighbours, but a change has taken place nowadays.

A number of temples and shrines have been well-maintained and some that had been destroyed by fire have been rebuilt under royal patronage. Often a shrine of a pre-Vaishnavite deity is cleared in preparation for the annual festival of *Lai-Haraoba*. A large proportion of shrines seemed to be intact in spite of secularism and anti-religious wave of modern years.

The shrine of *Umanglai* is remarkable not only because of its cultural heritage, but also because of proper care of the village headman or *Hanjaba*, who on the order of the king does not allow any prince to approach it, for should any of them contrive to worship there and offer gold and silver, he would certainly aspire for the throne and might cause endless trouble to the ruling king.

The delineation of the gurus and their roles in salvation are of immense significance in their belief. The Almighty is addressed as *Guru Sidava* (eternal godhead) and the epithet guru is applied to one important deity called *Nongsava*. *Leithak-Leikharol* says: "The preceptor who teaches your preceptor is the Supreme Guru, the Lord of the Universe". The stream of knowledge comes from the eternal godhead

through three mortal gurus and ten guru pandits of King Khagemba (1597-1652). It has also been said that there would be hundreds and thousands of gurus who by their examples, wise sayings and knowledge in ancient lores, preserve, propagate and promote the thought of this blessed land. The gurus in theology, music, dance and crafts are god-realised souls who have brought a sea change in the disciples and then in the court of the kings. The relationship between the *guru* and *sisya* has always been regarded as sacred. Training and illumination under able gurus and the efficacy of the first guru's blessing in one's success are accepted and continued in modern period. All forms of art such as music, dance, story telling, fortune telling, etc., are strictly within the cult of *guru-sisya* relationship. There are well-known sayings among them. "The guru is a visible god, one who has the blessings of his guru is ever triumphant in life, while one who has the blessing of Krishna, the Lord of the Universe, may sometimes fail". If an artist meets with occasional success without the necessary equipment in any field of art, we have a host of fortunate persons who have succeeded by the grace of the guru and not by their effort. Unfortunately at present the reverence for the guru has very much waned and it is one of the causes for the present day falling of standards.

Closely connected with the concept of *Guru Kripa* is also the grace of *Lai Chakhetpi* (the levelling goddess) for one's quick rise in art, politics, business, etc.³ To propitiate the guru by sincere efforts and also the levelling goddess by *pujas* is a feature deeply ingrained in every Meitei heart.

This feature gave impetus to the spiritual power of the guru among Manipuri Vaishnava community. To affiliate to a guru for salvation in the short span of life is often recommended in a text called *Sagok Lairemlel*. It says: "Human birth is full of foolish ideas. A guru is like a boat to cross the ocean of *Samsara*".

As in Hebrew, Chinese and Indian thought movements, in Manipuri belief too, the great truths of *dharma*, universality and openness of god have been quite clear. We can bring out the divine apocalypse in history, legend, epic poetry as well as in mythology. The moral evaluations emerge from life,

mind and evolution. They reflect the question of man for common good and will for all ultimate ideals.

The development of moral monotheism in Indian and Meitei thought is alike. Animals are notable characters in them. The fairies and giants play some part in rewarding the virtue and humanity and protecting the weak and the more amiable against the wily and the violent. Most of the stories and dramas were meant for teaching the people *dharma* with the help of tigers and elephants.

A major feature of Meitei thought is the ample evidence for polytheism, dualism, monism, transcendentalism and henotheism. All shades of thinking find due places in it just like mingling of stream waters in the common current. Its thought is not static but assumes different shapes through the centuries. It is found to be so when we take help not only from the existing texts, but also from the *Sadhana* of the elderly people. It has taught us a sort of belief in many gods and goddesses. Owing to this reason their social custom such as marriage is polygamous. Like the Chinese philosophy of *Yen* and *Yang* it propagates the doctrine of *Pa* (male) and *Pi* (female). Like the Zoroastrians it tries to balance everything in *Laingou* (good spirit) and *Laimu* (evil spirit) for eternity. In the end the people think that the evil will be vanquished by the power of good. Their mind goes beyond dualism and find something that will be both together and makes sense of the two. Reality is finally an impersonal god.

There has been a curious blending of naturalism and supernaturalism at every level of experience. Forces of nature like the sun, the moon, stones (underneath the land), rivers, hills, etc., have been worshipped. Natural rivers, plants and insects have been the sources of inspiration to the poets, painters, weavers and dancers. Nature with its laws and secrets is represented as *Mahousa Lairembi* (natural goddess). The weaving of textiles is a replica of cosmic process through human efforts. The spiritual or supernatural ideas have been largely developed under the tremendous influence of Vaishnavism in the 18th century. When they meet they accost each other saying *Hare Krishna* and by asking the

welfare of the other. They bow to superiors by *dandavat pranam* as an honour to the divinity in the other man. The emphasis is on being and divinity in man, and other living beings as well as in inanimate objects such as stones, books and sacred things. Humility, courtesy and polite expressions (*Thaksi Khasi*) have been the hall-mark of our elderly people throughout the centuries. As stated earlier they practised and preached them to the younger generations.

Success on the battlefield depended more on the favour of god than in the skill of an army. These ideas lead to the belief that man is but an instrument of god and the universe is his *Lila* ground. A line of *Sagok Lairamlel* (a treatise on the ways of God and divinity) says, "the world we live in is often compared to a stall in a market. If one knows the method there will be gain; if there is no foresight there will be loss".

Another characteristic has been the harmony of humanism and worldliness of early period with the pessimism and mysticism of the 18th and 19th centuries. It is a commonplace of early thinking to emphasise human effort, family life, material happiness, community welfare and an affirmative world-view through its institutions. The land is a good one brought forth by the Almighty Father. The world-view had its focus in the land of the Meiteis. It has adored the war-gods. A unique feature in their genius is that of the heroic duel of fighting among the rivals as divine ordeals for any dispute. Appeal to bouts of fighting with spears and swords, etc., was a means to test the innocence of the warring groups or persons. According to the code of chivalry and honour the loser feasted and took wine with the victor after which he suffered himself to be killed by the victor. Sometimes they realise the folly of wasting life for other purposes and settled the disputes to the satisfaction of both sides even after fighting. Fighting is one of the inescapable duties of upholding "come what may", the sacred duty of defending one's integrity. The Manipuri people unlike the Burmese, never throw their arms. They stick to them till the attainment of *Sanatana dharma* in the battlefield. There is a tradition that

the Manipuri soldiers fire their guns to the sky for the first time for salvation.

The idea of pessimism and original sin does not exist in it. Sin is taken in the sense of ceremonial pollution (*Mangba*) and violation of the approved customs.

But there are trends about mysticism and pessimism in Manipuri thought. At times the *maichous* (scholars-cum-yogis) retired to caves in the hills, and after years of solitude came back to their places to make known their results to the common people. Besides the mysticism of the *tantric* and *yogic* type there existed the cults of *maibas* (priests) which are similar to the *Sahajias* and *Madhura bhava* of the Vaishnavas. The *Laimanai* (attendants of God) in the temples of *Umanglai* adopt the attitude of faithful and loving servants towards their concerned deities.

But the Vaishnava movements in Manipur till the beginning of the 20th century brought in their train certain ideas such as *Karma*, *Niyati* (fate), *Maya*, Heaven and Hell and certain weakness of Puranic Hinduism. They are implied in the literature of Vaishnava period as well as in their practices. A passage from *Ghambir Singh Nongaba* (Death of Maharaja Gambhir Singh) speaks of the same: "The bubble-like souls float on an ocean of the space of time. The human body (mortal coil or engine) which is made of the five elements is like a log bulky piece of plantain....."

REFERENCES

1. The fire in the domestic hearth is never extinguished by an orthodox Manipuri. At Andro (a scheduled caste village at Nongmaiching Hill, 5 miles to the east of Imphal city) fire is kept perpetually burning tended by the Andro people under royal decree. It is said that *Yajna*, fire which Poireiton, the first coloniser, set in has been preserved upto this time with great veneration. We have on the authority of *Pureiromba Khunthokpa*, another example in which *Pureiromba* (Stammerer ancestor) carried *Yajna* fire in his mouth from a far off country to this land. The Meiteis practised cremation before 33 A.D.
2. According to Meitei tradition *Sanamahi* who happens to be a household deity cannot go to the palace of ruling dynasty in which

his borthor *Pakhangba* rules. The villages, hills, mounds, trees, etc. which are sacred to a deity are elaborately discussed in a treatise called *Laiphamlon*. Any error or negligence while in any rite is feared to lead to the worshipper to evil consequences such as the killing of the priest or the ruin of the worshipper. There are certain dieties such as *Pureiromba* and *Khoriphaba* in whose worship cooked materials are to be used. Fish is also not to be offered to the latter. Certain deities are worshipped once a year. The time, duties, dress, etc. must be adhered to by the people according to its code.

3. Prof. N. Tombi Singh, *Manipur and the Mainstream*, Imphal, 1975, pp. 7, 142, etc.

2

PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES

CONCEPT OF GOD

The Meitei people are, perhaps, the most God-fearing people. There is not a single trend of thought which denies the existence of God but arguments against a particular cult or way of religious life by the *Sarois* (ancestors of the Naga and Kuki groups) are to be found in the early myths.¹ References to miracles, mystic experiences of the gurus and the creation story confirm the existence of God. A Meitei (Manipuri) believes that he can prove the existence of God not as a theory but as a fact provided he follows the correct *Laining Lambi* (way of God realisation).

The Meitei *puyas* (written books) give no definite definition of God; but after thoughtful study of all that they have to say about God, the best and fertile minds have tried to form descriptions about gods. The Meitei words for God are *Chingu*, *Khoyum* and *Lai*; *Chingu* means one who can see the universe by His divine eye; *Khoyum* means one who has His abode in the navel. The popular word 'Lai' is coming from the word *Laiba* (easy) and thereby conveying the sense of carrying His will into action very easily.² The *Lai* is the infinite spirit in whom all beings and things have their source, support and end. It is at first used in neuter gender and impersonal sense. It is the sacred lores and the written *puyās* (scriptures) that enshrine the oldest, the highest as well as the purest form of their idea of God to which the philosophy and

religion attained. The Meiteis are known to acknowledge the worship of 243 gods and 162 goddesses in addition to the members of the trinity. We are familiar with the accusation that the religion of the Meiteis is tribal, animistic, polytheistic and a curious mixture of nature and ancestor worship. In the estimate of T.C. Hodson, the well-known author of the book *The Meitheids*, the tenets of the Meiteis are incompatible with the characteristics of a competent ethnologist.³ He however admits that it is a kind of naturalism tempered by metaphysics. His hasty generalisation misses the richness of their philosophic thought and forgets their very genius. As against the above charges may be placed the views of the author whose present thesis attempts to clarify the position of their beliefs.

The attempt to grasp the idea of the highest principle being the origin of everything and being immanent in everything has engaged their mind. All shades of philosophical reflections such as the unity of God (as found in abstract unity), theism, pantheism, naturalism in the sense of harmony with nature, etc., are the doctrines to which the Meitei accept with unanimity. In another opinion the duality of concepts, i.e., spiritualism and naturalism perhaps reflect their world-view and reality.

While acknowledging the existence of gods and goddesses they exalt *Sidava Mapu* (Shri Hari) as the Supreme. He is assumed as existing prior to anything. The negative attitude of *Šidava* (immortal) is used here as in Upanisadic thought. It implies that there are no human beings analogous to him. It is declared that every happening is according to His will and pleasure. In the first part of a hymn, He is significantly compared to a black bee of *Langvan*/August-September which produces the sound of *Om* in its effort to suck nectar in the spur of flowers and to build its hive. The Upanisadic concept of one without a second/the infinite (the *Šwarupa Laksan*) is emphasised.⁴

Is God personal or impersonal? The Meiteis say it is both; the emphasis of myths, legends is on the belief that God is personal rather than impersonal. There are references to the *Tatastha Laksana* of God in which He is regarded as a person.

All that existed comes into being by His will *Um* (to puff off His breath). Before the creation everything was in darkness and void. By His second sound *Um*, there was water. God brought forth several other gods from His own body—*Ashiba* (creator), *Leishirel Nomungbi* (*Sakti*), 9 *Laibangthous* (Divine youths) and 7 *Lainuras* (Nymphs) to execute His order.⁵ The myth embodies as a principle of monism, and the phenomenal world is held to be the manifestation of His sacrifice (in the *Sataptha Brahman*). In *Langlol*, W. Madhobram, a noted Vaishnava poet of the 18th century, speaks of God as *Konphurel* (big instrument in which metals are melted) as He is everything. Creation of the universe is also a magnificent process of weaving to the cosmic being. The weaving of textiles appeared as a replica of the cosmic process.⁶ To the question whether God is masculine or not, the Meitei *puyas* in general address God as father. Yet it also refers to Him as feminine and even as neuter. The female analogies are clearly in the minority. Masculine address indicates that God is a person. He has both characteristics since He created both the sexes in His own image. The description of God as father in the front-side and as mother in the back-side is evidence enough of this concept.⁷ Before Him, men and women are equal, inequalities between the sexes are done away with. God is impartial as all are in the same relation to Him.

The transcendent idea is minimised by them when they address gods and goddesses as their ancestors or progenitors of clans. The continuity between man and God is symbolised by the expression denoting ancestor-descendant relation or parent-child relation. The belief the Meitei clan extends in unbroken continuity from the divine ancestors down to the present generation is an emphatic expression of the value they attach to such a relationship.⁸ God signifies His personal relationship to the universe as creator, preserver and destroyer of the pantheon. The doctrines of *Lilā* and incarnation of important deities have been sufficiently developed in connection with the creation of man and not in the beginning where the subject is the general creation of the world. Some of the gods suffer mishaps and hardships. Love which involves suffering is ascribed to God in the *lilas*. *Laiharaoba* (Merry-making)

rite is performed to imitate the play of God. In ordinary times God is in a state of quiescence and by enticing to bring Him into a state of activity from water in this rite He is activated and persuaded to show His power in helping His worshippers.

The Meitei religious system may be characterised as henotheism as distinct from polytheism. In the *Laiharaoba* rite the deity is worshipped in His own peculiar place as the chief deity of the universe without interfering at all with the claims of any other god. The same oration, hymns and palms are used on every occasion of sacrifice without regard to which a particular god is being addressed from which we may infer that *Umanglais* are thought to be different forms of the Almighty. Of course the outward forms and dances differ from tribe to tribe and from clan to clan. The *Laiharaoba* which has been the bugbear of so many hostile observers is the bedrock on which its entire civilisation rests.

These gods and goddesses are as real as the shape of water in the vessel or the manifestations or the otherwise invisible electricity in the filament of the bulb. Just as the Government or the state does not produce any impression of any shape but in a concrete form through the ministers with portfolios, we have gods with definite purposes. We may illustrate its curious features in some detail. As for example, *Pakhangba* (moon-god) is the divine ancestor of the Ningthouja clan. He is represented as *paphal*-symbolic diagrams of the incarnation of God *Pakhangba*. His coiled manner has made a wonderful network spreading his enormous body underneath the soil. He used to take the shape of a snake during the day-time and shape of the moon during the night which means that he was as clever and shrewd as politicians, as snake during the day-time and cool and calm like the moon during the night. He has many human functions such as the origination of administration, scripts, etc. The combination of natural and human function is evident in the representation of Sun-god under the name of a tutelary deity *Sanamahi*. He is worshipped in the north east corner of every house regularly. The different positions in the sky denote the birth, growth and

death of human beings. They are also personified under the names of three mortal gurus. The python is its vehicle.

Phaoibi, the corn-deity, develops romantic and humanistic traits in addition to her functions of giving paddy, salt, vegetables and fish. *Wambarel*, the presiding deity of the south and of the river, is thought to be the husband of the daughter of the chief of Anal Nanphou (old Kuki tribe).⁹ Some gods have no origin of nature and no specific names being merely known as *Apokpas* (ancestors).

Another peculiar feature is the representation of them in purely human forms, composite forms (partly animal and partly human). Some gods like *Pakhangba*, *Ikop Ningthou* have horns. The planetary deities were endowed with animal heads—*Leipakpokpa* (Mars) had the head of a buffalo, *Yumsakeisa* (Mercury) that of the head of an elephant, etc. Like the Egyptian gods these Meitei gods present a striking contrast to the Greek gods which are usually presented in full human form without any surviving trait of its earlier animal origin.¹⁰ In the *Lai-haraoba* ritual the sylvan deities are worshipped in human forms. Nature or *Prakriti* is represented as *Lairembi* (Chief goddess). Generally witches and evil spirits have not the full human forms. But *Helois* are beautiful female forms which lure foolish men into waste places and then disappear leaving their victims bereft of reason.¹¹

It is to be noted that some gods such as *Sinleima* (goddess of learning) and *Thangjing* (one of the protectors of direction), etc. have either the father or the mother but not both. Some gods such as *Lai Ising Chaiba*, *Khoriphava*, *Luwang Khunthiva*, etc. are born like human beings. Some are created after the likeness of the god. The forefathers of the clans are the cases in point. The gods are liable to *Lalup* system and like human beings worked together for the king. Such a system continued up to the time of King Loiyamba (1074-1122 A.D.). Gods have the quality of goodness and truth. The important characteristic to mention here is that they are truth incarnate as opposed to human beings to whom belong the falsehood and cheating. It is on this basis that gods kept aloft from human beings. Man has outwitted gods and taken over the roles of gods.¹²

Local and particularistic tendencies could be detected when different villagers worshipped different gods and at times the same god in different names and aspects. They assumed the deities presiding over the throne, individual house, forest, mountainous regions, rivers, lakes, directions and occupations. The Meities in the beginning of the 20th century never entered the forest, top of ridges, mounds and *Surungs* (inner route of caves) as they contained *lais* (gods) but during the rule of the Europeans, the *lais* in the forest left the country. They induced the people to cut the forest and dig the mounds. The gods emerged whenever they pleased from the inner route (big or small) which they dwelt and became visible to the worshippers either in a dream, in the full light or in the sky through contemplation of the names. The stone lying underneath the land was thought to be a *lai* lying in darkness, possessed of terrific power, inspite of the simple appearances.

Some gods like *Sorarel* have heavenly abode; most of the deities come down to the hills and villages to which they are attached. The Almighty is fabled to live in the sacred hill in the form of a human being. The story of Khoriphābā says that his mother Konthoujam Lāiremā was forbidden from coming back to Heaven, that is, divine kingdom of *Śorārel* (Indra) again as she had taken the milk and items of food offered to her by mortal parents and relatives under cover of a cloth spread over her head. Ten protectors of the countryside (*Lokapals*) are associated with the geographical and climatic horizontal division of Manipur. The vertical concept where heaven and earth were popularly worshipped are recognised in their worship of *Atiya Śidavā* or *Nongpok Ningthou* (Sky-god) and *Leimarel Sidavi* or *Nongpok Panthoibi* (earth-goddess). As per the usage of their belief a member belonging to a particular class is not allowed to join the rite of another clan. The possession of the idol of *Apokpa* assumed great importance because it symbolised the leadership of a clan. Another thing to be noticed is that the body is regarded as a means of god-realisation, but never as an end in itself. In a text called *Singdabung* the parts of the body including skin, nails and fingers are psychologically interpreted by the Meitei as abode of deities, the function of deities, etc.

They also pay their homage to the native land, to all the great shrines within their own direct knowledge bearing association of saints and philosophers. The Meitei mind is pantheistic. In everything of this world they perceive divinity and the deity. They are beyond communal narrowness. To the gods of the scheduled castes, tribes and the Shans Tai group of Burma they make their obeisance. The catholicity of view is born of the atmosphere of Manipur and pervades the palace as well as the woods. The *māibās* as well as the common people have been permeated by Vedantic philosophy. Naturalistic world-view constitutes another feature of their thought. It is written in the sacred books that the gods and goddesses in their incarnations and deeds teach the Meiteis the mystic dances, duties of family life, housing, cultivation and all items of human life. In another place it is declared that it is not by the grace of god that man learnt all these items but by his response and challenge to nature or harmony with nature that he can know all the items connected with human life.

They have the myths of the under-world, soul's journey to the abode of death and care for the dead, graves and the funeral offerings. An outsider will feel curious to see a beautiful Meitei cremation with seven layers of firewood (meaning seven goddesses), four green bamboo poles (representing four lords of directions) and a canopy (the body of human being descending from the Almighty).

Priestly class and institutions—Just as in ancient Rome every household had its Vesta, so also in Manipur, every householder is virtually the priest of some deities such as *Sanamahi*, (Sun-god), *Leimarel* (earth-goddess), *Panthoibi* (Durgā), etc. The system of conducting elaborate and state rituals have devolved on two classes of priests and priestesses along with a number of institutions¹³ under the pious kings. The function of the pre-Vaishnavite priestly class known as *Amāibas* or *Māibās* is to sing legendary glories, exploits and greatness of the deities with *penā* (fiddle) and suitable *puja* materials. They took to the questions connected with divination and blood relationships among the clans. The priestesses known as *Amaibis* or *māibis* are experts in dance, oracles and

trance with the bells. They do not eat fish, and use clean fire. The Manipuri Devadasis (*Maibis*) are selected from the selected few who had a tragic call of fate and unusual signs. They get training from a senior guru. For spiritual works they use nurse-like uniforms given by the King of Manipur. In their possessed mood the *māibis* utter oracles or messages of God. The association of the male or female *māibi* with a deity may be indicative of his or her special care of that cult or abode of that deity. Although the female *māibis* continued their family-life with their husbands, certain restrictions are imposed on their everyday life. The same restrictions now apply to *Laimanais* or a class of women (wedded to their favourite deities) who live the life of the Devadasis of south India. But Manipuri tradition and religion have not reduced them to downward order as sex objects. They have nothing to do with prostitution by furnishing a clear example of moral and sane life. The *maibis* and *Laimanais* of Manipur adopt the attitude of bridal mysticism (*Madhurya Bhava*) and of *Sahajiya Panthis*.

CONCEPT OF SOUL

It is the deep-rooted conviction of the Meiteis to hold that the soul survives the body and does not perish along with the body in pre-Vaishnavism as well as Vaishnavism. The Meitei wisdom proves that the soul has a destiny beyond the physical existence. Death is abandoning the old worn out *polang* (jumper) and the soul assumes a new cloth or *polang* in birth. Later under influence of Vaishnavism the ideas of the *Gita* about spiritual life have entered into their philosophical and religious conceptions. (*Gita*-11.22). *Leirik Nonglon* reflects a link between old thought and this incoming Hindu thought.

The Manipuri pandits evolved at first 18 letters and afterwards increased them into 35 in order to suit the adopted words of Bengali and Sanskrit. But letters are divided into *Thāwai Mayek* (soul letters) and *Hak Mayek* (body letters). The main vowel letter A is mentioned in the 18 letters. It appears differently according to its combinations with other vowels and consonents.¹⁴ They press letters into service to

illustrate the spiritual nature of the soul. *Leirik Nonglon* says that activity or motion is there to show its nature.

The creation story of man proves that *Guru Sidaba* put the soul into the creature created by *Kodin* or *Sanamah*i by his own order. This creature which has intelligence, perception and notion of right and wrong is man; the soul comes after the body. A Meitei artist has a view in image making; one is the image with soul and the other image without soul. If the image has sex-organ it is one with the soul and if it does not have sex-organ it is a image without a soul. The nature and function of the soul has been thought in different ways. The term for soul in Manipuri language is *Yaibi* or *Thawai* (driver of body) and *Chenga* (inner soul). The belief stresses that not only men but even animals, plants and trees have souls though they are not remarkably developed in them. The latter is called *Thawai Apakna* "old beings".

Theory of one soul : Some passages in *Sagok Lamlel* (way of salvation) and *Khangoi Ngamgoi Sekming* (lore of death) say that only one soul dwells in the physical body of every person as the king with power to control the impulses and senses.¹⁵ All souls are alike. The union of immortal soul with the sky means death. The soul is an immortal air.

Theory of many souls : One of the controversial and disputed questions of Meitei belief is the numbers and names of human soul. The folk songs in *Laiharāobā* and the lore of the physicians speak of five souls along with *Mi* (the shadow cast by a person against sun or moon light).¹⁶ Probably they mean five *pranas* or life principles of the Hindu thought. A sacred thread (*Lugun*) consists of five knots to justify the belief. One of those called *Yāibikon* (vyan) or *Loinaba* (companion) goes out of the body in sleep. It works in dream and is followed by other souls. Companion soul is responsible for guarding the individual against diseases, misfortunes and evil spirits. Black magic against *Loinaba* while in one's sleep is sufficient for the victim's sudden death, nightmare and accident. If this soul leaves the body, the person is senseless and utter incoherent words. Meditation on its nature is known as *Brahma Sanaba*—to sleep in the bed is also spoken of as a kind of death.

The plurality of five souls is supported by the theory that they are the emanations from the five rays of the Almighty which take place through the desire of the Almighty for human birth. In another context it figuratively says that five deities, namely, Almighty, earth goddess, sun-god, moon-god and progenitor of seven *salais* (clans) became five souls. They speak as if modern psychology has demonstrated its support to the same. Some have poured forth the five souls in the form of functions (1) to feel (2) to take pride (3) to awaken (4) to love other beings and (5) to give rest to the person. Thus there are five souls in a human being which actuate the body and control different functions. Here the five vital forces are called *Thawai* (soul). Really they are life-forces as the common function of all sense organs. Knowing the roles played by *Thawais*, T. Bokul Singh put the names of *Kshar* or *Vyakta* for them.

A particular text of the later times gives a materialistic view of five life-principles. The chief soul called *Waba* resides in *Kanglei Thembung* (navel). *Heirong Nongkhomba* is another soul that resides in *Lum-langthel* (a place which is $1\frac{1}{2}$ finger tips below the navel). Another soul called *Leisangba* resides in *Sajungthen* ($1\frac{1}{2}$ fingertips below it), *chaning*, (abdomen) Another soul called *Songthupel Mirengn*, in *Amangthel* is a little below the breast, while another soul called *Muba Langong* resides near the chest (middle of the breast) called *Nungbathel*. The text describes the souls as darkness since they have no form. But the structure of one soul (symbolised by earth goddess in the navel) is shown to be similar to that of *Sembong Kaibong* (a nest built by a particular worm in a leaf). This soul is called *Napanlemba* which cannot be identified with any of the above names. Each soul (collectively) is apt to migrate from one part of the body to another according to astrological conception which came into prominence with a good number of works in physiological and astrological literature.

The shadow reflected against light (not the reflection in mirror or water) is what counts much in taking omen about the sanity of a person or about the time of death. The physicians are experts in the act of seeing it in connection with one's unsoundness of mind or serious illness.¹⁷ The *Mi*

invariably accompanies the human personality and exists before the birth of the gross body. We are inclined to identify it with *Akshar Brāhman* of the *Gita*. In *Mikon Thagonba* (a hymn or folk song sung when calling in the soul of human being) and a text called *Mikourol*, the songs are as follows : "O, five elements of soul; Numbering six with shadow;" "O soul, I will call in thee as Ku Ku;" "O, thou shadow as le le." The souls are supposed to come to the body through the mouth. The departure of the soul may be done by demons and *mantras*. In another song the souls and the shadow are requested to reside in a number of places—rivers, villages, fields, girl's room, room of *Leimarel* or *Sanamahi*, *Pakhangba*. The souls do not like to reside there too. Then they are approached to reside in the parts of the body and the limbs and finally it resides just below the supreme navel. "O soul thou be here, I should have chosen it and agreed."

Scholars in this field think that it is a kind of *Atma Samarpan* where the people inhale god, souls and shadow to merge with each other. The author of *Sakok Sarum* (a medical text) agrees with the above in recognising five souls and *Mi* but he names them as *Mungu*, *Hanga*, *Chenga*, *Tokngaba* and *Aa*. They developed a conception of the colours, kinds and sizes of *Mi* (Shāyā Brahma) which are to be found in *Mitamlon* and medical works. Souls are also classified into seven groups or *salais* according to the clan to which they are born according to medieval Manipuri belief. They are *Ningthouja*, *Angom*, *Khuman*, *Moirang*, *Luwang*, *Chenglei* and *Khaba-Ngamba*, which are associated with seven different colours. This typical classification can be treated as a special contribution of the Meiteis to the sociological ideologies of India. Equal status is given to all categories of caste, sex and status if they are pious.

In a Manipuri text called *Wābā Leithetlon* (description of soul) we have an idea that the elements of the soul are automatically dissolved in their respective origins except one distant and separate soul which may be named as *Wābā Thāwai Hōmoiba Mirel Ham-chātpa* (empty or unrealised soul). It is an atomic thing "not bigger than a seed of mustard". It is a cosmos in itself, being that can travel all over the world and

see all. It does not leave the house until it is directed by a gentle cosmic wind to the sky/heaven or to the womb of a mother. If the cosmic wind does not carry off this soul or drops it on the earth the soul can't attain liberation. It is relative to the *Karma* theory.¹⁸ The same reference indicates that some souls (like that of *Ksana Pākhangbā*) can live in the sky for some time while some others can take human birth at any time and place. Some souls can assume human form in the womb of any woman according to their choice. Some souls by their power want to be born and to die on the same day. These evolved souls are in a stage of snapping the bondage, and do not slide down the ladder of life. God will arrange for their re-birth in a noble family so that they can guide others in the process of evolution.

The theory of passage of the soul has always had a deep influence on the folk belief which has been written by a number of writers. After the separation of the soul from the body the soul is taken by *Khamnung Kikoi Louonbi* (a powerful goddess) in the guise of his friend to follow her and come to *Khori Keithel*. The soul used to live on the dish of leaves of *Wandeng Khoibi* (a kind of plant) here for a while. Then it takes him again to *Khonghampat* through hilly passages where it is asked to ease itself and to drink water from the pot and to take meal at a fixed place, to wash clothes at *Phisulok* (brook for washing) and to comb. When the soul looks behind its body, it finds itself dedicated to the flames and there is no hope of coming to life again. The cry of lamentation is heard at *Makoi Nungol Ching* (the hill where the soul feels pity and sorrow) and then it goes to the abode of *Thongaklen Guru Sidaba* (deity of death), for getting their results of *Karma*.¹⁹ The passage is described in *Amam Sikumlol*.

Another account gives a different nature of the souls. The souls go into the corpse. One of the souls called *Yāibirel* is supposed to go to the sky at the time of burning the dead body. One soul is said to reside in the grave and in the person who acts as the *Gira Thāngba* (one who performs the ceremony of oblation and offer *pindas* for the departed soul). Another soul is in the physician. Still another lives in the

Šaijin Sum (a part of the house). The famous pandits of King Khagemba could bring back the dead king's (Khagemba's) soul which they caught on the way. One Laikhuram Suryabaro Pandit died in place of his wife as we find in the case of Babar in Indian history. There prevailed a belief that if offering was made of *Ngamu* (a fish) or certain trees, god would reward the soul of the dead man in exchange.

The *Purānas* tell us that the souls are either punished or rewarded according to the nature of the deeds. The misdoers like thieves, liars, etc. are required to live in pits of human refuse or are branded with red hot iron or required to repeat their misdeeds near the *Vaitarani* river. In common with the universal belief they hold that the bridge in the *Vaitarani* is the dividing line between the good and the wicked after death, the former going to the god of Heaven (Khamnung Kakhangkon Kasha Mashaikol) and the latter to hell, which is known as the kingdom of *Thongarel* (Yama). They do not go to the same place according to Meitei scriptural view for the wicked soul do not get an easy passage. They have to cross it with the help of a single hair. This may be taken literally or allegorically as we choose. They have no clear idea of final judgement as we find in Christianity.

Relation between the Soul and God: The Meitei elders hold that god must be different from the self. By worshipping god in human form as in sculpture man worships the self. The images of god must be different from the human appearance — a view which is different from that of Greece and India. The treatise on medicine and lyrical song speak of the relation between *Yaibi* (*Jiva*) and *Yaibirel* (*Parmaatma*) as the relation between male and female. God is called *Ipuroi* which may be as well applied to the husband by a wife. The male lover is after the female at a distance of three finger tips. The anxiety of the soul for union with god is expressed in *Khoiju Lamak*, a folk song, and prayer of the *gopis* in *Rasalila* dance. The *Yaibiren* is neither moved nor spoken. In the hymn addressed to god on the sixth day after the birth of a child we find the relation between god and the soul as that of the relation

between the sun and the rays. The soul is said to have sprung up from the shoot in god.²⁰ God is called *Yāibi Pinapa* (master of the soul), in certain texts. The unceasing relation is symbolised by different kinds of hair on different parts of the body. The Manipuri version of the *Gita* describes the relation between the whole and parts. The doctrine of *Acintya-Bheda Abheda* figures prominently in Meitei thought. Naoriya Phulo expresses the relation in terms of the relation between fire and spark.²¹

Concept of Heaven: (*Mungnang Kaokhangou*)—The Manipuris have faith in Heaven which is attained after death. They use the words *Khamnung Nongdam Yaihikon* or *Laileipak* (region of god) to indicate the same. The Pre-Vaishnavite heaven which can be reached through a divine ladder is a place of Indra (Sorarel) or pole star and is situated on the sky far remote from the regions of the sun, moon and the stars. He is as large as the size of *Ngaching* (prawn). Another prevalent belief however says that it is ruled by *Thongarel* (Yamaningthou-presiding deity of death). The good souls are allowed to live with the family members in this region. The soul's personal immortality is implied in this conception. The materials of *puja*, ornaments, etc., which are put for a dead person will appear in *Khamnung* for him as the soul is subject to human limitations. It is not definite whether there is sufficiency of food for the people, they have to work for living. We come across clear reference to the grace of *Thongarel* in giving lives of lovers who have not completed their life-span. Some of the souls are thought to be born again in the womb of the woman of the same tribe for another life. The question of bliss is not hinted and performance of rites-de-passages and ceremonies are concerned not so much with a place in this region as with the appeasement of evil spirits who bring about disease, misfortune, on the one hand and on the other hand bumper crops and other kinds of material happiness. This is not entirely discarded even now.

The general trend of later Meitei thought also suggests a belief in paradise where god resides and is protected by his gatekeepers. There the noises of *Hayum Haya* of the inhabitants resound. They are speechless but the sounds of

Hayum Haya are audible. Their way is different from the way of the mortal since they are always fat, free from pains and miseries and live in mirth and pleasure. They are as tender as the boys of five years for all time. *Yaibirel Sidaba* (Hari Vishnu) takes His seat on the throne by hanging two legs with the left hand touching the navel and the right hand stretching like the petals of the lotus. It implies that every happening is His doing. The released souls are conducted to Him by a woman who is a part of Himself. They remain as the *Samburu* (mole) in Him and have no chance of returning to human birth. We have an account that the soul, alike in the state of bondage and in a state of release, is an entity which does not become one with God. It continues to exist even in the state of release as entitatively different from God even if it is a part of Him.

The radical followers of Bengal Vaishnavism have a vision of *Vaikuntha* where the Almighty (Vishnu) reposes on the coils of snake Ananta with Lakshmi sitting at His feat. The description and illustration of celestial place are found in abundance in the Vaishnava scriptural literature. Nabadwip and Vrindavan attract the Meitei pilgrims as abode of god. The holy places are reckoned as a paradise in their candid opinion. They are supposed to be the suitable places for the rulers, industrial magnets and elderly persons to visit in their lifetime and to pass their retired lives in the old age according to the patterns of Gaudiya Vaishnavism.

CONCEPT OF KARMA

The appeal of the *Karma* theory to the Manipuri mind is reflected in a well-known saying—"Nungna toubana Nungna Phungba Eina Toubana Eina Phungba, Eigoi Eigoi Janma Gi Phal" (As you sow, so must you reap). It is but the result of one's action (*Karma*). More proverbs pertaining to (i) theory of fate, (ii) theory of good action etc, are, "what is lotted cannot be blotted", "sin breeds sin, ill gotten money is ill spent". We find a vivid glimpse of this theory in these proverbs.

Let us have a look as how the Manipuris define *Karma*.

The word *Karma* means action—they see *Karma* as *Shraddha Karma* (*Shraddha* ceremony) and *Karma Yuga* (period of *Karma*) in astrological calculations. The Manipuri text *Amabadhi* (written in the form of a dialogue between the preceptor and the disciple) teaches the doctrine of *Karma*, the essence of which was the denial of the existence of Heaven and Hell. It explicitly describes that the happiness and misery are the result of one's virtues and vicious deeds. *Karma* bears fruit in the present life and does not wait for the next birth.²² It is believed by some scholars to identify our past life with our parents, present life with our own life. It is much better to attain salvation in this life than by a series of births.

We find the same attitude towards *Karma* in a passage in *Leihaklon* mss. which reads thus (English translation): "There can be no ordain of god. Man is to earn the fruit of his own labour as a pot is the product of a potter. The white herone of Leitang lake used to feed itself by walking on foot. The drake feeds itself by mouth. Man's individual will turns god's ordain. Do not be downcast, never be idle, that is to say, there is no ordain of god. Man succeeds in life according to his own individual work as the potter makes his pot. The herone walks on foot in search of its food at Leitang lake and the drake seeks its food by its beak. For mankind, the individual will become the act of providence. Hence, don't be unattended to duty and never be idle. There is no fate apart from the fruit of labour. If fate is, it can never come without labour²³. *Langlon* a treatise on morals, gives a higher role to *Karma* and further adds that change of human appearance and spirit (as different from those of lower levels) must be studied on the basis of *Karma*.

In addition to the above texts we have another text written in the form of a dialogue between a god and a goddess. Mention may be made of different characters of persons based on the grace of the goddess. The goddess possesses immense powers to grant any boon but she too chooses not to interfere with the *Karma* and destiny of the people. She too adheres to rules of *Karma* and tradition of the land according to *Imoinu Ahongbigi Tungnapham*.

It was an article of faith with some that men are not

helpless puppets of destiny, but masters and creators of their own fate. By dint of this will-power alone men have mocked at the disadvantages of heredity and the most adverse circumstances. Some of the princes like Gambhir Singh, who was not destined to any greatness if one may say so, willed themselves to eminence of kings and devotional saints. Their life itself is a glorious proof of the miraculous powers of will.

Through good and bad *Karma* we build our credit and debit in the universal book of life and the totals renew from life to life. The causes and tendencies in life which lead to misfortune are what we call bad or *Papa Karma*. In their belief it originates from one's departure from the mystic law or god's will. Motive is also necessary to determine the impact of *Karma*. If the motive is impersonal and the action wrong, then it will have its limited reaction on the physical plane and the *Karma* does not affect the soul. If the motive is evil and even though the action is not affected, that *Karma* affects the soul, for the motive is significant. There is also the belief which attaches importance to the mood of the parents at the time of their sexual activity. What they think, the same the child must become; the children of high personality will be born if the seed is sown correctly.²⁴ A sound family life is held in high esteem for the philosophy of the rural people of Manipur.

Individual and Collective Karma: The Manipuris believe that troubles in life, such as defeat in the war, punishment given to them by the Burmese or the English (1891) were the of results of their *Karma*. According to them there is a very close connection between the *Karma* of the King or the state and the individuals who are under him.²⁵ Not only do individuals have *Karma* but a society or institution of whatever scale—from a small community to a nation—also has its *Karma*. Arnold Toynbee, after a detailed research of history, reached the conclusion that even an institution is bound by its *Karma* and that this is why the human beings within it cannot easily change their institution as they would like to. According to the Meiteis also the change of mankind's *Karma* always begins with the human revolution of one person in his faith in god.

While doing our best to attain our personal revolution, one can simultaneously improve the *Karma* of family, community and even the entire world.

Another point to be noted is that they discern the application of this law in subtler planes of existence, through yogic disciplines. Through them they avoid much of human suffering and enjoy power, wisdom and bliss. The effect of *mantras*, supra-sensory perceptions and the *siddhis* have roots in the subtler planes and are based on super-science. They transcend time-space limitations and elude the grasp of the normal man in the culture of Meiteis.

Karma and fate: There are trends intimating to us about *daiva* that an arrow once released cannot be stopped midway; it has to reach its aim. Fate or destiny is but *Karma* in operation and it is not possible for a man to transgress it in any way. None should repent for his poverty or miserable condition. The rural folk holds that fate is personified as *Ningthon Apanba*, the deity of Luck or *Sorarel* (Indra). Under Hindu influence they developed the belief that *Sorarel* is the Manipuri counterpart of *Vidhata* who used to write the luck of a baby on the forehead on the sixth night after the birth. They worship *Viddhi Vidhata* with *mantras* (in Manipuri language) in order to bestow good luck on the baby and to alter the divine decree if there be ill luck²⁶. The *puja* materials include a piece of cloth, a bunch of bananas having odd number, *Leishang* (kind of flower), pieces of gold and silver, sweet smelling fruit and one earthen vessel containing rice.

Karma and Cycle of Births: Closely connected with the theory of *Karma* is the theory of transmigration of soul and of seven or ten births which have prevailed in their mind in a unique way. Previous deeds in past lives determine the present life as amongst a thousand cows a calf knows its mother so the deed done finds out the doer. A man cannot escape from his *Karma*, good and bad alike. There are many epic stories and legends in Manipur which support the belief that the present life is a mosaic of good luck or ill fortune. The belief still prevails in them that after the death, he or she really enters into another existence in the form of a baby in the same family or in a *yoni* of a different family or in the form of

birds or animals.²⁷ Aware of the notion of *Karmic* debit they hold that if a man kills another man in this life he will be killed in the next birth. If a cattle strays into your garden and eats the vegetables you must think that your sons or grand-sons have confiscated other's vegetables. In the celebrated fiction *Dhananjoy Laibu Ningba* (Dhananjoy the Saint) we read how virtue in spite of ups and downs wins in the long run and the wrong doer in the present life reaps the fruit in the next birth. There must be a number of reasons for such tragedies, heavy debt, untimely death, loss of property on the part of a person, impossible for us to fathom ; they think that the person was reaping what he had sown in previous births, and another party was paying off the *Karmic* debt.

Epic of Moirang : In common with the Hindu and the Buddhist beliefs the early people hold that man cannot attain salvation or fulfilment of a wish in one life. One cannot become perfectly enlightened, or become a king as the result of good deeds done in seven births reaching back to a normal age (not countless ages).²⁸

Principle of Lightning Karma : They hold that through confession, repentance, expiation, atonement, prayer for the wrong actions done in pure and intense *Bhava*, one can cleanse his *Karmic* impressions by giving vent to them through the impact of spiritual vibrations and thus lighten the *Karmic* load. The Manipuris are firm believers in the law of *Karmic* astrology as revealed in Hindu astrological *shastras*. To them it implies something more than the dictum "as a man soweth so shall he also reap" state of unfoldment. It is far more abiding, because a man can sow, if he has to have seeds gathered during the previous harvest. Whether he/she had accumulated merit in another existence which can alter the *Karmic* process can be gleaned from the careful reading of a horoscope by a professional astrologer.²⁹

The *panjis* are specialists in the science of revealing the *Karmic* results and prescribing *pratikars*. The people used to ascertain the doctrine of *Svabhava* or nature of a person in the performance of actions. If we atone for it with repentance the planetary position indicates *adrasta viśeṣa* (particular unseen) which is explained in astrology in the language of experience.

Various ways of atoning for the sins are presented the performance of which can ward off ill-luck. *Adrista* is the outcome of actions done previously good or bad as the case may be. An astrologer by his *upasana* and *sadhana* (various observances of devotional and spiritual ethics) has to develop a new kind of the sixth sense. Those who perform *pujas* for atonement by proxy should acquire a set of *siddhi* by such practices so that a pinch of the holy and a single utterance of a syllable could lessen the suffering of a person.

From the devotional literature we know that Krishna causes the *Karma* to disappear in the twinkling of an eye. It is simple. Other *Bhakti Sastras* indicate the way out that by our own efforts we are helpless to save ourselves. We must look to god by *bhakti*. To lack *bhakti* is the cause of unhappiness in this life. When one chants the name of god in all sincerity, apologizing for one's bad *Karma*, the whole of all sins is extinguished right away. It can be changed for the better.³⁰ The faith in the grace of Krishna is greater than *Karma*. The state between the confirmed *vairagi* (taking of *Hari nama* by being a monk) and find release from the physical body is known as the stage of *Babaji* (monk's life) who devotes himself to this life of singing, dancing and fits of devotional fainting

CONCEPT OF MUKTI (LIBERATION)

The lyrical song in *Lai Haraoba* (merry-making of gods) makes out that the soul is imprisoned in the body. The soul is described as a bird in a painful nest and longing for its native land, i.e., heaven. It is unable to quit the mortal coil, the bodycase. The ultimate purpose is to fly to god from where the soul was sent. It prays : "O thou, abiding on high far away from me ! please remove thy silver bolt and gold key. And the screen that interposes between us. That I may see thee direct without fuss" !³¹

Instances are also not wanting in Meitei belief to show that the body is the temple which the soul manifests itself and therefore has to be kept in a fit condition so that it may always be at the service of god.³² It is not a religion of escapism from the world in the hope of bright thereafter. The

references to the same in the *Manipuri Gita* are not about the bright thereafter unconnected with the worldly life. To one who has developed self control, his residence is *Tapovana*. It is no use to go to the forest to seek peace, fleeing away from his duty to humanity.

The theistic concept of liberation which not only frees man from the cycle of birth and death, but begets divine bliss by establishing a communion with god has been extolled in the sacred literature. *Mukti* can be described as (1) *Jivanmukta* which can be attained during lifetime and has *Videhamukta*, liberation after death. Manipuri faith recognises the above types though they earnestly desire salvation after death. To the true Meitei death (*Nongaba*) means the absorption of the individual personality into the almighty Guru, the highest of the high. True we may adopt such expression as *Nirvan*, *Moksa* and salvation to convey this idea. In the book called *Nongarol* (Ascent to Heaven) mention is made of important kings and *Maichous* (Gurus) whose cremations are not mentioned to us.³³ They are supposed to go straight to heaven. The divine rulers and mortal gurus and scholars stand as examples of *Jivanmukta*. Whoever comes in contact with them was inspired by their mysticism, inspired utterances and personal examples. The Manipuris have recognised the mendicants with saffron robes as *Jivanmuktas* although most of the schools of Vaishnavism do not do so.³⁴

Following the *Bhagavatpurana* and the Manipuri version of the *Gita*, Manipuri Vaishnavas have enumerated three types of divine birth—(i) *Salgraho* (to be absorbed as a point in the navel of Brahma), (ii) *Sameibrao* (to have his beautiful vision after being born as His servant),³⁵ and (iii) *Dastio* (to serve the Lord after being born as His servant).

To the Manipuri Vaishnavas more important than salvation is its devotion. Nothing short of *prem* (love) can give us the pure state of salvation. *Prem* consists in eternally experiencing the love of god. The ultimate aim and purpose of human life is the attainment of the spiritual form of Krishna.

Means of Salvation : They believe that the individual requires the aid of sacred lore and scriptures on the one hand

and the gurus on the other for realising the liberation. The gurus fall into two types (i) gurus of the *Nongdamba sanglen* in whom the *sattva* element predominates and (ii) gurus of the *Kaibirol sanglen* dominated by *Rajas* and *Tamas*. The first category behaves calmly and advises the king to save the people and the country. The second category executes the command of the first. By the help of incantations they challenge the deities, and the pandits of these types are not born in the mother's womb. They have neither birth nor death and mysteriously disappear from the face of the earth. The reference to the ways in *Asilon* (lore of death) declares that the due performance of life's duties, necessary rites and ceremonies are enough for the soul's passage and salvation. Certain texts insist on the performance of *Lai-Haraoba*³⁶ a clear knowledge of presiding deities of different parts of the body, contemplation on the *Brahma* while asleep, concentration of 12 letters of four groups (*Yaiberal vija* seed of *Mantra* of soul) as the means of liberation. Whosoever recites the names of *Sanamahi* (Sun-god), *Leimarel* (earth-goddess) etc. shall enter the paradise. The worship of these deities was associated with *Bhaktimarga* rather than primitivism. Under the ancient clan system like the Japanese they were ardent worshippers and diligent observers of family rites conducted in compliance with different surnames having common ancestor called *Apokpas* (ancestors). A text called *Asilon* describes nine sheaths corresponding to nine colours of the Immortal guru and seven colours which spring forth from His body and generate seven clans (*salais*). Meditation and knowledge on the nature of the concerned sheath and colour (according to the *salai* in which he was born) are the ways of salvation. It also means that outside the clans no salvation—an assertion uttered by them before accepting Bengal Vaishnavism and firmly maintained at all times must—even when correctly understood—appear a bold idea to those having a vague knowledge of Meitei *salais* or clans. They make an attempt to justify the stay of the realised souls in heaven for one year after which they will come down from heaven to the earth and go through the process of life and death according to *Karma*.

According to pre-Vaishnavite thought one need not neces-

sarily take to ascetic life for salvation. By being a householder he can concentrate on god. This thought has relevance to the modern predicament. Some have opted for salvation to apostles and not for god. Some wives attend on their husbands and witness the vision of god even before the husbands could get the divine vision. The devotion displayed by *Sija Wahenga* to King Nar Singh, is highlighted to justify this point. There are cases of pseudo monks (*Sadhu cheng changba*) who go to the forest in search of seclusion but foes, lust, greed attack them if the mind is not free. They are not bound to reach *moksa*. But a warrior or a ruler can maintain the serenity of a sage and can attain salvation through hard work.³⁷

Side by side with early thought there has developed the Hindu method where introduction is said to be traceable to Hindu missionaries of different periods. It is to be noted (in Chapter IV) that Hindu ideas of *Karma* (action), *Jnana* (knowledge) and *bhakti* (devotion) were accepted with rejoicing after the acceptance of Vaishnavism. It has been shown that the notable kings (Pakhangba, Naothingkhong, long lived king of Luwang, Khumal and Mangang clans), elderly pandits and the *Maibas* (specialists in bodily and physical treatment) practised *asana* and *hatha* yoga with remarkable success.³⁸ The Vaishnavas with their background of *Bhagavata* have stressed for them the nine modes of *Bhakti* and *Raslila* of Krisna in their own way. A Vaishnava would not mind for the life of any being or life in the form of grass, tree or animal provided he is privileged to see the *Ras* of *Nitya Vrindavan*. A conception prevailed that grass, tree and animals have spirits and consequently eligible for salvation on the condition that they are present in the dance. In conformity with the doctrines of *Ras* and *Kirtana* there emerges the doctrine of attainment of liberation through the offering of clothes of various textiles and designs to the artists during the *Sankirtan*. Distribution of money and clothes are made with a view to please Sri Krishna and thereby to please the departed soul. The belief is that by doing so and by prostrating in the *Sankirtan* at the time of *Shradha* ceremony in front of the

singers, god will be pleased and by pleasing god the separated soul must attain liberation.³⁹

For the general lay believer of Vaishnavism a mere phrase or word of Chaitanya or Hare Krishna might be the means to salvation. Even during the 20th century, there must have been numerous laymen who had never received instruction from the teachers. Some of them, by others, are the sole support of their lives. The question was how many Sanskrit *slokas*, words or phrases of the *Gita* and *Bhagavat* were familiar with and how will they preserve and perfect the spirit in their daily lives. It is good if a layman has committed to memory no matter how eloquently and aptly one may be able to interpret them. It is better if the teaching of the text is translated into action and concrete terms of action in one's life. One's understanding of the text is fruitful by doing so.

In modern times, i.e., late Twenties a bold Vaishnava called Prabhupada A.C. Bhakti Vedanta Swami accepted the teaching of Gaudiya method of salvation as the topmost yoga of salvation. The disciples of Hare Krishna Movement led by Dr. Damodar Swamy are propagating this view in Manipur as well as in the West to the masses who being fond of its scientific background are encouraging the movement.

REFERENCES

1. The *Sarois* or the forefathers of the hill tribes were opposed to the cult of water goddess of the Meiteis in one myth. In Manipuri faith the evil spirit or strange composite creatures in spite of their lineage from the Almighty are always hungry and demand food from human beings as ordered by the Almighty. The Naga-Kuki mode of eating and living have a bad odour about it. Such denunciation by the Meiteis is one more evidence of the old religious schism that separated the hill people from the plain people. The hill tribes worshipped some Meitei gods and vice versa though the mode of rites are different.
2. The words *Chingu* and *Khayum* are now obsolete and never used except in *mantras* and *pujas*. The modern word (Lai) is in common use. It may be pointed out that every Meitei word connected with religion is preceded by it such as *Laipham* (place of god), *Leining*

(way of devotion), *Laimang* (bad spirit), etc. It is at times shown to be derived from the Kol or Dravidian term (*Linga*).

3. Jevon's remark in Introduction to Plutarch's Roman Question (P. XXIII) quoted by T.C. Hodson, *The Meiteis* (Latest edition) p. 99: "Jevon declares that the conception of divine being as "gods" connotes, firstly, the relationship of members of a family, subject to one head, who may be Lord of all or attenuated as merely primus inter pares; secondly, their representation in human form; thirdly, the association of moral benefit with their worship; fourthly, their presentation as idealized human beings; and fifthly, their occupation of a definite place in a definite cosmogonic system."
4. Atombapu Sarma, *Manipur Itihas*, 1942, Imphal, pp. 66-70 (cult of Atingkok Guru Sidava in connection with the creation of universe in 4th chapter).
5. *Leithak Leikharol* mss. It is edited and published by Manipur Sahitya Parisad. *Laibangthou Mapalgi Mingkhei* mss. may also be consulted.
6. Vide the point collected by me from the traditional weavers of Manipur. The creation story as given in *Langlon* is parallel to *slokas* 7 to 9 of the first chapter of *Manusomhita*.
7. The saying reflects the concept of *Ardhanariswara*.
8. Cp. Ancestor worship in China and Japan.
9. Dr. M. Kriti Singh, *Religious Development in Manipur*, Imphal, 1980, pp. 70-80.
10. More of it is discussed in M. Jhulan's *Vijay Panchali*, p. 6; Dr. S.K. Chatterji, *Religious and Cultural Integration of India* (Atombapu Memorial Lecture), Imphal, 1967, pp., 42-43. The parallels are found in Hindu and Egyptian representation of gods.
11. The Meiteis have developed the concept of the witches, nymphs and evil spirits. *Heloi Lamleimas* have the colour of moonlight and have only one vertical eye. They are dressed like the *gopies* of a *Rasa* dance. Their toes do not touch the ground. *Haoreima Sambubis* have the appearance of a tribal Naga woman with the traditional basket.
12. The books, literature, and legends testify to the strong relationship between divine beings and human beings. The *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, (Royal Diary) ed. by L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, Imphal, 1962, contains a passage on this issue during the reign of King Loyamba in the 12th century.
13. There is the national convention which guides whether a person has fulfilled the condition for *maibaship* and *maibiship*. For both classes intensive training under the able gurus is necessary. The institutions of the priests are 3, i.e., *Ashei* (fiddle), *Amai* (song and verse) and *Yoirel* (in charge of local deities and sacred places). Similarly there are 3 types of *maibis* (priestesses), *Sanglen* (priestess in the service of *Pakhangba*), *Nongmai* (priestess of goddess

Yumjao Lairembi) and *phura* (priestess of Nongsaba deity). They are believed to have the vision of these deities whom they serve and are able to communicate the message of gods during their trances to the people.

14. Culled from the primer of Meitei Script published in 1950. The letters were invented by the court pandits in the 17th century. The division of letters into vowels and consonants is not very different from what we find in books with reference to the Sanskrit and the Tamil divisions.
15. The soul is in this sense, spoken as the Lord Himself. The five elements such as Fire, Water, Air, Earth and Sky are treated as a, e, i, o, u in a text called *Amam Nonglon*. Pandit Atombapu Sarma holds that *Thawai* is derived from *thawa*, a corrupted form of *Dhawa*.
16. Cf. H. Kulabidhu Singh "Manipuri Dances", pp. 39-42.
17. J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, A study in Magic and Religion, London, 1963, pp. 237-255. We have innumerable mss. written on this theme.
18. Death by hanging, unnatural way and in child birth are regarded with dread by the people. The soul, it is believed, remains in the house of the family and turns out in an evil spirit unless precautionary measures are taken in time.
19. Culled from the songs of the ballad singers of Manipur and *Asilambi* (way of the dead). The latter is edited and published in some books. Pandit N. Amuyaima Singh, *Aman Sikumlon*, Kakching Bazar, 1977, pp. 4-11.
20. From the Radio talk of R.K. Hireinya Singh, an authority on *Meitei Pura*, in connection with the rites of the Meiteis on 12.11.1980.
21. Naoriya Phulo, *Ahan Yathang* (voice/order of the elderly people), Imphal, 1948, pp. 23-24.
22. M. Chandra Singh, "*Ariba Manipuri Sahitya Itihas*", J.MSP. March, 1964.
23. Passage quoted by late poet Th. Chaoba Singh in "*Laibak Amasung Thabak*" (fate and *Karma*) included in his book, "*Wakhang Ichei*", Imphal, 1965, p. 38. W. Yumjao Singh, "*Langoi*", Imphal, 1966, pp. 7 to 9 and pp. 10-11.
24. The science of *Yumballon* (domestic affairs) lays particular emphasis upon the time of the relation of husband and wife. Late N.Phulo's exposition of this theme remains to this day the most popular of its kind in argumentative literature vide N.Phulo—*Ahan Yathang*, Imphal, 1948, p. 10.
25. The point is taken from historical evidence, the authorship of which was attributed to Manipuri rulers such as Marjit, Pakasana, etc. in the 18th and 19th centuries.
26. Vide Pandit Madhob and N. Khelchandra's *Khunung Sajat, Lichat*,

- Imphal, 1968, pp. 67-68. The Mss *Bidhi Nongdamba* may be consulted in this connection.
27. M. Narendra Singh, *Langlol*, 1981. The next birth often promises to accomplish an act if it is not finished in the present one.
 28. Vide my paper "Avatars and Lilas in Manipuri Thought" presented at the 54th Session of I.P.C. held in Madras University in December, 1979.
 29. The Meitei culture of astrology is well known to the Burmans. Remedial measures (*Prayascittas*) by Manipuri astrologers was revered for this efficacy. My paper "Manipuri System of Astrology and Astronomy" presented at the 36th Session of All India Oriental Conference in Santiniketan (1-3 November, 1980) relates to this aspect of the people in Manipur as well as in Burma.
 30. Dr. Sudhindra Chakravarty, *Philosophical Foundations of Bengal Vaisnavism*, Calcutta, 9, 1968, Section on Baldeva and the Samkhya.
 31. The folk song is translated by S. Gourahari Singh, in his book *Manipur and Second World War* (written in verse Imphal, 1980 pp. 21-22.)
 32. *Punshirol* (the science of long life) as practised by the elderly people of Manipur proceeds rather in the same direction.
 33. Information gathered from Ch. Birahari Singh, a pandit of standing in this line of thinking. *Meitei Aribagi Gita*, ed. by R.K. Sanahal Singh, B.Com., are summarised in Chapter VII Section A.
 34. James Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Section on the Meiteis' contributed by T.C. Hodson.
 35. R.K. Sanahal Singh (ed), *Meiteilon Aribagi Srimad Bhagavat Gita*, Imphal, 1973, pp. 121-122.
 36. M. Narendra Singh's article "Aeikhoigi Laining Lichat" (Our ancient religion and way of life) contributed to a Manipuri quarterly journal called *Umanglai Khunda*, Second Year Issue No. 5 & 6, 1981, pp. 2-7.
 37. Dr. M. Kriti Singh, *Religious Developments in Manipur in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Imphal, 1981, pp. 324-325; Infra Ch. VII Sect. A.
 38. Vide the sub-section on Hathayoga (Infra chapter IV)
 39. Prof. N. Tombi Singh, *Manipur and the Mainstream*, Imphal, 1975, p. 160.

MAJOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

VAISHNAVISM AMONG THE MEITEIS

Caitanya's Gaudiya Vaishnavas—As in other places there are many Hindu sects here including Saiva, Sakta, Smarta and Ganapatya. As a Hindu they are tolerant of them as different paths to Reality.

The largest and best organised community in Manipur is a traditional Vaishnava form stemming from the *paribar* of Narottam Thakur Mahaya of Bengal. Officially recognised as the state religion by Rajarsi Bhagyachandra alias Jai Singh, King of Manipur (1759-1763, 1763-1798) and expanded by his successors, it is one of the sound religions of the world. By order of King Jai Singh, the court pandits and the Hindu Brahmans of his *Sabha* adopted indigenous creeds based on what is best in the earlier belief and Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Manipuri code propounds a curious type as distinct from that of Bengal Vaishnavism although the philosophical and mystical side came from Bengal Vaishnavism. The culture of Manipur is, for the most part, the culture of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas of Manipur. They are born on this earth of their own belief, practices and theology. A devotee of Gaudiya Vaishnava, especially the Brahman, cares for his children and teaches the Manipuri and the Bengali languages right from their childhood. The elder circles are conversant with the works of the poet-philosophers of Bengal. The whole social, political and

spiritual attitudes are governed by these things. His beliefs are centred around the greatest god/*mapu*.

Belief in Hindu and primitive gods and goddesses—as all believe in one god—they also believe in one *Mapu* (Almighty). In later times, He is identified with Krishna or Sri Sri Govindaji. The Manipuri names for Krishna is Govindaji in eternal alliance with Raseshwari originated by King Jai Singh. His subjects are the devotees of Govindaji. The people's love for Him was beyond explanation. He is the Supreme authority in all matters—social, cultural and religious. For hours they used to remain lost in meditation. The kings, artists (drummers and singers), etc., started practising devotion to Him with vows and rites for their fame.¹ The Meitei *Sadhaks* composed *mantras* and *bhajans* adoring Him and eulogising His attributes. To Jai Singh as also to his followers (a certain group) He was real and palpable at every moment of their life. Often we have heard them talking to this deity while walking along or working in the battlefield. The major portion of their income was spent in offering Him dresses, flute, bells, *puja* materials, feasts and renovating temples which the priests of the old palace (court) conducted with the passion of a staunch votary. The elders instilled in the young mind a great love for gods and mythology of all periods of this country.

Besides Sri Sri Govindaji and Reseshwari, they believe in other gods, goddesses, angels and spirits. These deities they set in two categories: deities of pre-Vaishnavism (forest deities, household deities and royal deities etc.) and gods of Vaishnavas, Saiva and Saktas (Puranic Hindu deities often identified with earlier gods and worshipped with local rites). They believe in angels like Nityananda (of Bengal Vaishnavism), Lai Sarois (attendants of important deities) whose functions are to impart mankind with good news and sometimes with warnings.

Belief in holy books and incantations (Lai-wa): The sacred *puyas* written in Meitei script are the guide and record of faith for them. The Maichous of the court have to remember them in their heart. But they also believe in the *Gita*, *Vedas*, *Bhagavata* and texts of Bengali poet-philosophers, written in Bengali or

Brajabali languages. They have equal regard for these types of sacred books. They are regular in reading the concerned texts and utter the names of god and incantations in accordance with the warrant of times. During the concerned festivals or rituals or summer season, the *maibas*, the Brahman priests (for Hindu ceremonies) and the story tellers would explain to the audience the beautiful stories of the gods and their exploits and relation to the land.

Belief in gurus, avatars and their miracles and prophecies: Several expressions are used for the god-gifted men and their performance of miracles. They have created history as they were born with the message of teaching and guiding the Meiteis. They were experts in coining and collating Meitei facts with those of the Hindus in their own way.

The practical side includes recitation of the names and attributes of the multiple deities, prayers, alms, fasting and pilgrimages as the foundation of Manipuri Vaishnavism. They are codified by order of notable Vaishnava rulers such as Jai Singh, Gambhir Singh, Nar Singh and Chandrakirti. At a suitable age, say 19 years for the male and 14/15 years for the female, they are initiated into the cult of Gaudiya Vaishnavism by the king or the Brahman priest after whispering the *Hari nama* and the lineage of the Gurus. They are invested with sacred thread and garland of *tulsi* beads. It is necessary for them to take bath and to put sacred marks on the forehead before taking meal. According to their spiritual growth they can become a confirmed *vairagi* or mendicant to the close practice of communion with Krishna and Radha at the age of 60 or 70. The disciple pours water at the feet of the *Diksa* Guru and takes *achman* of it and serves him in many ways. The relatives of the deceased family or the confirmed monks remain shaven and observe vegetarianism by avoiding fish, drinking habits and immorality. Fasting on *ekadasi*, important religious days and due observance of the rites of the dead are important to most of them.

Pilgrimage to the important temples such as Govindaji, Ramji, Hanumanji, Kamakhya, Nityananda or Siva is another practice which they have been observing. They often visit the groves of the *Umanglais* during the time of *Lai-Haraoba*

(provided they are not tabooed by custom). They also visit *Chari dham* (4 sacred places), and such places as Nabadwip, Mathura, Vrindavan, Puri and other famous shrines in their lifetime. A holy bath in the Ganga is considered obligatory for them. They have a tolerant attitude towards all sects and castes. They don't care for associating their holy scriptures with other faiths.

Saktism and Tantrism from Bengal and Assam had asserted their heads in Manipur by the Seventh and Eighth centuries A.D. The Meiteis found their elements within their framework which they had not known before. The Ramanandi cult under King Garibniwaz (1709 to 1748) at the instigation of Shanti Das Babaji, put an end to some of the animistic practices and changed the whole life by bidding farewell to the use of *Yu* (rice beer) and burial. Another thing they did not share with the reformed movements of Vaishnavism was the complete abolition of caste system. The Sakta and Ramaite trends have been strengthened by the Bengali community and the Desawalis and Teli living in Imphal. By now, the Gaudiya faith was a strange mixture of ideas of all sorts and what not.

The Vaishnava rulers veered back towards conservatism, forbidding the intermarriage and interdining of Vaishnavas with the low caste people and intimating the subjects to observe them in a different fashion. Details of rites as framed by the court officials should govern often all over the state. The Maharajas believed that the aristocratic and the higher class people were their support.

Formerly texts of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and Hindu scriptures were in the hands of Sanskrit pandits and Brahmins and the rulers. Now the people denied their authority to keep them with themselves. Most of the sacred texts have become the property of the people, translated into Manipuri language of the common people. The copying work of the scribes and commentators who worked in the court during the Maharajas, the advent of printing press and wide circulation of books have enabled them to buy from a publisher or street seller for a small amount. The sacred books and mission culture and art have survived not only the attacks of the enemies

(Burmese) and the new missionaries, but the ravages of the moths. Similarly the sacred *puranas* of the pre-Vaishnavite people written in the Meitei script survived the persecution of the rulers and the oppressors.

A strange kind of unity prevails among the Manipuri Vaishnavas living in Manipur, parts of Burma, Cachar, Hojai, Lamka in Assam, Nabadwip in West Bengal, Dhaka, Sylhet in Bangladesh and Vrindavan and Mathura in U.P. Of course, there are differences among them but as a religious community they are bound by the innovations of King Jai Singh in the ways like food, dress, ornaments, practice of music and dance and celebrating Hindu festivals. Its enrichment of Indian culture through assimilation and integration attracted the attention of the British writers, rulers and external observers and was even referred to by them in their learned papers and books.

THE ISKCON MOVEMENT

Manipur has been a Gaudiya Vaishnava State ever since its introduction by King Jai Singh. The ISKCON centre in Imphal was directed and organised by H.H. Bhaktisvarupa Damodara Swami Maharaja (Th. Damodar Singh), and a prominent person, called Krityananda, a disciple of Acharya A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. The Manipuri Vaishnavas attribute to the success of this minstrel in America to the grace of Krishna. Some of the sayings of the early Vaishnavas can be fitted in with the movement in America about the birth of ISKCON. In the words of Chaitanya Brindavan Das, the author of the *Chaitanya Bhagavat* (Bengali), "I shall come twice again. In the second advent I shall assume a beautiful form full of bliss of the choral chanting of the Holy name. In all towns and villages of the earth the Holy name will be chanted". Following the message of his guru, A.C. Prabhupada, his groups are converting numerous men and women in different countries of Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe and America into Vaishnavism and spreading Krishna Consciousness.

Manipur has had a number of men who have been moved by Hare Krishna cult to elevate it from a national level to an

international level. Th. Damodar, a Meitei by birth, born at Toubul some 50 years ago, is a case in point. He received his education in Calcutta and America where he completed his Ph.D. in Chemistry in 1974. The loss of his mother during his absence in America and his religious bent of mind invited him to seek initiation on June 30, 1971, at the hand of a follower of A.C. Prabhupada who was initiating Hare-Krishna movement in America (Los Angeles). After coming to Manipur he began to preach this doctrine through lectures, discourses, *bhajans*, *kirtans* and slides. His place among the founders of ISKCON in India and abroad is unique in some sense.

His movement did not meet with opposition from the Manipuri elites and intellectuals. Followers of ISKCON number about 500 Manipuris and it is widespread among the youths. His group has taken initiative in organising Hare-Krishna order and is setting up a great centre of Hare-Krishna campus at Hare Krishna land, Tidim, Airport Road, Imphal, where people of all sects and persuasions meet and exchange views. He had already held the religious conferences in such temples as Kalimai Mandap (the temple of Devi-Durga) and Thakurbari Mandap where many American disciples participated. As part of their service they observe 10-day Hare-Krishna festival in the campus in a solemn way with programmes of *mela*, book exhibitions, free bus service, *kirtans*, discourses, film shows and free distribution of food among the people. It celebrated Krishna Janmastami and Vyasa puja from 24th to 28th August, 1986, as part of the 500th Birth anniversary programme of Caitanya.

The commentaries on the *Gita*, the *Bhagavata* and teachings of Vaishnavism according to A.C. Bhaktivedanta were shown, read and explained by them at the time. They learn more about the creed by this movement when they celebrate it. The centre also brought out souvenirs and magazines which were circulated in different parts of India.

THE PANGKOT MOVEMENT

The history of Manipuri religion is not complete without an account of a dissenting movement within the social fold of the

Manipuri Vaishnavism regarding rites and speech. Their leaders such as Thongbam Vaishnava Yadov, S. Sandhar Singh, (later Paonam Chaoba) Sugnu Sana, etc., had declared the Gaudiya Vaishnava texts, (*Chaitanya Charitamrita*, *Prem Vilas*, *Govinda-Lilamrita*, *Gita* and *Vidagdha Madhab*) to be the authority of their religious life, and respected the Vedic rites by holding radical views against the tradition of Manipur under the kings. They put the teaching of Chaitanya and his followers into practice. They were confident that the leading *Pangkot Ojhas* were interpreting the Vaishnava texts right and in following them they were carrying out the sayings of Sri Krishna.

We do not live a real devotional life, they said. We lack *Prem* as we should. These groups wished to be led wholly by the radical Vaishnava ways. Pondering over the ways they agreed with what the few *purohit* rules and the Brahma Sabha of the Manipuri kings had done but questioned whether they had gone all the way. They took dissent from the Manipuri ways in the following :

(1) Meitei Vaishnava *pūja* was the costly ritual of life enjoined by Chaitanya and his Goswami philosophers for the benefit of Brahman priests. They found nothing in reforming to the offering of *pinda*, cooking of the *Bamons*, and *Aiswariya* aspect directly from the teaching of Mahaprabhu.

(2) *Hari nama* is whispered into the ear of the baby at the time of birth. Ordination into monkhood of the infant is allowed since he has already received initiation.

(3) The instruction given to the masses by Chaitanya to teach and to initiate into *Hari nama* refers to the receiving of the same name from the father, mother and competent monks. It is not the monopoly of the Vedic Brahmans to act as hereditary gurus. A monk or person well-versed in Vaishnava *shastras* is found worthy of acting as a *swamiji* at the last hour of a dying person.

(4) There was little devotion in the heart of the person who is hosting the *pūja*. The Brahman was eager to be a priest but his outlook on life was greedy and acquisitive in the name of religion. They resolutely turn to Shri Krishna and seek His glory by offering simple flowers, purity of heart and *Hari*

Dhwani (shouting the name of Hari) in eating (similar to that of Vrindavan) at a public feast. What counts much is the offer to god without any *upadhi*.

(5) Abstinence from the fictitious *Guru Pranalika* (line of the gurus of the Manipuri Vaishnavas), worship of Mahadeva, *tulsi* leaves. *Sankhya Jala* (water from the conch), etc. were practised by some section of the *pangkots*. They claimed that they maintained a high level of spiritual life through the worship of the images of Radha, Krishna, *salgrama* and Gourachandra only.

(6) Making *Hari nama* and 18 limbs of the *bhakti* yoga are the centres of their preaching; they insist on treating the *Bhagavata purana* as *Hari nama* and God Himself (as different from the bliss or *mukti* of other schools). The *Bhagavata* originates out of *Kama Gayatri*.

(7) They went to excesses of prohibiting *Darshan* (listening to *Bhagavata* discourse) at the time of the death and *Khomjong Parva* (a national ballad sung to the accompaniment of *dholok*), *Pena* (fiddle), *Dolyatra* (dancing), *Vasak* and the Brahmin manners. They had surrendered their all to Shri Krishna through *Kishori Bhajan*, *Sadha*, *Bhagavata Sidhanta* and short cut *pujah*. *Mala* (rosary) is essential for them. After becoming a convert to it, he or she must give up fish. Normally the Manipuri Vaishnavas take fish though they do not take meat and egg.

(8) The *piba* of the family can act as a guru and priest in all ceremonies of a *Pangkot* family. However a Brahman priest is allowed to conduct the ceremony in case the dead person was not ordained as a monk or nun.

(9) The *Pangot* festivals are Krishna Janma, Radhasthami, Mahaprabhu Janma, Death day of Thakur Narottam, etc. There is a great feast in the month of Mera/Sept.-October. They are not against Shri Govindaji's *Rasa yatra*, *Shnana Yatra*, *Dola yatra*, *Ekadasi vrata*, etc. The hearing of sacred texts by two persons (reciter of Bengali lyrics and Manipuri translator) has a special charm for them in every ceremony.

These radical groups were given the name of *pangot* (from *Pangat*) in view of their distinctive rigidity. The name means one who has one's wish at the feet of God. It also implies

assembly of the *bhaktas*. In another context it is used in the sense of dining in a *pangti* (straight line). Their manner isolates them from the general society. Whether they are more God-intoxicated or not we are not sure. In point of fact credit goes to them for discipline and uncompromising life.

CULT OF APOKPA AND REFORMATION

Things took a different turn in Cachar which was at that time a separate state under the British. After the great depopulation of the Meitei in 1891 many of them had settled in several villages of Cachar. The leader of the Meitei revivalist movement in Cachar was Naoriya Phulo, who had been brought up in Bengali atmosphere of Cachar in Assam. He was given English education up to matric and worked as a teacher in different schools and later as a sub-inspector of Railway police for some time. He could not bear the insult hurled at the Meiteis that they, the Meiteis, had not their separate religion, script, etc.

He also opposed the observance of Hindu festivals, use of Sanskrit language and stopped the activities of the *Bamons*. His preaching was the exposition of pure Meitei belief, Meitei way of life so that their racial identity would be unfolded. His followers came to learn that the clever *Bamons* had used devices to lull the uncritical Meiteis. Naoriya Phulo had before him Bengali and Sanskrit texts of Hindu religious books which he had thoroughly studied. By that time revolution was held in abhorrence. Through his analysis he developed the thesis that there is no sin listening to the lore of the Meitei forefathers as is evident in the case of Janmejoy Maharaja. The best means of liberation is to worship the genuine Meitei gods and goddesses, hymns of the Meitei language and not through Bengali and Sanskrit words. He lived at about the same time as that of Rajpandit Atombapu Sarma, a great Sanskrit thinker and illustrious writer. Maharaja Churachand along with his group of scholars and artists went to Lalang (a part of Cachar) for the celebration of the *Sanskirtan* of his forefathers in 1935. The king met him and heard his arguments denouncing the religious faith of the Manipuri Vaishnavas. A

public debate was arranged, i.e., conference of adherents of new movement called *Apoka Marup* and the traditional Gaudiya religion to meet and decide on the basis of sacred lores and arguments. It is said that N. Phulo Singh, better known as *Haoriya Phundrei*, defeated in debate Pandit Atombapu Sarma. Maharaja Churachand did not controvert Phulo's standpoint. The result was favourable to the new group of *Apokpa Marup* established under his leadership in 1930.

Phulo's life was crowded with arduous activities, composing books, inventing a script for use, debating and discussing in and around Jhavirband (his place) and organising his movement by going to law court against the Brahmans. As per the custom of Manipuri people every village has its *shinglup* (wood club) whose members used to subscribe some fixed amount at the time of the death in the house of the members. The Vaishnava members refused to pay their subscriptions and boycotted the *shraddha* ceremonies of the *Apokpa* family.

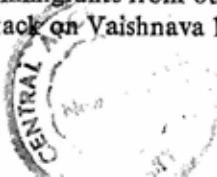
The 46 followers of Naoriya Phulo including three Meitei Brahmans were excommunicated by the Brahma Sabha of Jhavirband (the birth place of Phulo in Cachar) vide the *Vigyapan Patredam* in the middle of Forties which contain information regarding the new movement's creeds such as the abolition of the concept of uncleanness, preparation of rice beer by Kanhai, younger brother of Phulo, treating the deities of the temples as wooden images, declaring Gopicandan *mritika* as the unclean clay from the grave of the *gopis*, discarding *Veda Bitita mata* of *shraddha*, *sankirtan* and pilgrimages to holy places (Nabadwip, Gaya, Vrindavan, etc.). The replies and challenges of *Apokpa Marup* concerning the cases in the law court and defence of their stand in chanting God's name in their mother tongue are given in their letter dated September 28, 1940. Further it also contains their questions to the Brahman practices which resulted in the caste bar, performance of *prayscitta* ordeal to be undergone by a Meitei lady when married to a Brahman groom. Seven villages were declared unclean on account of alleged connection with the followers of *Apokpa Marup* in their notices. But the latter did

not know on what grounds and principles of *Veda Vyavastha* they were purified. They wanted further information as the conduct of the Sabha did not permit of any further examination.

Instructive texts and papers of Apokpa Marup: The scientific theory of Meitei cosmic evolution is developed by Naoriya Phulo in his unpublished book "Sagok-Salai Thiren" (said to be discovered by himself after its burning in fire in 1705 A.D.) during the time of Maharaja Garibniwaz alias *Pamheiba*. Later writers have drawn upon this book freely for philosophical and scientific analysis.

Phulo's published works in Manipuri language (in Bengali character) consist of *Lainingthou Laibao*, *Ahan Yathonao* (the dialogue between old & young) *Aingi Wareng* (arguments criticising the Hindu celebrations in Manipur). *Chuksa Thounirol* (account of Meitei rituals), *King Pamheiba*, *Thain Nongin* (Two birds representing different viewpoints) and *Meitei Houpham Wari* (story of the origin of the Meitei). His *Laniningthou Laipao* may be considered an epitome of this school. It is written in verse and of poetic quality. His mastery over de-Sanskritised Meitei words and studies in the evolution of the soil, world and God are reflected in it. People satisfy themselves by reading his books. He translated the philosophical hymn of *Hari nama* into *Haya Pokpa Haya Pokpa Haya Haya Haya Mahi Mahi Mahi Maya Haya*. Some of these books shed the characteristics of the *Gita*, the *Upanishads*, etc. He does not deny the values and ideals of Hindu thought for the followers of Hinduism.²

The Meitei Marup led by Phulo absolutely broke off from the Hindu Meiteis. In the books he used his pen with success in changing the Meitei practices and beliefs from the Hindu influences. On the platform he was a formidable adversary of the section which was nearly Hinduised. To these anti-Hindu policies we owe the above books some sections of them did not accept this position. He was a critic of Hinduism in the form of Bengal Vaishnavism, Bengali and Sanskrit culture and the Manipuri *Bamons* (Brahman immigrants from other parts of India living in Manipur). His attack on Vaishnava kings like



Garibniwaz, Bhagyachandra and missionaries like Santidas Babaji aroused the Manipuri mind to a strong resolve to throw off the Hindu yoke. Not only the parts of Cachar but Manipur joined his movement though his birth place continued to be leading among his followers.

For him Meiteism is not the descendant of the tribals or some accepted theories as it was broadly speaking for the European anthropologists like Mocullock, Pemberton, T.C. Hodsan, Grierson, etc. Nor is it a speculation based on Hindu myths without foundation or verification and offspring of the Aryan origin as alleged by W. Yumjao Singh and Atombapu Sharma. He is against the views of the Meiteis, assimilation who stand between the revival theorist. By his unique theory he holds that the Meiteis are the descendants of *Lainingthou Sorarel* and their religion is the worship of *Poklen Pokpa Shatlen Shatpa* (sole breeder of that is bred), along with a host of pre-Vaishnavite deities. For his religious information he received from his followers the appellation of *Taibang Phaoba Naoriya Ahan* (Elderly man who takes human birth). To this day in Cachar as well in Manipur *Ahan Ibungo* is held to apply to him (and his companions also, who held the position of a guru).

Phulo's success inspired some Meiteis from Manipur to contact him in the late Thirties. His disciples are Pukhramba Surchand, Pukhramba Ibomcha and Takhemlamba Bokul (Deputy Speaker in the Assembly in 1949), who carry on the same line of thinking by means of books, journals (*Yann*), meetings of polemical character calculated to refute the Hindu ways and carry conviction to the Meitei masses. Some of the Manipuris who were uneasy with the attitude of the Brahman gurus discarded their sacred thread and *urik* (necklace of *Tulsi* leaves). Under the presidency of Pukhramba Surachand, the Manipur State Meitei Marup was established in Kangleipak with a constitution. Its 28 resolutions include among other things to substitute Sanskrit terms and names by pure Meitei words, to adopt Meitei hymns in worship, to abandon Hindu festivals in favour of the Meitei ones, etc.³

The *Apokpa* movement can be called counter reformation

as it upholds the primitive belief of the Meiteis to its full extent. The teaching of the Hindu saints was outrightly rejected and adherence to a doctrine evolved by them was declared essential for salvation. What about the *Maibas* and *Maibis* which are requisitioned for conducting the rites and ceremonies. According to the interpretation of the *Apokpa* cults they are the products of the kings. They use Sanskrit hymns and songs and as such they are not allowed to conduct rites. Necessary sacramental rites can be performed for the properly ordained members by one who is well versed in this system.

THE MAYANG KALICHA (VISNUPURIYAS) MOVEMENT

Among the Manipuris there is a community called Mayang Kalichas who are more dark skinned than the Meiteis. There are different theories about their origin and settlement in the Imphal valley. The Meiteis are experts in calling them as Kalichas according to their own habit. On the authority of Manipuri texts such as *Nongchup Haram*, *Chingurembi Khonglup*, *Khumanlol* and *Mayang Khuntholon*, the pandits opine that this group had been in Manipur since the Seventh century A.D. There are two groups among them, the one of which is Leimanai (servant of the queens) and the other Ningthoumanai (servant of the kings). The first group settled down in some *loi* (degraded) villages—Heirok, Khangabok etc. The latter lived in the villages such as Ningthoukhong Ngai-khong, Visnupur Nachou and places around the lake Loktak. They began to shift later to such new places like Nungu, Langmeidong, etc. Late M. Chandra Singh, holds that they are the descendants of the South Indian people who lived in part of Burma before the coming of Buddhism in that country although clues are not founded. M. Jhulon Singh is of the view that they have been in Manipur since the time of Maharaj Khagemba (1597-1652) as captives. At first they were *Saivas* who were later absorbed in the Meitei Vaishnava group. R.M. Nath holds that they came from Kamarupa to Manipur during the reign of King Khongtekcha in the Eighth century. They established

their headquarters at Visnupur which means a place where Visnu resides. B.C. Allen observes as follows: 'The Bishnupur in Manipuris almost form a separate caste, and are said to be the descendants of 120 Hindu families of different castes, who were brought into the valley by Garibniwaz in the latter half of the Eighteenth century to teach the indigenous inhabitants of the valley the customs of the Hindus. They intermarried with the people of the country but a time came when the Meitei or original Manipuri race, came to the conclusion that the new comers were of inferior stock, and are now regarded with a certain measure of contempt. Both parties style themselves Kshatriyas and in Manipur intermarry with one another. In the Surma Valley the distinction is more rigidly observed and intermarriage is not gradually allowed.' According to Manipuri tradition, they were of Western *sudra* (inferior) stock, their ancestors having migrated from their original habitat to Manipur in the 17th century and subsequently to the later periods.

As distinguished from the Meiteis it has acquired some independent customs: (I) condemning the Meiteis as Kuki-Chin-group, (II) carrying the carpet or seat for self sitting, (III) to avoid entering the *tulsi* plant (grown in the courtyard) with shoes and (IV) non-restriction of the age limit of persons playing Krishna's role in the sacred *Rasa* dance.

No doubt the Visnupuriyas have shown their mettle in *Kirtan* singing dance, Vaishnava theology and other administrative services. Bhusneswar Thakur, a member of this community, is well known for his deep Vaishnava theological knowledge in the learned circles. In popularising Manipuri dance and editing treatises on *Rasa* dance, Guru Bipin Singh must be reckoned with. Their educational and cultural activities in Tripura are a source of inspiration not only to the Meiteis of Manipur but also to the people of north east India.

CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT AMONG TRIBALS

The beginning of the 20th century relates to the advancement of the different schools of Christianity to the unreached

region of the hills of Manipur inhabited by 29 tribes of Naga and Kuki groups. They speak various dialects of Tibeto-Burman origin. They had head hunting propensities. The nature of the country made each sub-division district, speaking dialects unknown to others. They were noted for their warlike qualities. The Kukis, a group of tribals known as Khongjai in general according to the Meiteis, came to settle in the hills of Manipur in the 19th century. They speak Kuki-chin tongue akin to those of Burmese border as do the Meiteis in the valley of Manipur. One cannot but associate this faith with the British rule and contact with the outside world. The missionary of indomitable energy was the revered William Pettigrew of Arthington Aborigines Mission of Church of England and later of American Baptist Mission. There is a valid saying that he was a powerful Scot in Meitei land for his untiring work and in view of his pioneering research in linguistics and Indology. He did much to promote educational life in the early part of the 20th century. He had learnt Manipuri from the Manipuris in Cachar and could converse with the masses very nicely. He came to Manipur on February 6, 1892, where he started schools to give tuition to the children of some Government officials. In recognition of his outstanding work the authorities appointed him as Honorary Inspector of Schools for some time.⁴

From the Manipuri groups he could gain one Purum Singh a scheduled caste from Fayeng village who had been left in Pettigrew's care by his parents. He could not carry on missionary work in the valley as there was opposition from the elites and Manipur State Darbar. The king, as the ruling authority, refused permission to preach. His friend Major Maxwell, the Political Agent, advised him to go to the areas inhabited by the Tangkhal Nagas. His stay there enabled him to compile his next volumes. He made the Tangkhul people attend his classes with presents of clothes, pictures and even lozenges. In spite of some initial failures his missionary zeal succeeded in continuing school with the support of the Political Agent. In 1918 he went to Calcutta and got married to a lady. By the time he came back to Ukhrul, the Tangkhul tribes refused to send their children to the school on the plea that they were in

danger of being converted to an alien culture of Christianity. One day a mob of tribals brandishing their spears and weapons surrounded his residence and stoned his house. He and his spouse escaped death. This act of violence succeeded only in angering the Political Agent who threatened the responsible persons connected with village administration with dire consequences. The tension was, however, normalised with students attending unhesitatingly, with better financial support and the induction of non-missionary teachers. More schools were run by the Baptist Mission to which Pettigrew belonged.

In the meantime arrangements were being made to conduct the first census in 1901-11. Pettigrew was made the Superintendent of Census in the Tangkhul area since no one else was capable of knowing the Tangkhul dialects and social conditions. He had the opportunity to visit the other hill areas. His contacts proved useful in propagating new ideas among the people. He was out to spread the gospel to the unreached populace in the remote hill areas. In 1901, 12 boys of the Pettigrew School gave their heart to Christ whom William Pettigrew worshipped. In 1907, he was instrumental in extending the authority of A.B. Mission over the Church of Ukhrul with 7 members.

Meanwhile another missionary, Mr. Watkin Roberts of the Welst Presbyterian Mission of Aijal, was invited by the Chief of Senvon village of south west Manipur hills to correct his subjects in 1910. He set up the Indo-Burma Thadou Kuki Pioneer Mission which was split later into two. He later resigned from North East India General Mission in 1928 and founded his independent church preferring his independent rule. Pettigrew was determined to do the missionary work in the south west hilly regions also by undertaking tours of Khongjang, Parbung, Kailong and Pherachand. In 1916, the headquarters of the Baptist Mission was shifted from Ukhrul to Kangpokpi in the northern part of the Manipur valley where the missionary doctors performed many medical services. It now functioned under the name of a hospital and a leper asylum. From 1917 to 1928, all the churches were under the jurisdiction of Manipur Christian Association, later under the Manipur Baptist Convention.

Another missionary called Dr. Crozur joined the Baptist Mission and worked with Pettigrew till they could not quite agree on personal and circumstantial grounds. By the time of Indian Independence a big change had taken place among the hill tribes in spite of certain setbacks. Christianity, which had been opposed, became a preferred religion. Leading people took active interest in it. A united religion gave the example for a united nation and government. And we see that this soon came to pass in the activity of the Nagas, Mizos and the Christian tribes of North Eastern India.⁵

Christianity and Kuki Rebellion (1917-19): The church movement suffered intensely during the Kuki rebellion of 1917-19. The Kuki groups in the hill areas at Manipur rose in rebellion on the issue of forced labour system adopted by the British. The movement was led by Longju village Kuki. A certain man called Chingakham Sanachaoba was the brain behind the movement and the Haokip group was under his leadership. It took more than 5000 armed men and two years to suppress the rebellion. The British controlled the situation by opening new outposts and joint military operations of the forces from Assam and Burma.⁶ The Kuki movement was a last effort to withstand the changes. The non-Christianised Kukis bitterly resented the support given to the British authority by the Christian Nagas. Like all loyal British nationals in India both Pettigrew and Crozur joined the campaigns mustering forces for the empire and enlisted the tribal people for the labour corps. W. Pettigrew joined the army as a captain. He was suitably awarded by the Maharajah's Government and the British for the meritorious services. The failure of the Kuki rebellion led to a large scale Christianization of the Tangkhul people in the north east of Manipur.

Meanwhile a church was established at Keishamthong and a separate Christian settlement made on the outskirts of Imphal with some members including the tribals, Meiteis and a Gurkha. In 1920 five Christian families moved to Thangmeiband settling on a plot of land given by the Government. Purum Singh, the first Manipuri Christian who had married a Tangkhul girl and had become a Head Master of the Ukhrul High School for many years, was one of those having moved

down from Ukhrul. The site was abandoned during the Japanese war.

There arose between 1920 and 1923 the revivalist Christian trends and there was no remarkable increase that would occur later. There was a constant enmity between the pastors and the village priests on account of the tribal belief, culture and life by the missionaries.

Developments since 1950 : Things took a different turn after 1949-50 when at that time we have the integration of Manipur within Indian Union and the birth of India as a nation. Many foreign missionaries had taken the Indian citizenship and continued their efforts. Conflicts ensued between the Christian and non-Christian on the issue of Genna and long-standing hill practices in the course of 1950 and 1951. The harassment of some Christians by the non-Christians in different hill areas caused the liberal S.D.Os/S.D.C.s to call a meeting of hill chiefs. Modern S.D.Os with modern Christian outlook decided on collecting guns, deadly weapons from the majority non-Christians. Some of the non-Christians were imprisoned and fined for causing trouble. In one earlier case, Pettigrew intervened with the authorities, securing permission for the Kuki Christians to settle on a new site only about a quarter of mile from the old village of Kaikao. It was not easy to be a Christian to have a separate Christian village on many grounds although there was no state persecution. In 1951 the Christians of Sempand, a Christian village, attempted to move back to their former village. While returning from the site where they were constructing a church building they were attacked. Three Christians were killed and 11 injured. It took some 2 or 3 years in concluding the compromise by the State authorities. The coming of foreign missions is favoured by the declared liberty of religion of the Constitution of India and removal of inner line permit system. At the time when no foreign missionaries were permitted two Roman Catholic priests, namely, Father Revalico and Father Beankey of Silesian Don Bosco came to Imphal in 1956 and started Don-Bosco School in the quarter vacated by S. Palit.⁷ Roman Catholic lines spread widely in Manipuri hills and plains. It is through educational policy that they have tremendous

success. True to the policy, the Sisters, Bishops and Fathers (Kerala Christians also) set a high standard of education to form the minds of the young and prepare them for a disciplined life. The educational results of the High Schools were high. Their tuitions were very nice in Manipur. In 1973, 1000 Catholics in Nagaland and Manipur were brought under a newly created diocese of Kohima and Imphal. The ban on the missionaries entering Manipur was lifted and new recruits from the Indians began to come in large number. After the departure of foreign missionaries evangelistic work has been carried on by the national Christian evangelists who worked 30 days a month visiting the people of the valley.

Churches of different denominations such as Roman Catholic, Seven Days Adventists, Salvation Army, American Baptist Mission, Kuki and Mizo Churches and Free Apostolic Church of Christ are found in the state. Christianity which had been the persecuted religion in a mild form, has become the official religion of the hill tribes. It has spread widely among the Meiteis of the valley and among some of the Meiteis living in Cachar in Assam. They accepted Baptism and received theological training from the Manipuris. They went out to teach and preach among the Meities from time to time. The Old and New Testament had been translated, correspondence courses had been organised in Manipur from the mid-missions, Basakandi, Cachar and Presbyterian House, Imphal. Much literature has been produced in Meitei tongue. Consequent on the preaching of the Christian Gospel some Meiteis are turning to it. They number about more than 1000 inspite of their affiliations to the church as A.B. Mission, Seven Days Adventists, etc. The Hindu orthodoxy, under the king of Manipur and the rigidity in absorbing the Hill peoples favoured the missionaries to convert the people from a low caste background such as the scheduled caste groups (the Andres, the Phayengs and the Yaithibies etc.). Their decision to accept Christianity was usually a family, community or village conversion. By doing so they thought that they would improve their social position.

Baptism among the scheduled castes (*Lois*) went on steadily forward, some additions to the churches being reported elsewhere as well as hundred of scheduled caste/degraded

groups who seek conversion on grounds of educational and economic facilities. At present young boys and girls of some *loi* villages and Kwatha (near Burma border in the south) are won to Jesus, often, and they would, in turn, convert their family members. The new converts of the Meiteis and *Lois* would settle outside the village of their kinsmen and set up a new Christian village of their own. They gave to the Church hymns of devotion in their own way. However, we have isolated cases of some Muslims being treated as Christians.

Religious tolerance prevails in Manipur. The *Apokpa Marup* revivalist group of *Sanamahi* cult did not offer stiff opposition to the work of the missionaries in hill areas. Christian churches, schools and book centres are found in the very heart of Imphal, Manipuri palace and Kangla (ancient capital). Whereas the Christians were subject to certain restrictions in the past, they were given liberty to live out their persuasion. With the abolition of the Hindu ruling authority and the appointment of P.C. Mathew, I.C.S., as Chief Commissioner it aroused the Manipuri mind for allowing toleration in religion. According to the Census of Manipur in 1971 there were 279243 Christian souls in Manipur to whom they can witness for Christ: Nagas, Kukies, scheduled castes (*Lois*) and Meiteis. They constitute 26.03 per cent of the whole population out of which they form 2.09 per cent in the Valley. Among the tribals 96 per cent are Christians.

IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY ON TRIBALS AND WEAKER SECTIONS

Christianity as a people's movement is to make a profound impact on the tribals and weaker sections of the society. Fellow Christians in U.S.A. helped them with some money which was utilised for purposes of evangelistic educational and medical work. The changes are perceptible on the following points: (1) liberation from animistic/pagan belief, (2) modern lifestyle, (3) humanitarian service, (4) literature and (5) education. Christianity has been understood in the sense of developed religion. In primitive belief the tribals tackled the activities of spirit force through elaborate

rituals, taboos, *gemmas* and customary practices. Christianity has liberated them from the power of evil spirits/satans. Converted Christian hopes that propitiation of spirits cannot control the annual cycle of nature. It gives them a new way of life with a holy and loving God working out his purposes and transforming them into a community of saints. However belief in and fear of the evil spirits is still found among the Christian tribals. Many are tempted to equate Sunday, a Christian no-work day, with the taboo or inauspicious day for normal work. Some others have adopted Biblical hymns as a substitute for traditional charms in warding off evil spirits when travelling.⁸ Despite certain conflicts, animist and Christianity alike subscribe to the question of life after death, heaven and hell and justice. It was the case with the Meitei Hindus of the plains also. Christianity is something more than the simple matter of substituting one set of taboos for another. It is a liberating force from a world-view in which they are socially and psychologically enslaved by fear of spirits. The power of the devils is found to be less than that of Jesus. Christian theology replaced animism with emphasis on one God. It has done away with anarchy of incessant inter-tribal/inter-village warfare among the tribals and provided the basis for supporting the extirpation of those feuds by the British administration. The Church organisations brought members of different villages and tribes within common structures. The hill men of Manipur as well as of north eastern India were responsive to the gospel by leaps and bounds. The missionaries were indirectly encouraged by British Political Agents in Manipur. The Manipuri Hindus under the orthodox Maharaja (and his Brahma Sabha) looked down upon the hill people by developing fantastic ideas of cleanliness. It was encouraged by the British Government. They took special care in avoiding the entry into a Meitei house. Taking advantage of Meitei orthodoxy and conservatism they opened Christian missionaries with full support and created the gap between the valley and the hills. The primitive tribals resent caste stigma, big brother complex and label of Adivasi/junglee. Fear and oppressing have compelled them to embrace Christianity. The overlords and marketing agents victimised them. They resisted

much exploitation, cruel onslaughts on their land, etc. Acceptance of Christianity has helped rescue from such abuses and economic enslavement. Christianity endows them with a new sense of identity, well-being and worth. Hindu Vaishnavism has brought changes in the ritual practices of the Meities of the valley as different from the Highlanders by the 18th century. In reaction to the same, the tribals embraced Christianity some two centuries later. It accounts for the nearly four-fold increase of tribal Christian members in Manipur since 1947. The churches also aim at the penetration among the Meitei Hindus, non-Christian Kabuis through different media. A much more convincing explanation is that Christianity provided an ideology in adopting a new lifestyle in the face of the disappearing primitive religious, social and political institutions. In the earlier society no distinction is maintained between religious, social and political elements. If one is affected, all are affected. History records the ferocity of the tribal head hunting raids which were brought to an end by the British and with the coming of the Christian gospel. As per the Naga practices vital and creative energy is associated with a human head. They believed that heads, specially that of the long haired women, made crops grow better. Heads were often taken in ambush, the heads of women and children were specially taken as war trophies among them. The Meiteis term it as *Lukha Thanaba*. Certain types of clothing and ornaments could be worn by men who had taken a head, and a young warrior who took many heads was held in high esteem and had an advantage over others in attracting girls. "No heads, no wife", so goes the saying. The primitive Naga until recent times had bones and skulls as trophies of war. The pillars were decorated with carvings of animal and human figures. All these were considered necessary for assuring the welfare of a family or village. But the mode of lifestyle changed from war to peace. The end to head hunting and human sacrifice brought an end to the Morung which is characteristic of Naga life. Young boys and girls used to sleep in their respective dormitories where in some cases sex laxity was displayed. They were stopped from practising this system by Christian Nagas for moral betterment. Art designs have altered. The Christian

tribals used to put on Western dress to which they were introduced by the British, no longer used weapons which they once had. In most cases they avoided the drink of rice beer and of eating unhygienic things. The Christian ceremonies and rites-de-passages in Christian communities are duly solemnised. The Christians are less appreciative to the tribal music and dances in their matters.

Humanitarian service is obviously the important agency of Christian influence which has been in the field of medicine, orphanages and relief work. It is noted earlier that William Pettigrew founded a missionary hospital and a leper's asylum at Kangpokpi in North district of Manipur by the end of first World War. Since then there has been a distinguished succession of missionary doctors who have placed before us the high tradition of medical work and service among the population as a whole. In 1954, mid-missions began medical work in Basakandi. Similarly hospitals were opened in Churachandpur and other hill areas of Manipur by other Church groups. In famine and flood relief measures the Don-Bosco centres of Imphal co-operated with the Government. Christian dispensaries in Churachandpur are always crowded with people needing medical care.

In the tribal world, religion had a close association with illness. Illness was due to the anger of deities and evil spirits. The concerned spirit had to be identified and propitiated by observance of taboos and costly sacrifices. The medicine men used to counter the Christian medical practices. There was a current practice among the Nagas of Mao Maram and Tangkhul that some descendants of Nagas caused in monthly circles stomachache to others. This was contray to Christian medical practice with due emphasis on modern medicine and equipments. The village *maibas*/priests and chiefs used to take over the work of pastors.

The impact was keenly felt in the hill areas on the langauges and literature of the tribals. The foremost thing the missionaries did was to reduce the dialects to writing in Roman characters. No hill tribe by that time had scripts. The missionaries gave them the portions of Bible versions and first books such as dictionaries and grammar for use. They

have been witnessing through the distribution of tracts and booklets; they learn songs (set to indigenous music). It provided a linguistic unity as in the case of the Tangkhul Kabuis and Kuki Sub-Division, which with many dialects they had not previously had. The Christian literature contributed to the development of tribal identity in this sense. In spite of their diversity they are discovering a common bond of kinship and communality in Christ. Christian literature production is going ahead. Translation of the Old Testament continues here under the Baptist Union.

Closely connected with the written language and reading are the questions among the tribals. The gospel portions that cannot be read is valueless; tracts distributed among the illiterate section were seeds fallen in deserts. This led to the opening of schools at the initiative and voluntary efforts of the missionaries. There were thousands of village children attending the day schools. Education at the primary and high school levels and Christianity came to be invariably associated. We have earlier noted that William Pettigrew opened schools in the valley and hill area. One of the J.B. Schools in Imphal was named after him. Many Christian schools were the non-Government and voluntary schools in the hill areas for a long time. Woman Catholic institutions consisted of high standard, strongly Catholic in standard. At the collegiate level we have such Colleges as Ukhrul Pattigrew College, Churachandpur College Lamka Christian College, Hill College Tadubi, theological seminaries etc. which had voluntary Christian origin. Some more were opened in other areas, and some of them have been taken over by the Government of Manipur since 1975.

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7. Both of them are my intimate friends. Their arrival gave rise to a good deal of criticism in the editorials of K. Kunjabihari Singh, in the Manipuri daily, *Ngasi* (now defunct).
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4

DIFFERENT PATHS OF GOD-REALISATION

The Yogic concept of living including physical health, growth of mental consciousness and ethical fervour has been the foundation of Meitei philosophical system. The ancient elders drew from their experiences the procedural disciplines for psychological improvement. The secret that teaches the same is called *punshirol* meaning the science of longevity—a concept of enjoying a full life of 100 years avoiding untimely death.¹ The wise people of yore had formulated these as aids to spiritual and cultural preservation of a high standard of health, vigour and vitality. For spiritual life they began with the body, and the awareness of every pose of the body in sleeping, sitting, eating, exercise, etc., is itself a *dharma*.

The importance of body and physical culture in their belief—the Meiteis adopt a kind of scientific analysis of human body as a means of God-realisation. *Lai Haraoba* (marry-making of gods) is but an analysis of human anatomy and its underlying scientific principles and a reduction of the scientific principles involved into 364 under the style of *Umang Laïs*. Every family of Manipur worships the highest God through *Umang Laïs* at the community/national level. They aim at union with the self-evolution and self-realisation of God by the scientific analysis of human constitution. The system does not ignore human body as it is made in the image of the Almighty. To take an instance *Lai Eshing Chaiba* (anatomical heart) is worshipped and *Laikhurembi* (tongue one

of them) is pursued. The organs and their functions are the results of dialectical self-evolution of God. The nervous system and the psychic state are the aspects of God's self-realisation.² Life, conscience and soul are better understood through their physical basis. Their beliefs have often a strong esoteric ring. We can ally them with Gorakha *panthis* who popularise the cult of the body as the first principle of God-realisation.

Jnana Yoga : The principle of wisdom and illumination is given a place in pre-Hindu thought. The nature of the absolute, soul, the distinction between the real and unreal is discussed in the form of a dialogue between the guru and disciples. The Manipuri approach in this direction is reflected in the Manipuri version of the *Gita*. The author of the *Gita* uses the term *Jnana* in a special sense as the knowledge having the connection with *karma* and *bhakti*. It is a clear illumination of consciousness and not a foggy emotion or a blurring and intoxicating romanticism and aestheticism. It represents the spiritual enlightenment of the individual by the cross-fertilization of higher knowledge of *karma* and *bhakti*. Shri Krishna gives a discourse on *Sankhya Jnana* (meaning of *maya*, psychology of mind and 24 *tatwas*) in the third chapter. In the fifth chapter His teaching is for *Brahma-jnana* in order to lead Arjuna to the knowledge of mind, self, three *gunas*, and contemplation of *Nirguna chintamani*. In this context, He dwells on the meanings of *Swadharma-Jnana* and *karma-jnana* and *dristaprajna* (ideal man). Again he enlightens the heart and mind of Arjuna in his praise of *jnanas*, namely, *maha-jnana*, *uttam-jnana* and *manasic-jnana* as parts of *karma yoga*. These knowledges have a bearing on the sense impulses and organs in a greater degree. Let it be noted that in the discussion of wisdom, no particular school was adopted solely by the author of *Gita*, but he took over from the yogic, *tantric* and indigenous sources whatever could fit in with the main purpose they have to pursue.³

An aspirant has to tread the three stages and a Guru—
(1) *maha-jnana* means the knowledge of 3 postures, 9 rooms, 11 senses, 9 doors of God, 108 joints, 61 pulse beatings and innumerable pulses. *Madhyam Chakra* (inside the navel),

Kundalini Chakra (below the navel) and *Vaksharini Chakra* are mentioned. *Kundalini Chakra* is made of *amrita*. It is a gold lotus with 4 pollens. It is the seat of *Samveda*,⁴ above it is the *Bakshrini Chakra*. The white lotus called *Kamala Dhavala* has 16 petals. *Chandra mandal* (a disc of the Moon) is situated inside the lotus. It is the temporary seat of *Parmatma* and *Paramhamsa*, the man having the vision of the one in two is called *Mahajnanin*.⁵ The two *Atmans* are in *Trivini tirtha* above the *Chandramandal- Muktabali* temple is in the middle of the *Triveni* as the seat of *prana* and *aprana*. It is the seat of *Nirakar Parabrahma Jyotirmay*. Meditation on these *Chakras* and *Tirthas* gives him the vision of *Nirguna Chintamani* in his heart and at the time of death.⁶

Uttam-Jnana : The *Gita* describes it to be of inhaling and exhaling through the *tantric* letters *Ha* (fire), *Ra* (water) and *Sa* (air) which are in born. *Madhyam Chakra* exists in the navel. It is fastened thrice by the *Shushumna* and goes upward. It is the seat of *Jiva* (about 4 finger tips). *Mahasthan* is the seat of *Parmatma* and *Paramhamsa*. Meditation on it makes the *yogi* all seeing the three worlds and realise *Divya Chakra*.⁷

Manasic-Jnana : The *Tirtha* situated between the two eyebrows is the above of *Parmatma* and *Paramhamsa* who are inseparable from one another. It is the union of mind, *Buddhi* (intellect) and 11 sense organs with God. Another *Mahasthan* is situated on the top of the head called *Muktabali* (cornea) which is the abode of the immortal God. One God is acting as the gatekeeper of this Temple and receives the soul and conducts the soul to the Almighty. Therefore, human body is but the microcosm in miniature. Meditation on it enables to process up knowledge of *Khanda Pralaya*. The relation between God and devotee is spontaneous and does not admit of any step of the cow⁸.

It will not be out of place to state a few words about *Sahaja Yoga* in conjunction with *Jnana Yoga*. There are four paths for a spiritual practitioner according to Hindu tradition; first is the path of the ant (*Pipilika marga*) where the movement is very slow and on a solid base. It is a movement through gradual preparation and progressive development.

This is called the way of *Vamadeva* in which the persons go through the cycles of birth and death over and over again. They practise yoga with deliberate effort and try to gain Salvation by overcoming all difficulties by knowledge and actions full of devotion. It is followed by the *mainous* or junior pandits in the tradition of Manipur. The second is known as *Kapil marga* (the monkey way) where there is a jump from one solid support to another but always remains anchored on a material base. The Meitei *Sadhakas* made experiments in different forms by jumping from one *sadhana* to another and from one guru to another.

The third is called the *Vihang/sahaj marga* where the consciousness flies back to its source, as is done by *Alal*, without any support. This practice is at the level of the soul and is associated with Suka, Kabir, etc. The path is meant for the separation of consciousness from the physical level so that it can be taken back to the purely consciousness, source. It leads to be catastrophic attainment of absolution. The divine sages and some of the gods in their belief follow this *marga* through direct apprehension or revelation or meditation on the great truths. They are the chosen and blessed ones. Closely connected with this is the fish way (*Meena marga*) where the consciousness moves against its usual flow through the sense organs just as the fish moves against the current towards the source of water. The bird way and fish way are one and the same method in practice. In the Upanisadic literature the last two have been described as the *Devayana marga* (path of gods) whereas the physical yogas have been mentioned as the *Pitriyana marga* (path of forefathers). But the Manipuri leaning towards physical yoga and simple forms of *Bhakti* yoga can be pronounced.

Karma Yoga : The Meiteis are aware that the world is a workshop of god where a person has to know his own genius and work with all his heart. It anticipates such scientific views as the *Gita* and Bradley's conception. If that type of activity is not rightly chosen and well carried out the person will be blasted by the cruelty of time. The Meitei saying exhorts the man to be a great actor and enjoyer. *Sinpham onaba* (wrong choice of profession) is a miswork representing the kind of

work which is wrongly pursued. It is to be avoided at all costs as if it does not contribute to the evolution of the soul.

The Manipuri text *Loina Silon* gives a programme of a particular occupation for a particular family (caste/surname). The fourth chapter of the Manipuri version of the *Gita* discusses elaborately the duties of four castes, namely, fisherman, hunter, oilman and washerman. The professional must turn to duty natural to him by birth and training (on pages 184-186 of the same text) is discussed the doctrine of *Niskama Karma Yoga*. Arjuna is taught to believe that Brahma, Narda Sringi, etc. take their birth according to their *karma* and He illustrates the same. The merit one acquires from his *karma* is just little small fragment of the smell of a flower. But the sweet scent can be enjoyed by anybody through the practice of *Kriya Yoga*/ *Niskama Karma Yoga*. The true wealth of a human being is to realise the *Parmatma* after transcending the realm of virtue and view. The text takes to criticise wrong decision and vague notion and exposes the defeats of uncultured persons. It undertakes to separate the lakes from the Ganges river, chip or shavings from the sacred sandalwood and a small piece of silk cotton tree from Vrinda Devi, bronze from the gold or jewels through *Karma Yoga*.

We also come across the idea that the world is supposed to be the field (*kshetra*) of Manipuri warriors.

Dhyan Yoga : The innumerable mss. on Yogic and *tantric Sadhana* tell us to meditate on important deities at midnight for they can be discovered by our search. It has been practised since the time of King Naothingkhong. This is proved by the passages of *Thiren Layat* said to be written by his court pandit. Suitable time is classified into morning, mid-day and evening. One requires to face towards the north and south in the mid-day; east and west in the morning and south-east and north-west in the night. It also lists the use of such flowers in the ear as *Tingthou* (a kind of sacred grass), *Uriksibi* (*vitex negundo*) and *Nongleisang* (a kind of flower, selige nella species) as invariable materials for the morning, day time and evening respectively.

We also come across three forms of praying to God which are typically Meitei. They are (1) to put the folding of two

hands on the crown of the head with closed eyes; (2) to place the ten fingers facing each other on the back and raise the tips of fingers towards the neck and (3) to stretch palms on the back and place near the lower part of the heart with the breathing of *Ha*, *Ra* and *Sa* in the right and left nostrils.⁹ Meditation on the presiding deities of different parts of human body has also been prescribed. We are to do in a Vaishnavite text called *Ahnic puja* that a devoted Vaishnava should absorb in the notion of Vishnu and should divert his mind of all external things so that he can have the vision of god after death. There is also a semi-private apartment or institution namely *Ahnic Loisang* where the Vaishnava kings meditate on the Vishnu in the form of Govindaji. A *sadhak* has to put his thumb on the four fingers, join the thumb and the forefinger and finally the thumb itself is left. By fixing mind he can see the *murti* of God *Sanamahi* (Sun-God) in a portion between the two eye-brows. He can try to see the image of any deity in the dew drop reflecting the dazzling in emanating the rays of the sun. God will be seen as light or colour and then as his own body, if he is kind to the *sadhak*. With the help of *sadhana* and *mantras* the Meiteis attain rapport with deities such as *Sanamahi*, *Pakhangba* and *Leimarel*. When the process of seeing the Lord and his grace is felt, he will possess powers. The description of various deities as given in the sacred lore appear before the realised soul called *gurus* and *maichous/Shidabung*.

Notable amongst the mystical forms and communion with God besides the above references are those of physicians and the *maibis* (priestesses). The deities in the mystic eyes are of the nature of supreme silence, voices coming from *Uchinao* (a kind of bird), *Sendrang* (sparrow), sound of diving something into water and sound of wind blowing can be heard at the time of *sadhana*. Its effect on the physician or the worshipper is that eyes let drops of tears, voice becomes choked with emotion and gratitude. *Sagok Lamlel* says that God cannot be directly seen, the true identity can't be visualised in contemplation in this iron age although *Inil* (sound) can be heard. But the ancient mystics claimed to have realised God and all the five souls directly by their mystic experiences.

There were many things that are seen with their physical eyes and not with the ordinary eyes of this age.

Of peculiar mystical interest in Meitei belief is the relation of a married female *maibi* with the *lai* (deity) by whom she is possessed. Her husband must be familiar enough with the *tillam* (formulae) of the concerned deity in matters relating to her character and sleep. The *lai* visits the *maibi* on particular nights of the month when she sleeps alone. The *lai* may approach her in human form, or in the form of an animal. *Kaubru* assumes the form of an elephant, *Marjing* a horse and *Sanamahi*, a bull. The *maibi* will feel the actual sensation of copulation at this time. This is also the case of those *maibis* who are possessed by a female *lai* (goddess). The *lai* may visit the *maibi* while in her menstruation but no sensation of intercourse occurs at such times. Should she bear a child by her husband the *lai* is likely to become angry. She has no affection for her child and at times neglects it. Her husband must realise the position in which she is placed.

The *lai* possesses the *maibi* also while she is awake causing her to transcend all bounds of normal conviction. On the *lai*'s leaving her, she comes back to senses. The *lai* also remains in her in the form of a snake or a lump or ball (*matum*) in the stomach. Should the *maibi* become angry the sensations become acute. To cure the pain they resort to a kind of massaging called as *Puk Suba*.

In another book it is said that the Almighty resides in the air, he is enveloped by air. One can realise Him at the centre of the forehead by closing the physical eye and by the help of eye in *Lumlangthel* (a place below the navel). Proceeding further it says—All shades of colour say, green, red, black, etc. will come from the left shoulder and enter the right one. They will be followed by the bright black colour with the bright colour in the centre which is similar to the feather of a peacock. It is analogous to the drops of water in the lotus leaf or the falling of mercury on the ground. God has been variously described as the colour of *Nongthou* (sky blue), and *Murei Sangdanaba* (dark-greenish colour).

The Manipuri *Sadhakas* give also some other familiar

symbols for *dhyana* or meditation such as the conch, the flute, the sword, etc.

Bhakti Yoga-Manipur had too much of emotional impulse even in early times. Islam in the 17th century has nothing to do with the people. They had absorbed *bhakti* ideas when they became aware of different Vaishnava schools such as Ramandi, Nimbarkism and Vaishnavism of Caitanya. Manipur's culture and religions were moulded largely by *Bhakti* path. Personalities who rose to the heights of Vaishnava mysticism are many. It has produced god-intoxicated devotees, such as Rajarsi Bhagyachandra, Princess Sija-Lairoibi, and other devotees who had mystic union with Sri Krishna since the introduction of Bengal Vaishnavism by Maharaj Bhagyachandra in the 18th century.

The Manipuris were remarkable not only for their devotion to *Bhakti*, but also for their practice of Vaishnava dances, music and other methods. The Vaishnava kings compelled their subjects in Manipur to cultivate the concepts such as nine modes constituting *Bhakti* which lead to supreme beauty, *Sarnagati* (taking refuge in god), *Prapatti* (throwing oneself on god), *Prem* (universal love) and the number of *rasas* (sentiments).

In Manipur the power of the divine name was developed into a powerful creed. Unlike the earlier pre-Vaishnavite practice, we find millions of dedicated souls uttering the names of Vaishnava gods with feelings of home at all hours of the day in prosperity, adversity, in times of happiness and misfortune, in festivals or at the time of birth and unexpected happenings. The Manipuri Vaishnavas say *Jay Krishna* before starting any work. They utter *He Radhe*, *He Krishna* whenever they seem to have fostered or expressed contempt or mockery for any person. Oath taking in the name of Vishnu or Krishna are binding on them. Vaishnava aesthetics as found in Manipur have acquired worldwide fame through the blessings of Rabindranath Tagore.

The intoxicated Vaishnavas especially the realised ones practise and take into *Sadhana* like the *Sakhis*, *Manjaris*, etc. as a means of god-realisation. The *lila* of Radha and Krishna in the eight divisions of day and night, *Sakhis* and *Manjaris*,

their age, complexion, colour, garment, nature of service as developed in the texts of Bengal Vaishnavism are remembered by them in their contemplative hour. The influence is exerted by the emotions felt in the *Siddha deha* on the physical body of the *Sadhak* in time of enjoying *Rasa lila* and *Sankirtan*.

References to *Bhakti* are profusely scattered in the lore of God *Sanamahi* and early *puranas* for it is incumbent upon every Meitei to adore Him daily. To the Manipuri Vaishnavas *bhakti* path is a true and authentic echo of their worship of god through the *parakiya rasa* of *Laiharao* (merry-making of gods), by a hymn or song (sung when calling in the soul of human beings) they meant what the *Sastras* describe as self-surrender.¹⁰ A lyrical song suggests the comparison of the *Jiva* with a female bird. It runs thus : The forlorn female bird not knowing the whereabouts of the male bird, pathetically sings : "Oh those beloved youth ! those the sons of my mother-in-law, You are the precious ones which cannot be parted with, come flying from the golden cave of the hill." Like the Vedantic ideology the two birds *Chekla* (Male bird), *Pombi* (female bird) of the same tree and nest are spoken here as husband and wife. The male bird being at liberty, flew away and the domesticated female bird returned to her cage. The forlorn and dependent female bird is unable to bear the separation and cherished the thought of his flying from the golden nest in the hills. The idea behind it is: "may all livings beings consider their homes to be golden home (as precious as gold). However if one is dressed by love, it is but natural for him to have his golden home. Therefore she said, 'come soon', 'come soon'."

Spiritual purport—*Parmatma* is here spoken of as the free male bird while the *Jivatman* is spoken of as the female bird which is caught and bound by the world. The song finds them in the form of two birds resting on the tree which is in the form of human body. If the *Jiva* worships *Bhagavan* thinking itself to be his sweetheart then the Lord will not abandon this darling. The same idea is effected in the above song.¹¹ Luwang Guru Punshiba is an example of *Swarnagat* in our thought.

In this context, it is necessary to remember that *Bhakti* is intimately associated with *Thougalon* (court manners and

language) to be shown to the rulers and the nobles of the State. The people attending the court have a well developed concept of *maryada* (dignity), polite vocabulary, adherence to some words of the Vaishnavas. *Thogalon* created a bar between the gurus and the disciples. It gave rise to a sense of feeling in the general public about God, and that the ruler was his representative on earth. Its rulers permitted the *Rajkumars* (princes) to kill one another with polite words and respect in their life.¹²

Bhakti marga is considered to protect the human nature against ghastly evils of injustice, immorality and falsehood. The fruits coming from it are thought to be greater than those secured with great difficulty through *Chingkherol*, *Swar Sanaba* (*pranyam*), etc.

The *Bhakti* path, so patiently nursed by the kings, received a check from the changes and modern secularism. The impact on the Manipuris has been intensified on account of the activities of the Saint Vijaykrishna Goswami of Dacca (a powerful exponent of Brahmoism and Caitanyanism) and of Hare Krishna movement of A.C. Bhakti Vedanta. The current of thought released by them on modern lives is propagated by this group at present.¹³

The Meiteis are the followers of *Bhakti marga* and its forms. It has charmed the devotees and villagers, literate and illiterate, higher classes or lower castes. None by reason of caste, sex and creed was denied the gift of god-realisation. Vaishnava mysticism has become the common property of the Meiteis through different methods such as religious discourses, association of holy *sankirtan* in the ceremonies, plays, dramas and taking of *Bhek* (to put on the garb of a mendicant nun and to join the *Vairagi* order with their consent at the time of death). They perform *karma yoga* also in any form which appears in the nation's history. *Bhakti* has to be supplemented by *shradha*, *karma* and *jnana*. Like Hanuman or Arjuna they do not hesitate to sacrifice their lives in order to regain universal love, right for freedom, co-existence and universal friendship.

Mantra Yoga : To convey a great thought with a few words has also been a feature of the Meiteis. The device of the seed

mantra for the common people for attaining divine glory in a shortcut way is familiar with them. The substitute of a letter to represent as deity is to be found in the sacred *puyas*. They are void (*sunya/zero*) and the first latter *Ka* represents the Eternal Almighty. Besides *Ka*, the local name 'Anjee' or the peculiarly shaped Indian mystic symbol of 'Om' having 7 for its main body and sometimes with numerous dots round the figure (never above the *Nada Vind*) represents the form of *Pakhangba*. The worship of *Kha* for *Atiya Sidava* and *Gha* for earth goddess, etc., had its place.¹⁴

Meitei *puyas* abound with the *Laiwas/mantras*, often to the extent of remaining inscrutable. No distinction is drawn between the *Laiwas/mantras* and the prayers in their mind. The *Sadhakas* easily select Manipuri or Sanskrit or any language for this purpose. Like the *Laiwa/Tinwa* all forms of prayer are connected with the eternal and the determined sounds and systematic study under the guidance of a guru. The *maichous* (court pandits) composed the hymns and lores in order to portray god according to the changing concepts of time. As in the case of the rest of India we find three forms of approach for understanding the deities thus—(i) to dedicate in a poetic manner the nature, greatness and glory of deity. Under this category come the hymns and short inspired utterances addressed to the *Mapu* (Guru, the immortal), Sun, stars, etc., (ii) to expiate on His varied glory by several significant attributes in the form of manifold names. Under this category come *Mingourols* (account of names), *Naoyoms* (womb), *Khongun* (footprint) and *Laihuis* (origin and personality of god) such as *Sanamahi Laihui*, *Leimarel Mingkheirrol*, *Pakhangba Naoyom*, *Panthoibi Khongun*, etc. Stories of certain deities being more efficacious than others had been circulated by the priests and followers of the cult with a view to attracting more supporters. Connected with it are the different *tengtharols* (*Arati* or song by waving a light), and *Neherol* (incantations) of different gods such as fire, sun, etc. The *puranas* such as *Sanamahi Laihui*, *Pakhangba Laihui*, *Leimarel Naoyom*, etc., give preference to the deity in particular. He or she is declared to be the supreme God in that text. (iii) Lastly to invoke His grace and succour by the utterance of only one name of His. Under this

come the repetition of a single name, such as Hari, Krishna, Ram or Govinda in the Vaishnava period (18th century A.D.).

In the hymns we find them worshipping *Sanamahi* with the seed *mantra* *R.*, *Pakhangba* with *S*, and *Leimarel* (earth goddess) with *H*. (*R* in another context of *Leimarel Sekding*). Each *mantra* stands for a particular *lai* which stands for the boons the aspirant craves for being conferred upon him or her. In spite of apparent absence of literal meaning, the *mantras* (local, Sanskritic or Buddhistic) have symbolical significances to the aspirants who practise them.

When we look into the function of the incantations in the life of the Meiteis we are struck by the immense popularity of this practice among the Manipuris.¹⁶ Their stories are well-known in the history of Manipur. We have instances where the practitioners of *Laiwas*/incantations had flourished in this century during the British regime. Chingakham Sanachaoba, the ring leader of Kuki rebellion in Mombi area in December 1917, is supposed to be a great occultist. The Haokip of Mombi were under him against the British. They believed him to be a scion of the old ruling branch of the royal family as the name *Sana*, meaning golden, a title of any descendant of the royal house in Manipur. He could ride the spirits such as *Leimarel Apoiba* and *Sanamahi Apoiba* and the tigers through his incantations. The Political Agent got the report that he gained influence over the Kukis by allowing them to fire at close range at a pig, which escaped unharmed—probably a variation of the old ballet conjuring trick, which Haodin played on the Arabs. He was a rare genius with *tantric* powers. Taking advantage of German war he exerted his influence on the Kukis against the British. He wanted to make himself the king for some time with the help of the tribals.

Ningthou Semba in 1934 and *Lainingba* of *Thanga* in 1951, a class of *sadhus* claiming themselves to be kings or superhuman ones and initiating the villagers in their new theories, had been in existence in the island of *Thanga* (in Loktak lake) of Manipur South) during the time of Maharaja Churachand and even later in the time of his son. They have been termed

as *Lai Ningba/Sadhus*. In course of their investigation it was clear that they formed a conspiracy against the rulers and were found guilty of causing disturbance in Manipur religion and administration by their black magic. R.K. Sanachaoba, Y. Selungba, Thouba Hanjaba and Madhob were arrested by the Maharaja and punished according to law. In 1952, under the orders of the Maharaja, the *Lai Ningbas* of Thanga were sent to the jail, while three of them were killed in police firing since they being a menace to the state for burning up 34 houses and attacking their family members.¹⁶ In the opinion of the Government these people were inspired by Irabot, the famous reformer of this time.

Doctrines such as *Bhut Sanaba*, *Heloi Sanaba*, *Brahma Sanaba*, and *Lai Sanaba* have been promulgated by the vicious gurus or *maibas* of the *Tantric* school. They are branded as being immoral practice in the name of sound religion. Black magic in the form of *Swar Satpa* (taking away one's breathing) and *Kapsanava* (sorcery) are far more common even to-day than is supposed, though human sacrifices, etc., have been abandoned in fear of the strong armed law. Even now the political magnates and the famous persons implore the *tantrics* with the offerings of money and valuables to conduct incantational prayers for the opponent's defeat and their victory.

Yantra Yoga: Importance of *yantras* (ritual diagrams/designs) is recognised by both the pre-Vaishnavite and Vaishnavite *tantras* of Manipur with a particular aim in view and with a desire to achieve certain things. Symbolic forms of divine power are constituted by the scientific distribution of letter, mathematical numbers and syllables of incantations. They are constructed by projecting points into various lines, triangles, circles, *Palandabi* (*Chakra* having 6 petals) snake forms, sometimes explaining the evolution of cosmic process and sometimes representing Meitei gods such as *Sanamahi*, *Pakhangba*, *Leimarel*, *Lan Leima* (goddess of wealth) and certain Hindu gods which are always drawn during the auspicious times with the burning of incense. There are *yantras* which must be prepared on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday according to *Yantralon* (a Manipuri treatise

written in the 19th century). The intended deities are thought to come down for the benefit of the worshippers. Manipuri scholars mention different forms of *yantras*, mode of preparing and using them in the *puranas* with symbolic significance. It is surprising to find that *paphal* forms of *Pakhangba* have been created on *tantric* and local models.

We find 364 designs of *Pakhangba* (Snake-god) motifs representation known as *Paphals*. The divine snake is drawn in the form of various animals, viz., tiger, dragon, duck, cat, etc. Some forms symbolise evil and some auspicious under Kangla; there are underground tunnels relative to the coils of *Pakhangba*. There were spots for royal court, execution, *puja*, etc. according to the coiling pattern of the tunnels. We have a sacred dance form in which a dancer with a sword or a spear executes on the symbolic head of God *Pakhangba*. It is associated with the first step of creation, prayers and media of communication of different forms of the country. The particular spots in the diagram represent certain areas of snake-god, *Pakhangba*. The symbol of snake was used for the royal flag and state emblem till 1949.¹⁷

The *yantras* are drawn in the leaves of *Thamang* (*Bhurja Patra*/Birch bark leaf), *Wapram* (thin paper prepared from the bamboo), etc., with the addition of one of these things such as—the *Chagem* (broken rice) ink of *Sangoi hidak* (*dhatura*) leaves, *karbir* (oleander) and certain elements of the horn of cows/bulls, mother's garment, a piece of *Ningthou Phi* cloth (Royal Cloth), lace obtained from the plum tree and black thread. The proper places of wearing the copper, silver and gold *kavacha*/talisman are the neck, waist, arm and the tuft of hair on the head. Such method of using *Yantras*/amulets against evil eye is one of the striking products of their mind.

From the above discussion it is known that the classification of the *Yogas* is not based on any scientific basis. It is based on a superficial basis since *Karma-Yoga* overlaps *Bhakti-Yoga*, *Jnana-Yoga* overlaps *Mantra-Yoga* and so on. The established fields and branches of their concept of *Yoga* which cover the above are : *Hatha-Yoga* (science of hard life and health, postures and family life), *Raja-Yoga* (*Dhyana*, concen-

tration and meditation including *mantra*, *yantra* and *tantra*), *Jnana-Yoga* (science of acquiring knowledge through *yama*, *Niyama*, etc.), *Karma-Yoga* (performance of duty and action) and *Bhakti-Yoga* (sublime devotion, its forms and elements). The life of perfection and spiritual attainments of a person are relative to the practice of higher types of *Yoga* whereas vicious and imperfect lives are the results of black magic and sorcery. It is possible to realise the immanent God and His presence in human beings by resorting to spiritual exercises and adhering to scriptural injunctions.

All *Yoga* is only the means, never the end of *Sadhana*. The Meiteis have accepted it as initial steps for god-realisation and cosmic-realisation. Though necessary, they should not confound it with the realisation itself according to the Manipuri Vaishnavas. *Yoga* to the Manipuris was never a negative way of withdrawal, but also cosmic-realisation through *Bhakti*, *Karma*, *Jnana* and allied threads and an art of integration of life at all levels.

REFERENCES

1. The point is touched in mss. such as *Haklon* (science of physical body), *Pombilon* (physiology), *Yellon* (health) and *Hakchang Sajel Laiwa* (physical exercise), etc.
2. The interpretation is given by H. Kulabidhu in a magazine called *Kanglei Pung Mayol*, published in 1959 : Cf—Chapter V Section D in connection with the problem of Evil.
3. R.K. Sanahal Singh, B.Com. (ed), *Meiteilon Aribagi Srimad Bhagavat Gita*, Imphal, 1973, pp. 76-108, 157-176.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 200-202.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 212-214
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 218-223.
9. N. Ibochouba Singh, Pandit, (ed). *Thirel Layat*, Imphal, 1981, pp. 22, 27-29.
10. Cited to me by N. Tomba Singh, a noted translator of Vaishnava holy texts (*Lairik Haiba*) who have some books to his credit.
11. Pandit Raj Atombapu Sarma, *Manipur Sanatan Dharma*. Imphal 1952, pp. 23-27; Supra Chapter I Sec. II of this thesis.

12. Raj Kumar Sanahal Guneswar, *Manipur Shri Govinda Nirupan*, Imphal, 1980, pp. 49-50.
13. Vide Supra Chapter III Section on the Manipuri Gaudiya Vaishnavas and ISKCON Movement. For details vide *Saint Bijoy Krishna and Brahmachari Gangananda*, published by Sri Sri Sadguru Sadhan Sangha, Calcutta, 6, 1957.
14. Mss. of Mayek Laishak Khangba may be consulted for further investigation. It is in the custody of the Pandits of Manipur.
15. In Manipur, there is a current belief that if a person is well-versed in *mantras* and *yantras*, he or she will be issueless or will not be blessed with any male child. After verification it is found to be correct to some extent.
16. CK, pp—618, 659 etc. The magical powers associated with the leaders of black magic movement in the island of Thanga (30 miles to the south-west of Imphal) in 1934 and 1952 are supported by the statements of the villagers of Thanga in the law court. The same are recorded by the President of Manipur State Darbar in his diary and reports. I have also a detailed discussion with H. Mansoljoo Singh, the noted ballad singer of Thanga village, who was involved in this movement and suffered imprisonment.
17. I found considerable material in the illustrated mss. in the possession of Pandit Ng. Kulachandra Singh and late Madhob Pandit. Also vide Infra Chapter IX in connection with Thengkou form of dance.

THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Manipuri ethics have been designated by European writers as hedonistic and pragmatic based on customs and traditions. The people living in Manipur far more resemble the clans or tribes than the ethically civilised ones. The principles governing their life are thought to have been ordained by the ruling deities through their *avatars* and *lilas* and inspired utterances of the *maibis* (priestesses). The ethical principles, with the observance of which one qualifies for a good life are: (1) Respect for the kings and the nobles, (2) Respect for parents, (3) Appeasement of ruling deities through rites which are daily, weekly and yearly, (4) Due care of *Laiphams* (abode of gods), (5) Observance of astrological festivals which may be either individual or of community. Conformity to them means virtue; violation of the same implies crime or sin which will bring the ruin of a person or the state. Hope of reward and reward of punishment by the deity or the ruler were the binding forces of morality. Some of them are in the nature of secret words which cannot be communicated to the public or family members.

DIFFERENT CONCEPTS OF A HAPPY LIFE

The Ethical Principles of Manipuri Faith are invariably connected with a happy life on earth as well as in the after death life. A happy life according to the Meiteis is to live a life

of a householder with a big family, to have male children, to practice all the virtues such as performing *Ras* dance with his son or daughter as Krishna and Radha at home and to go to Vaishnava holy places, to be in the company of the wise *sadhus* towards the evening of life. This concept is found to differ from person to person. A commoner in Manipuri society feels that two bullocks, milk cows, sufficient quantity of paddy, cultivable fields and garden are enough for him to live a life without depending on others. A prince feels that his ambition is to become a king after assuming the formal ceremony at Kangla capital. A singer or *pung* artist holds that the essence of his life consists in achieving fame as a recognised guru while alive and winning the award from the king for service of Shri Govindaji. If we take outlook on life as a whole we find that a Meitei tries to make his life a wholesome, joyous and beautiful thing worth living for and a full thing he may be proud of. He strives to put into the best possible use and benefit his physical and intellectual powers by defending the country and by living upto the ideals of culture, religion and civilization.

Different opinions have been expressed as to the value of family life and asceticism. In the Vaishnava period we have a trend praising the life of a monk while in the ancient times it is not so. The true view pertaining to the same is that the family life is the apprenticeship for a higher calling. The chronicles point out to us the divine kings (1-7 kings after *Pakhangba*) and three mortal Gurus who had lived a fruitful life of service and who have later chosen to retire into seclusion.¹

Planning Life: Individual life is planned through a period of three divisions of life:

- (1) *Nahagi Matam*,
- (2) *Yumbanba Matam*,
- (3) *Ahangi Matam*.

(1) *Nahagi Matam* (period of boyhood): It corresponds to the *Brahmacharya* stage where everyone has to receive training under expert teachers. There are proverbs telling the urgency of timely training for them. Young boys are to devote

themselves to the learning, reading and writing, physical exercises as wrestling, hockey, etc., the unmarried girls have to pass the night together and learn not only various crafts but also domestic life and social values from the elder women. He or she was to learn and practice the art of living. Instances are on the record that King Naothingkhong in his boyhood received the lessons on art, philosophy, polity etc., from the long-lived *Guru/King* of the Luwangs.

(2) *Yumbanba Matam* (householder's life): Late marriage was recommended by Manipuri society. There is a maxim that the children's children are always children. The books, way of life, attitude, etc., extol the life of a householder as superior to that of an ascetic. Those who die without entering a family life and a couple without issue are low in the social estimate. After their death the ceremony of *Chupsaba*² is performed by the relatives so that the same may not occur to them in future. The non-existence of the system of ascetic life and begging, belief in a warm family and social ties in pre-Vaishnavite period give it a historical driving force. Great importance is attached to songs and duties connected with family life in *Laiharaoba* dance. A person who has no knowledge of his parents and clan genealogy is called *Mithibong Mitambal* (worthless being) in a text called *Meiheiron Yumbiren*.

(3) *Ahangi Matam* (period of old age): It is the period where the individual retires from the active life and devotes his time to the cultivation of religious merits such as fasting, listening to the religious discourses in assemblies, to observe the religious rules. Worldly enjoyments and power are no longer his aspirations of life. There is a saying that *Pakhangba* and his successors retired to the Himalayan regions for *Vanaprastha* life. But the general people do not indulge in such practices and go beyond this stage.

The Sanyasa Asram: Renunciation was introduced in Manipur in the work of Vaishnavisation of the people. The *sanyasi* in Manipuri context is a confirmed devotee rather than a *Karma Yogi* or *Jnana Yogi*. The *Sanyas* order is joined by aged people who are above family relations, sex, etc. They are made to embrace this order on the eve of their

departure from this world. Formalities are conducted by some Brahmans and in some cases by the monks if there is a specific desire of the person on his death bed. Sometimes the monastic orders consist of childless persons, persons who have suffered such hardships as to make life a burden to them, criminals, unholy-love makers, frustrated lovers, unchaste people of lower orders; their dress is the same as of the Chaitanite monks or nuns.³

They are revered as the *Jivanmuktas* by the householders. Their presence in a Vaishnavite feast, *shradhda* ceremony or annual *kirtan* is considered to be auspicious. There is an accepted warrant of precedence for the *sanyasis* to sit in the row. The question of precedence between a monk and a Brahman can be decided by their standing, age, etc.; they are welcome to every house. At its best it represents a soul who is well versed in Vaishnava theology, sacred songs, music, art of cooking and biography.⁴

There are occasions in the pre-Vaishnavite text in which the people are said to observe fasting in the month of *Mera* (September-October.) It is an ancient practice where the people spend six days without food near the bank of a river or tank in connection with the ceremonies of their parents. The high class Meiteis and elder people of villages became votaries of Goura Dharma by the time of the 18th century. They observe the daily Hindu rites and devote time to the study and recital of sacred Hindu texts. They take only vegetarian food and observe Hindu fasts and festivals with local colouring. To them Vaishnava holy places such Nadia, Vrindavan, Puri, Varanasi are sacred places associated with the reminiscences of the great Chaitanya, the divinely inspired founder of their creed. It was a religious duty for every Meitei Vaishnava to go on a pilgrimage to these places. This they did when they earned money for the sacred duty in connection with the *shraddha*, and annual ceremony of their parents and relatives. Thus the Manipuris stand on a similar ground in the stages of life as the Hindu thought.

PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

The Manipuris would agree with any philosophy of the world in the problem of evil and sufferings of the world. The sight of bloodshed and misery during World War II moved the people very much. The moral evil is no less striking in the present society which is much more corruptive than it was 50 years ago, and vice and lawlessness are rampant. The hardships are experienced by the deities or the gods. In the *puyas* we see that the goddess of the market or the presiding deity of an area used to lament over the loss of her people.⁵ He or she shares with the people their hardships and feels with them their sorrows as we find in the Old Testament. They have also discovered that love is one of his qualities in line with the teaching of the Bible. But the Almighty is above the pleasures and pains of the world. We can talk of the suffering of God on account of His love for human beings. God is not worried as we are, but He is grieved. The Vaishnava philosophy shows the sorrow of Vishnu for His servants.⁶

The problem assumes a very great proportion in the human world. The folk songs and ancient writings in *Augri* (destructive dance in *Laiharaoba* dance) are replete with insight into miseries and pessimistic tendencies. The solar and lunar eclipses and earthquakes have been regarded as natural evils by them and so no religious and social festivals are celebrated during these times in honour of the Sun, Moon and the Earth.⁷ The people feel with their touching tongue the discarded flower *Ingellei* in bereavement. The flower is neither gathered in time nor understood by the public. It soon fell decayed and withered at the time's gnawing tooth. It remains for all immortals to lament. None despises its truth. The poet-philosophers intensely agonized for release from the bondage of body like a bird in *Laiharaoba* song. Themes for lamentation were spelt out by Urok Usha in connection with *Shraddha* ceremony.

One view is that good and evil are but the results of one's *karma*. Another view is that god is the author of evil. God has given us the highest potential that of being able to choose

the right. He made man in his image—rational being, not robot. If a person does not worship god or refuses to carry out the spiritual obligations he has to suffer the consequences as a boy who not having prepared properly for the examination cannot accuse the examiner for failure. A crop that has been properly irrigated, weeded and manured is bound to yield a bumper harvest. God never fails His devotees. Evils, according to their belief, do not come singly. They come in numbers, by twos and threes, by dozens or even by thousands. According to one view good and evil are found in mixed proportions as found in the well-known proverb: *Awa Sangbai Nunggaiba Laitung* which means the amount of sorrow is *Sangbai* (a standard basket for measuring corn) and that of joy is *Laitung* (one fourth of a *Sangbai*).

Natural calamities such as drought, flood, famine, earthquake, pest and epidemic are much frightening to the ancient mind. The history of Manipuri culture and civilisation is the history of their facing them with precaution. They make attempts to use the part of nature for other advantage. Fatalistic resignation in the face of calamity of nature's wrath has no place in the life of a Manipuri, for he is called to conquer the same. By resisting calamities, he grows. And in this he has the god's help.

They explain the origin of evil with the help of a myth. The myth says that there was no old age, disease and death in the earlier *chaks* (ages). They were invented by Poiraiton and his sister Lainaotabi in their *lilas* to teach the people that the human world is "a vale of soul making". It would not have been good for man, with a life of ease and a carefree life to live in a world in which there is no death, dearth of population, problems of life, etc.⁸ The stories inform us of two spirits of *Laingou* (good spirit) and *Laimu* (evil spirit). The conflict between good and evil spirits is also pronounced that new terms have been evolved in stories to express them. However it is not eternal since both emanate from the Almighty. Evil thoughts are connected with ghosts, unreclined spirit and hell. Adversity and the sheer necessity of working against odds, (the Burmese devastation of Manipur in 1819-1825) have developed great warriors and diplomats able to

maintain their integrity and moral fibre. Misfortune if accepted can be the promoter of culture, as we see in the story of Rajarsi Bhagyachandra and of the Gurus whose hearts responded to the noble king's vision during the confusion of Burmese invasions. So there is a lack of the idea of absolute evil. No man is absolutely evil and everyone has the possibility of being saved.

The Meiteis take a complete view of the world in all its bright and ugly aspects and like the Chinese they accept every form of human life as existing for some reason.

REFERENCES

1. (a) For details vide my papers 'Ancient Titles and Duties of Manipur' and 'Ethics of Meitei Physicians' for presentation at the sessions of A.I.G.C.
(b) N. Angow ; *Pakhanga Nongkarole*, Imphal, 1983, pp. 1-40.
2. This is further evidence for the Meiteis' assertion that all people must enter the family life. The worship is addressed to the Sun-God.
3. The Chaitanite monk life had this influence on the Meiteis during the Vaishnava times.
4. Great joy filled the heart of the pious or the host as he feeds the learned and good natured *Brahmans* and the *Vaishnavas*.
5. It is still widely believed by the Manipuri people.
6. Sri Krisna is said to appear before the *Bhaktas* in dream and taught the different methods for overcoming their worries and problems. For details vide my paper (*Mysticism in Manipuri Thought*) a paper read at I.P.C. Session in 1982.
7. Information revealed by Ng. Kulachandra Pandit, an authority on the *puranic* lore of the Meiteis.
8. Late H. Mani Singh, Pandit, *Ngamdoi Leitai, Langdai Puyo Meihoubo*, Part I, Imphal, 1960, pp. 69-73.

6

MANIPURI BELIEF AND INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS

Manipuri belief and the *Gita* : The Meitei people accepted the ideals of the *Gita* in their life after accepting Vaishnavism of Bengal. The pre-Vaishnavite thought also has many features in common with the teachings of the *Gita* which can be mentioned as follows :

The divine function of instructing humanity by god is an important point in both. The *Gita* says that Manu laid down the laws of spiritual life as heard from Vaivasvan (Sun) who had heard from God Himself and he communicated them to Iksaku from whom, through a succession of royal sages, the world received its philosophic wisdom. God is defined in the *Nyaya Kusumanjali* as the first preceptor or teacher. In Manipuri belief god is called *Guru Sidaba* the immortal preceptor or most excellent Guru. His teachings are said to be revealed through a succession of mortal Gurus and scholars well versed in the lore. But direct revelation by the Godhead in the first person is unique in the *Gita* text only. In Meitei texts it is the Gurus and scholars who convey to the disciples the word of god. The Gurus propounded a philosophy in which the tenets of the *Gita* were presented in a language familiar to the Meitei mind in *Sagok Lamlel* and *Pombi Lang*. We find in Meitei thought that the Guru is not so far removed from the pupil as the Krishna is from Arjuna. However the ideal *Guru-Sisya* relationship as found in the *Gita* is similar to that of Meitei tradition.

The spiritual message of the *Gita* in connection with the purpose of incarnation needs no introduction. In Meitei thought also we find that they believe in a Supreme Being who comes down from time to time in the form of man, snake, bird, etc. for helping humanity in realising highest virtues and glories. The manner of taking forms by such gods as *Sanamahi*, *Pakhangba*, *Nongpokningthou*, *Phaoibi* (corn deity), *Panthoibi* (*Devi*) and their exploits are the same as the *Gita's* incarnation and of the *Bhagavata*. The people by listening to the glories of the deities (*Umang Lais*) and works derive immense satisfaction and imbibe their virtues. Some of the sylvan deities were men with divine achievements and therefore an ascent of humanity into the divinity. By worshipping their spirits after the death (*Khagemba*, *Naothingkhong*, *Lai Panganba*, *Panthoibi*, etc.), they are apt to worship god through His human representations. The cult of the *Umanglais* in *Lai Haraoba* dance and ritual is best expressed in the *Gita* idea of incarnation.¹

The Meitei concept of incarnation is more allied to the teaching of *Bhagavata* than that of the *Gita*. The *Gita* mentions many *avatars* while the *Bhagavata Purana* limits it to 22 incarnations of Lord Vishnu. The *Bhagavata* repeatedly points out that the *avatars* are not only for destroying the evil forces but also for teaching the mortals wisdom for the ages. In a similar fashion the Meitei *avatars* have taught and given right perspectives and directions to human beings. They do not place the *Sanyasis* or mendicants above law, duty and effort. It clearly enjoins a perfect Guru or every nearly perfect one for working for the welfare and progress of mankind. He is great only in proportion to the services he renders to the people and the State. The Meitei system believes in the existence of God as expressed in the following forms : (i) Highest mind, (ii) Highest instinct and (iii) Highest good. Every home worships the Highest mind as *Yumlai*. At the community or national level they worship the Highest instinct and Highest good as *Umang lais* (forest gods).

The 16th chapter of the *Gita* describes in detail the nature of gods (*Daivi*) and those of the demons (*Asuras* and *Raksasas*). Of these, the former is to be followed for

liberation and the latter must be rejected as they lead to bondage. The theme is akin to the stories of *Sanarembi* and *Chaisra* (the great tortoise in Burmese folk tales) and of *Khamba* and *Thoibi* (in the epics of Moirang), *Daivi-Sampad* is personified in the characters of *Sanarembi* and *Khamba* while *Asuri Sampad* is personified in that of *Chaisra* and *Nongbal* of our stories and epics.²

Vishnu or Krishna of the *Gita* is a warrior with four weapons. But the Manipuris pay proper attention to the concept of Krishna as the deity of *Rasa* (dance or *kirtan*). The *Gita's* Krishna far surpasses and supersedes the mere role of an adviser. He gave Arjuna the vision of godhead. Arjuna felt the impact of the divine (*Virat Purusa*). The same theme is akin to what *Guru Sidava* is said to have shown to god *Sanamahi* where the latter attacked his younger brother *Pakhangba* in an angry mood.³

The theory of immortality of soul and *samaskara* of previous birth are more or less common to both teachings. That the soul survives the body is expressed in a saying (*Sibasi hakchang porang sindokpani*—Death means the change of body of the basket). While in the *Gita* we have a visualisation of attaining salvation through several births (to be born in a favoured family for final enlightenment), we have in Meitei belief the possibility of attaining salvation in the present life also.

The blessed lord has given the marks of a *Sthita Prajna* to Arjuna in the *Gita*. It is one who puts away all the desires of his mind and heart and is pleased by himself. He is not troubled in the midst of worldly sorrows and miseries and is free from greed, desire and wrath. He is one who has conquered the lower self and has attained the claim of self-mastery, i.e., tranquillity. The same description is given to King Naothingkhong by three mortal Gurus in a sacred institution of the palace. The author further stresses that theory and practice as identical equanimity is an ethical necessity. *Pakhangba*, the divine ancestor of kings, voices the same ideal. The Gurus of Nongdam Sanglen (palace institution) are above all complexes and approximate to the above ideal.

The propaganda of spiritual knowledge which does not

speak of the crucible of experience is mere glitter and show. It is pseudo *Vairagi* according to the language of the *Gita*. In Meitei language it is called to be a monk by day and thief by night or *Sadhu* (*Vaishnava*) *Cheng Changba* (pseudo monk).

Hindu *Gita* speaks of three *prakritis*. The Meitei philosophy speaks of five souls and one *mi* (which means the shadow cast by the moon). The functions are much the same in their respective culture. In the first *sloka* of ch. 15 of the *Gita*, *Samsara* is represented as an *Asvattha* tree having its root above and branches below, whose leaves are the metres. He who knows it knows the *Vedas*. It extols the knowledge of the Tree of *Samsara* and its root. The Meiteis regard man as the image of god. In the *Lai Haraoba* (merry-making of gods) an analysis of human anatomy and reduction of the scientific principles involved into 364 names under the style and name of *Umanglai* is discussed. The so-called concept of *Umang lais* (sylvan deities) is analogous to the *Asvattha* tree with its branches and leaves.

Penance (*tapasya*)-The *Gita* has expounded the different kinds of penance. In the story of *Soubal Lairenma*, we find that her penance and fasting made God *Ingouba* (Siva) her master-husband. The dialogue between the Gurus and the disciples in *Sagok Lamlel* is an exposition of the efficacy of penance as a method of God-realisation.⁴

The *Gita's* fundamental teaching according to popular opinion is salvation through righteousness. It has also been the ideal of Manipuri life. It is parallel to the stories of *Sanarembi* and of *Khamba* and *Nongbal*. The central teaching of the stories is seen to be that evils of lust, greed and strife (as personified by *Cheisra* and *Nongbal* can be defeated by the steady practice of virtue and that as a result life is made valuable to all.

We may refer to the catholicity of the *Gita* as it prevents no one from following the path he likes in offering worship under its inspiration. Naoriya Phulo, the founder of Apokpa Marup against the Hindu Brahmans of Manipur, points out that there is no wrong in using prayers and songs in Meitei language. God does not prevent a Meitei from reviving his old culture. His idea of *Leimarel Awangbi*

(Mahousa) and *Leimarel Haidabi* (Mahousa Lairenbi) is very much the higher and lower *prakriti* in the *Gita*. To show his assimilation of the *Gita* it is enough to refer to his theory of "Thawai Panba Pumnamaki Yaibikol Mabuthou" which is parallel to *Mam Ekay (Gita-18/66) sarva sarvasu bhutesu*.⁵

The author of the *Gita* explains the significance of *Maya*, *Avidya*, *Jogamaya* and *Vishwamaya* and makes much effort to distinguish between meanings of these terms which are also used by other Hindu schools. *Maya* is defined as a tress which leads the human intellect to reject the spiritual knowledge and thus leads man away from the path of spiritualism. The concept is seen in Manipuri belief. The child is in dialogue with the Immortal Guru in the womb of the mother before its birth and afraid of separation from god. The child complains that the human birth after ten months will result in developing a love for the physical world and takes him away from the creator. After birth the child cries as he is alone in the world.⁶

The nature of love as seen in the *Gita* shows that god is ready to receive all who go to him in humility and trust. The Manipuri faith, however, taught a peculiar kind of conjugal love which conquers death. The story of Nongbal Pombi Luwaoba and Chothe Thangmei Pakhangba drove the lesson of Savitri home that *Leinung Thongarel* (god of death) remarks that *Sati* Sanarenbi Lairourenbi and Namoinu were true and brave women. It became incumbent on him to give back the lives of their husbands, viz, Chothe Thangmai, Pakhangba and Henjunaha. The joy of God, the rejoicing of all people on the untimely dead-men's returning to life is not found in the *Gita*. But the *Gita* concept of god-soul relation is strikingly similar to that of the Meiteis. It receives much clarification and emphasis set forth in *Sagok Lamlel* and *Manipuri Gita*. The author of *Sagok* at times uses Sanskrit words such as *Laiguru*, *Muktapali*, *Hum*, *Sar Ningsa* (Breathing), *Chuda*.

Theory of three *Gunas* : Quite in tune with *Gita's* classification of three *gunas* into *Satva*, *Raja* and *Tamas*, the Meitei thought reveals the theory of three gurus—Mangang, Luwang and Khumal. The concept of *tama* is represented by Khumal

Guru in their belief in a well known saying—There is no disease caused from the sight of a python but there is a serious disease from the sight of *Laishram* (family) of Khumal clan. The Manipuri terms performed with regard to the soul and the world the same function as that performed by the three *gunas* in the *Sankhya* and *Gita*. The *Sankhya* concept of *gunas* take us also the Meitei doctrines of the *Chang* (*Chara/Rajas*) and *Si Thok* (*Tamas/sthir*). The thing of the world is divided into two *Chang* (odd number) and *Si* (even number)⁷

From the stylistic and content point of view there appears to be a great deal of similarity between the *Gita* and Manipuri texts such as the *Sagok*, *Pombi lang* and *Khununglon*. Popularity of the *Gita's* category of writing has been made since early times. Thus the *Gita* is heard everywhere. Dialogues between the teacher and the taught in the form of *Gita* are found in Meitei texts though there are no chapters in the early writings. The *Gita* is full of charming similies in matters physical, spiritual and divine and psychological, etc. The same tendencies are to be seen in Manipuri books such as *Naothingthong*, *Phambal Kaba*, *Thawanthaba*, etc. The sense of perishability of physical existence (2/22) is mentioned in *Gambhirsing Nongaba*. Knowledge overcast with *kama* (3/38) —(Apak Wayel Koubadi Papki Mapeibu Haibani)—knowledge baring both the good and bad actions of *kama* (4/37) and evil effects of a flexible mind (2/67) are emphasised in the *Gita purana* of the Meitei in archaic language.⁸

The legend/epic love story of Moirang according to the psycho-analytic and psycho-philosophic interpretations of late T. Bokul Singh, president of Meitei Marup (a sect opposed to Brahmanical Hinduism), provide the people with all the *Gita* concepts to attain spiritual realisation. Khamba, the hero of the epic, symbolises *Karma Yoga*, *Karma sannyasa yoga* and valour. Thoibi, the heroine, indicates wisdom, *Dhyan Yoga*, scientific knowledge, *Jnana Karma*, *Sanyas Yoga* and fixed mind. Nongban, the villain means pleasure accompanying thought which is Chingkhoubas Yubaraj. On the side of poor hero Khamba are his sister Khamnu (humility), Thonglen (bravery),

Chaoba (rules of good behaviour), Pheiroijamba (fences supporter of the disinterested performance of action). The statement about the central deity of epic, i.e., Thangjing being Atingkok (causal body), Tingakok (subtle body) and Atinya (physical body) means that he answers to the concept of *Dhatahang Bishwatomukha*, *Gita* 10:33. (I am the all faced Dispenser).

Moirang, the place where the episode is supposed to take place, is *Brahma*/macrocosm, a place where diversified objects are found together. Loktak, the largest lake mentioned in the epic, means the human limbs with nine doors. To say that Khamba and Thoibi promised to marry in Loktak lake after meeting in a fishing place is to say that wisdom with the help of courage can conquer the limbs of the body which represent the lake.⁹ In a text called *Aeigi Moirang* (self-identity 'I am') late T. Bokul, the president, displays what we might call a psycho-analytic interpretation of the epic of Khamba and Thoibi in a scientific manner.

Gita cuts the very roots of communal feelings. "Even there devotees through faith worship other gods with disinterested motives they too worship god along, though without proper knowledge". The Meitei tradition under its able kings admits the same idea. All were happy under them and there were no communal feelings of the religious sects in Manipur.

In chapter XV verse 13, Sri Krishna says: "Penetrating the earth I support all beings by (My) Energy; and having become the watery moon I nourish all herbs". By becoming the savoury moon he nourishes all the herbs germinating on the earth. *Soma* (the moon) is the repository of all savours. The concept of *Atiya Sidaba* as the Almighty Father (Sky) and the folk songs addressed to the moon as the god of *Rasa* on the moonlit night by the Meitei women to bless them with good children have the *Gita* analogy.

THE BHAGAVATA PURANA AND MANIPURI FAITH

The *Bhagavata* and its chapter called *Rasapanchadhya* and *Bhakti Ratnavali* are the main texts for the Manipuri Vaishnavas. The story goes that the *Bhagavata* texts were brought

from Tripura as well as Assam during the time of King Garibaniwaz.¹⁰ To the Manipuri followers of the school of Lord Caitanya and of International Society for Krishna Consciousness Movement, *Srimad Bhagavata* is still the Book par excellence, their *Veda* and their *Vedantic Upanished*.¹¹ The Manipuris swear by the name of *Bhagavata* in the law court and the learned scholars quote abundantly from the stories of the *Bhagavata* in support of their stand-points. Copies of the scripture were made on Meitei made paper. They were circulated and read in religious festivals, birthdays of kings, queens, last hour of a dying person and 10 days of uncleanness of a house on account of the death of a person. The Brahman priests were competent to read the Sanskrit verses and explained the ideas at every house or temple when the people got opportunity to learn it the recital of the same in the palace in sweet and sonorous voices used to make a religious observance lively during the reign of the Hindu kings. They made the people follow elements of *Bhakti* which finally lead to supreme beatitude.¹² In the palace the tradition of reciting by the Ratanas of *Brahma-sabha* has declined after the abolition of kingship in 1949 but still the practice of listening from the Brahman experts is very much in vogue. It is to be noted that there was no Manipuri version of the *Bhagavata* though stories from the same have been added to other books. It is surprising to us that the varieties of *Rasa Lila* are based on the episodes of the *Bhagavata*. Some Meitei translators have evolved a vocabulary and style of their own which have helped to win them a wide audience. The translators refer in many places to Sri Dhar Swami, Viswanath Chakravartee and not the spurious ones of the Kashi School. In their estimate the *Bhagavata* is an ocean where both shells and pearls lie together.

I now proceed to prove that the Meitei thought is in agreement with the religious, social and political ideas of the *Bhagavata*.

Everything as the manifestation of Lord Krishna, the doctrine of *avatara*, *lila*, etc. are found in both. The superiority of the method of *Bhakti*, *Shakti* as disinterested love, the enormous struggle which the devotee has with temptations

(anger, passion, covetousness, delusions, pride), *Bhakti* as surging emotion as different from the *Gita* and curse as a strategy are the main themes of the *Bhagavata*. In it the attitude of the *bhaktas* to god stands out more prominently and is developed more fully than in any texts in India. The Manipuri singers, religious Gurus and reciters of lyrics used to spread this message. The people were imbued with love for Krishna for His miracles. Princess Sija-Lairoibi always regarded herself as a spouse of Lord Govindaji. The themes of *Rasa Lila* convey the idea that the *gopis* regarded themselves as the brides of god. King Jai Sinha preferred the extravagant rapture of *bhakti* of the *Bhagavata* to the sober devotion of the *Gita*.¹³ The exploits of Krishna as a boy are foremost features which charm the Manipuris.

The *Bhagavata* mentions six enemies of spiritual life of a human being; they are *Kama* (sexual passion), *Krodha* (anger), *Lobha* (covetousness), *Moha* (delusions of mind), *Matta* (pride) and *Aisarya* (malice). The deadly enemies of human character are taught in *Sagok* verse 166 as well as in the treatise of *Yumbanlon* and *Leisemlon*. In the inner and psychological meaning these enemies are compared to six cliffs to be overcome by Khamba in his attempt to pluck the flower of the insight into the nature of things. In the ceremonial flower offering ceremony of Lord Thangjing, Khamba is induced by his companion to go into the interior of jungle and cross six lofty ranges which were full of flowers with sweet smell, dignity and good look.¹⁴

The teachings of the *Bhagavata* such as self-control, ideal of *Grahashta* life, the value of prayer, fast and religious festivals, democratic ideas of equality, fraternity and selfless love are much cultivated by the Meiteis. But the Manipuris do not follow the social traditions and ways which follow from *Bhagavata* cult. Devoted to the feudal rule under the kings and the British they observed the order based on caste and inequalities. Some monks assume the form of *gopi* by wearing the Zhuli begging bowl, stick and cannot become equal to each other in their earthly life.¹⁵

The destruction of the world at every *chak* (age), the description of the mundane egg, *Prakriti* and the

story of floods before the creation of the Universe are common to the *Bhagavata* and Manipuri belief as culled from the *puyas*. In the *Vedas* the whole universe is described as an egg. In Egyptian and Meitei myths the egg contained the bird or god of light. *Pakhangba* who is no other than *Guru Sidaba* himself when broke forth from the cosmic egg which was composed of fire, water and wind, had a disc of light and was spreading seven brilliant colours like those of rainbow.¹⁶

The stories of *Leithak Leikharol* written in the 17th century bear the manifold touch of *Bhagavata* stories. To cite them : In the *Bhagavata* it is said that Brahma who created this world at the bidding of god, took a new form later. His discarded body became clouds. The *Leithak Leikharol* informs us that *Asiba* (the god who created the universe by order of the immortal Guru) relinquished his body after completing the world and took a new body. Different parts of discarded body became different earthly things. His teeth became iron, bones stones, his brain zinc, etc.

In the *Bhagavata* we are informed that Brahma found that the world was never full of living beings inspite of his creating specific living beings. So he divided his body into two, left and right. From the right hand half there sprang forth Swayambhu Manu and from the left hand half Satarupa (Swayambhu Manu's queen). As a result of their interaction the world became full of living beings. We find in *Leithak Leikharol* that the primeval halo, the seed of the universe broke up into two : from his right hand portion sprang the king of gods, from his left hand portion, his queen. They germinated. Germination may be construed in the sense of reproduction.

In many pages of the *Bhagavata* we are told that the sons of Brahma were born full grown from different parts of Brahma. In *Leithak Leikharol* as well as in some *puyas* we notice full-grown birth or a sexual birth was possible. The goddess of lightning was born full grown from the eye of the Lord of the Universe. Some of the gods in Meitei belief like *Leiphurel Namungbi*, *Sinleima* and *Thangjing* were asexual in their birth. They had either the father or the mother, but not both. Such types are called *Chingu Nongdamba* in Meitei *purana*. Some gods such as *Lai Ishing Chaiba*, *Luwang Khunthiba*, *Chanhi*

Leirong Apanba, etc., were born after 10 months' conception in the womb of mothers. The trend is shown in the birth of most of the gods in *Bhagavata*¹⁷ We come to the unique feature of *Bhagavata* presentation of Vishnu as Kshiroda, Karnataka and Garvodha Sais, analogous to Meitei concepts of Atingkok Atinga and Nanglum.

The greatest *puranaratna* not only describes Krishna and the *gopis* but also disclose the *Bhagavata dharma*, a way of life. It condemns the purse-proud and power-madmen who go about the world. The stories awaken us from moral and spiritual torpidity. The place of Radha in Manipuri Vaishnavism is as high as in Bengal Vaishnavism where she is made to secure the highest grace through whom the Lord enjoys and realises His infinite love. The pure *Bhagavata* cult is supplimented by their references gathered from the *Gitagovinda*, *Caitanyacaritamrita* and early literature of the Meiteis. A significant episode of Pricess Sija-Lairoibi being the consort as Raseswari of Lord Govindaji in the *Rasalila* also stresses the divine character of Radha in Manipuri mind. *Rasa* is a synthesis of Vaishnavite and Meitei ideas which prevailed at the time of introduction of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Manipur in the 18th century. The existence of an active female princess has been admitted in its belief since early times.

The *Samkhya* thought as found in the epics, *Gita* and the *Bhagavata* as against the classical *Samkhya* is to be found in their belief. The *Maibas* analyse the world into 24 categories after the principle of *Samkhya*. It is diagrammatically represented in the 25 divisions of *Keiyen* (a kind of traditional playing in a diagram).¹⁸

There is a similarity between the change of the ages of the *Bhagavata* as given and of Meitei tradition respectively. It says that the earth goddess in the form of a cow gives birth to Rajarsi Bhagyachandra for the religious reformation of Manipur. There is among the Meteis a definite acknowledgement of their debt to Bhagavatism in their concept of the evils of the *Kali* age.

Both had the theory of feeding the Brahmans and the Vaishnavas for god-realisation. The grand feeding of the people called *Tarpan Chak Pijaba* in the dark fortnight of

Langvan/about September by every householder is the central *Bhagavata dharma* of the Meiteis.¹⁹

Coronation ceremony (assumption of the throne) of the kings has a close resemblance to the episode of *Rajasuya* sacrifice of the *Bhagavata dharma*. Like the expedition the Meiteis observed *Phambal lal* in which a king on the eve of his assumption of a royal name has to go to the excursion for showing his valour. His valour or exploit in the war is sufficient to earn for him a title in the coronation ceremony.²⁰

Some of the Meitei books (*puyas*) such as *Lamdai*, *Ngamdai Puya Meihouba*, *Pudll*, *Leithak*, *Leikharol*, etc. were written after the model of the *Bhagavata*. The churning of the ocean is given in the inner and psychological sense in Meitei belief. The manifestation of the *Jiva*, earth, etc., takes place in the mind of Almighty in these accounts.

Man as the last creation is the crown of creation in Meitei thought. Human birth is to take place after the Almighty has taken three births. As in our faith, man and divinity appear simultaneously in the *Bhagavata* tradition. The universe is created in the *Satya* age. We can take the Meitei thought of *Upasana* of Almighty and of man to the point nearest to *Bhagavatism*.²¹

Manipuri thought (both in pre-Vaishnava and Vaishnava times) is full of parallels in superstitions and customs; at every stage we come across such beliefs as auspicious timings, not cutting one's nail and hair on *ekadashi*, one's birthday, sleeping with head towards the north, world of heaven, hell., Most of them are highly Bhagavataite thoughts.

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3. Vide my paper 'Pre-Vaishnava System of Manipur' presented at the History Seminar held at Jawaharlal Nehru University Centre of Post-Graduate Studies, Canchipur in 1975.
4. Points collected from the story of *Soubon Loirenbi*.
5. Late N. Phulo, founder of *Apokpa Marup* in Cachar, has advanced

- the theme in his numerous works such as *Meitei Hourakpham Wari* (story of origin of the Meiteis), *Aeigi Wareng* (my stand point), *Ahang Yathang* (voice of elderly people).
6. The widely accepted lore associated with the midwives of the Meiteis whose functions are similar to those of nurses, paediatrics and philosophers.
 7. Dr. Y. Bhagya Singh's speech on the early religion of the Meiteis published in the Sahitya Parisad collection, 1963; the concepts in their Manipuri, all are developed by Panditraj Atombapu Sarma, Kh. Yaima, Pandit of Govindaji Temple Board, etc.
 8. A close examination of the Meitei mss. reveals the point according to M. Chandra Singh, an outstanding authority on early Manipuri culture.
 9. Late L. Bokul, *Moirang Kangleirol*, *Moirang Thangjing Haraoba* (An exposition of Moirang epic on the basis of psycho-philosophy and psycho-analysis), Imphal, 1964, pp. 1-5, 5-30, 55, 56-58, 58-65, *Aeigi Moirang*, 1982.
 10. The Manipuri Mss. called *Takheingamba* written in the 18th century gives a vivid account of the *Bhagavata* transactions in Manipur.
 11. The *Bhagavata* is the 5th *Veda* which is the chief source of knowledge in matters spiritual.
 12. L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, (Royal Chronicle), Imphal, 1967, pp. 573, 578, 593, 663.
 13. Vide my paper "Mysticism in Manipuri Thought". Following the example of pious King Parikshit the Manipuri Vaishnavas are curious to observe *Bhagavat Saptah* by engaging wholly in God-realisation without taking two meals and taking light food prepared out of *ghee* and go to sacred religious recitations (by 8 Brahmins) and sit down like the *chiranjivis*.
 14. Vide a Bengali translation of *Sagok* by Dr. Y. Bhagya Singh in my possession. Also, T. Bokul, *Moirang Thangjing Haraoba*, 1964, pp. 61-64.
 15. The Vaishnava faith and movement in different parts of India is associated with the abolition of caste distinction and development of regional languages. But in the kingdom of Manipur, they never take a precise form. The feudal system and the Brahmanic supremacy were imposed on the masses.
 16. Savita Devi, N. Mehta, "Was there any link between living past and silent past"? Manipur and Egypt, Souvenir of the All India Youth Conference, Imphal, 1964, pp. 7-10.
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20. Late M. Ibobi Singh's speech on Meitei Kirtan at All Manipur Music Conference, Imphal, 1969.
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MANIPURI FAITH AND ORTHODOX INDIAN SYSTEMS

When we study Manipuri faith and conception there are seen many elements of Indian thought. It simply reveals that the Meitei people and Indian thinkers echo the same thought on philosophical matters. After the acceptance of Hinduism they echo the Indian thought profoundly. In the court of the King of Manipur there is a practice that, unless a Brahman completes the degree of one of the branches of six systems of Indian philosophy, he cannot be a *Ratna* (*Ratan*) of *Brahma Sabha* (learned assembly of Brahmans) of the king. The significance could be that the kings encouraged the studies in these philosophical branches.¹

VAISESIKA SYSTEM AND MANIPURI FAITH

According to Vaishesika system there are six *padarthas* say, substance, quality, activity, particularity, universal and inherence. Out of them *Samavaya* (generality) and *visesa* (particularity) residing in things have to be discussed in relation to Meitei mind. *Samavaya* is the common property of things, and the latter the quality distinguishing them.² The early Meiteis pay little interest in universals which transcend particular things. Different words were used to denote subtly shaded variation of the same thing or action. Thus, for example, the following words are used for boil in different parts of the body: *Peti*, *Bagi*, *Yembinig*, etc. Rules governing

the seven clans (*salais*) terms expressing polite words and common words according to social status *puja* materials, etc. explained even philosophical ideas in the framework of differences. It is to be noted that images are made in the form of seven *salais* when the artist prepared them.³ Lack of general laws is responsible for the weakness in the studies of science. There is no single authoritative interpretation of the lines or phrases of the written words of the sacred *puranas*. The Manipuri scholars produced different and variant interpretation of the same passage.

But it does not mean that the Meiteis lack the concept of the universal. The existence of the universal among the particulars and words including a common element designating the universal of individuals are evidenced by such words as *Mioiba* (manhead) and *Lai*, a word connected with religion, viz, *Laipham* (place of god) *Laiphi* (dress of god), *Laining Lambi* (way of life), etc. The notion of the universal among them is proved by using the suffixes I= blood such as Ima= mother, Ipa=father, Inao=brother, Icha=son/daughter, Iche=sister, etc, so are the words like Sel (money) and Mei (fire) which prefix or suffix every word associated with them. Songs and dances are in the nature of group on the whole, the Meiteis did not develop the notion of the universals as did the Greeks and the Indians.

The cosmic order and creation are all explained by *Adrishta*, an unseen power produced by souls. Whatever is hard to explain or unexplainable is solved by postulating *Adrishta*. It is similar to the *Laivak* or fate of the Meiteis though god is referred clearly in Meitei system.

NYAYA SYSTEM OF LOGIC AND REASONING

Nyaya has considered perception, inference, comparison and verbal testimony as different kinds of knowledge. Perception is the chief source of valid knowledge, a doctrine which they share with other systems and Manipuri faith while at the same time they make use of yogic perceptions. Knowledge corresponds to Meitei word *Mihun* (pulse). They make use of inference when they say "I know my father, grand-father, etc.

The child resembles his father”.

Observation as a basis of their life has been employed by the Meitei elders. They have a sound knowledge of earth, the nature of the soil, monsoon seasons, blowing of the wind, knowledge of astrology, animals to be trained for domestic use and war for their community. The Meiteis do not develop a theory of knowledge although instances for logical conclusion, explanation and causal connection are not absent. They employ the method of argument and difference ; life and death are respectively accompanied by the presence of *Sanamahi* (life principle of the body) and His absence. The invariable relation between a powerful king and the prosperity of the kingdom has been emphasized in many texts. Generalisation is often made on the relation between *Pokpa* (birth) and *Siba* (death).

They are aware of deduction and induction implicitly. By their generalisation they produced treatise on plants, paddy, seeds, etc. by their researches. They sought for precedents and data but induction, as noted earlier, ceased at a certain point and deduction based on the authority of the ancient lores then took over its place.

They speak about cause and causal relationships in *Thouram Kanglon* and *Thourang* (event) although arguments for a new beginning are scanty. Man's rationality was known to them in a clear way.

Analogy: Much is taught by comparison in Meitei literature and formal education. Simile/metaphors used in them were always linked with the country's fact with the result that they became profound and could not be translated into any language. Such similies are : *Thambou Hera Manba Pambom* (arm resembling the lotus fibre), *Ngakra Mita* (eyes like the Ngakra fish), *Khurum Khongda* (foot similar to the saddle), etc. There is the song suggesting that king resembles Sun-god in many respects. “But as for the foremost emperor, my lord and king, may be powerful like the sun and glorious like the moon”—this is the unrhymed verse written in medieval Manipuri in connection with the imprecation of *Cheithaba* (a festival observed on the last day of their year), *Chingu Khuya Thambal* (god's lotus feet), the current of life (*punsi Ichel*). If

the analogy is good, the people are happy. They do not care when the comparison is not up to the mark.⁴

The Meiteis are apt to gain knowledge of a thing from its similarity to another with which we are familiar. For example, one has seen dogs but not a jackal (fox) and he has been told that a fox is similar in appearance to a dog. So when he sees in the jungle an animal which looks like a dog but is not one, he surmises it must be *Lamhui* (dog of the *Lam*/jungle). This is the case with *Lamok*/pig of the jungle (the Indian wild bear/wild pig).

Arthapati (postulation): Whatever is hard to explain or explainable is solved by postulating a cause hitherto unknown without which the occurrence will remain a riddle. Mysterious incidents, the experience of pleasure and pain and the phenomenon of human being are all accounted by *Laibak* or fate (god in a sense).

Authority or tradition: Truths embodied in the sacred *puyas* (scriptures) saying of *Maichaus* (great pandits) and mortal gurus are important sources of belief. They are being ever chanted by the divine people. For them learning implies full knowledge of the precedents of past age, searching out the ancient ways. They attach importance to past events. The contents of writing are largely legendary. When compiling short treatise into larger work, they are apt to omit their titles and names. They think it better to imitate in their thinking and writing the ways of expression used by their predecessors rather than to contribute new styles or ways by their own efforts. They have a great respect for religious and social codes and the school of thought to which they belong. Dancers, singers, story tellers, etc., have codes of function in their matters.

Words and their implications: The Manipuris have a fine vocabulary and grammar. There are certain words which came into use for a certain purpose at a particular time. In addition to the direct meaning of a word, there are implied/veild words in the written literature. We have many allegorical stories also which convey real and underlying meanings. Different interpretations are given by different readers.

Implied meanings are very common in the sayings and books

of the people. When the literal meaning is not grasped, the implied suggestion has to be adopted. We are told, e.g., (i) *Aruvana Mataida, Aneivana Mataida* (the transparent water flows to the side while the dirty water flows in the middle), (ii) *Khwairamvand Manimukta Palle* (the jewels are bearing fruit in Khwairamvand), (iii) *Sana Keithel Anganvada Tampha Khudop Takhare* (the jewel ring falls at the early hour of the royal market).⁵

The sentences in their literal form do not carry any meanings but the secondary implications can be like these: (i) The transparent water and the dirty water are made to stand for truth and falsehood. The sentences suggest that truth speakers will be in the background whereas cheaters will be too many. (ii) The jewels bearing fruit stand for the opening of a big bazaar. The sentence implies that a big market is opened at Khwairamvand. (iii) The jewel stands for patriot Prince Tikendrajit Bir Singh, the hero of 1891 tragedy. He was hanged at the early hour (evening) in the main bazar of Manipur.⁶

Samkhya Philosophy and Manipuri Faith: Manipuri thought is akin to the *Samkhya* concepts on the following points: (i) Like the *Samkhyas* the Manipuri faith is a kind of dualistic philosophy according to which reality is dichotomised into *Lainingthou/Pa* (male principle/sky god) and *Leirenma Pi* (female principle/earth goddess).⁷ The *Karma*/desire of *Purusa* entered the womb of *Prakriti* and initiates the process for the evolution of the multiple things of the world. The Meitei texts hold that Mother earth receives the semen of Father sky in the form of rain and thousands of grass, worm, plants and animals are born as a result of interaction of them.

The poets of ancient Manipur sung thus: Is the high sky higher? Father is the higher; Is the earth heavier? Mother is the heavier. What the Meitei tale calls *Hanuba Hanubi* (old man and old woman) is supplied by *Purusa* and *Prakriti* in a theistic sense. There is argument between the two in accepting the active and unconscious nature of *Prakriti*. The person's capacity for work and action is expressed by a line called *Ima*

Mayi (Mother's line) of the palm. Life (longevity) line on the palm represents Immortal guru's (sky father's line).

One of the main principles of *Samkhya* is that the effect is latently contained in the cause and development is to bring into light when it is latent. It is necessary to liberate the effect with the help of an external influence before it comes into existence in a favourable situation. In contrast with *arambhavada* (an effect is unconnected with the cause) it holds the theory of manifestation. In the same sense the Meiteis would have the theory of *Phudokpa* that is manifestation of latent qualities or things.

Since cause and effect form as chain in the ever changing universe, there must be something which has no cause—the basic thing from which all changes occur. This it points as *Prakriti* as the material cause of all. Here a distinction between the two systems as the Meitei mind held is that creation is the outcome of the will of god. *Um* (god's will) includes itself the mental and material thing and is logically prior to *Prakriti*.⁸

Under the influence of Gaudiya doctrine of *Sakti Parinamvad* the Meiteis maintain that the individual souls and the world are the creation of god through his will. Having created the individual and the material world, god enters into them and remains in them as their inner controller. The cosmic order is but the manifestation of god's will through the world; human desire and human will are the expressions of god's will operating through man's past deeds. Here the point of divergence can be seen when there is no necessity of bringing an omnipotent god in *Samkhya* system. *Purusa* takes god's place (*adrishta* in *Vaisesika* system). *Purusa* and god for cartesianism left the world to itself after the motion one begins.

Another concept of *Samkhya* is the *gunas* which are constituents of *Prakriti* in varying proportions. The functions of *Sattva* (fire or light), *Rajas* (dynamism) and *Tamas* (coarse or heavy) correspond to those of Mangang Guru, Luwang Guru and Khumal Guru. Later they acknowledge the authority and significance of original *Samkhya* theory of *gunas*. Then *gunas* are not so much concerned with the balance in *Prakriti* and the

cycle of evolution and dissolution as with their works in the life of a person.

The system speaks of twenty-five *tattvas* including *Purusa*. The Meiteis have accepted the principles of the emotionalised *Samkhya* in so far as they are helpful to *Bhakti*. For our analysis we have adopted the following Manipuri words for *Samkhya* terms : *Hak* = gross elements, *Sei, Aeiha* (*Ahangkar*) = self sense of I = mine, *Pukning* = mind, *Khamba* = *Bhuddhi*, *Athouba Kayat* (5 organs of sense = *Jnanendriya*), *Awaiba Kayat* (5 organs of action, *Karmin-driya*). The terms like, *cit. buddhi, mana* etc. and their function can be regarded as the same with their Meitei equivalents.

In *Samkhya* philosophy *karma* is identifiable with *Prakriti* and is involved in the evolution of *Prakriti*. *Karma* matters little as the entire physical world is construed in terms of an atomic development. The idea is opposed to Meitei belief which says that *Karma* plays an important role in the destiny of a dead soul.

In *Samkhya* we find that when the soul passes a death it carries with it the *lingasaria* (subtle body). It constitutes the character and disposition of individual who has died and it is these which determine the new body in which the soul transmigrates. Souls pass through various grades of living beings, of which the *Samkhya* gives as 14 in all. The same reflection is found in Meitei conceptions of *Tingakok*. The rites observed for a dead man are conditioning the different kind of subtle bodies and their subsequent migration from one state to another. The Meitei concept of *Mi* (shadow) is akin to *linga-sarira*. According to some scholars, the Manipuri texts such as *Apok Satlamlel* and *Pombirol*, give an account of *Ango* which corresponds to *sukma sarira* (invisible organic substructure). They regard it as composed of five elements and made by God. God *Sanamahi* is called as one who keeps the parts of the body in proper order just as one who keeps the different chickens in their nests. The subtle body exists before it is in the womb of the mother. The gross body which is an effect of subtle body is produced by the sexual union of the parents.

Figures of speech and simile are extensive in *Samkhya* philosophical texts like *Samkhya Sutras* and *Samkhya Kari Ka*. The power of suggestions and aesthetic influence are very marked in them. The same feature we find in Meitei texts. The similes of a blind and lame-man, a dancing girl for the satisfaction of the audience have been adopted in Manipuri idea.⁹ This *Samkhya* account of *adhisthana* body has a feature which we do not find in the belief of the Meiteis. However the doctrine of transmigration and the soul's passing through the birds, animal, and plants has been explicitly advanced in the folk literature and particularly in the text called *Waba Leihatlon*.

According to the *Samkhya*, the world is neither real nor unreal. It avoids the extremities of the two views. The world exists in *Prakriti* and the aim of the soul is to get salvation after realising its true nature and removal of false knowledge. The Manipuri versions of the *Gita* contains a section called *samkhya jnana* in praise of this method.¹⁰

The *Samkhya* view in respect of cyclic theory of universe, ups and downs in each age and dissolution of the world stands on the same plane with those of the Manipuris.

MANIPURI FAITH AND YOGA

The Manipuris are well-versed in such games as foot-hockey, wrestling, polo, etc. There is a peculiar type of combat called *Mukna* in which two persons mutually aim at the gain and defeat of the opponent in a combat. The method of breaking balance of one by another by means of legs is its feature. This style is played between two male partners for trial of strength by sheer physical force.¹¹

There are two experts—one aggressive and the other defensive in the wrestling. In the inner psychological and spiritual sense it is a kind of deadly fighting between two parties, namely, *Laroi* and *Singloi*. The group representing *Singloi* is the group of wisdom while *Laroi* belongs to the wilderness of pleasure group. The *Mukna Thaba* (to throw down one by another through suppressing one's power) means the harmonisation of evil propensities by the willed self in accordance with a

definite purpose.¹² In the narrative, the process of conquest is described eloquently by many thinkers of this part of India.

Similarly in the foot-hockey the fight between Rationality and Animality is best expressed by two parties in the game. It allows catching hold of an opponent of one group by another partner of another group by any means. The person carrying the ball (made of bamboo) can hit the opponent by means of his hockey in attempting to rush to the goal-post. He has to score the goal only by hitting it with his stick. A goal is scored when the ball crosses; he encounters with an opponent in his attempt at carrying the ball towards the goal. It means the process tending to the merging of the finite in the infinite/god after subduing the enemies such as want, sexual love, malice and worldly tendencies in the spiritual parts. The science of life, physical culture and social code are closely associated with Yoga and religious belief of the Meitei people. These games are but the practices of meditation in order to develop the habit of fixing the mind on god.¹³

In yoga literature are mentioned some names such as *Upastha* (generative organ), *Jnanendriya* (life, vitality), etc. Whereas in Meitei thought are set for the nine terms namely nine *Loktak Isa*. *Loktak* (the largest lake situated in Manipur) is compared to the *Phambi* (energy/semen) of human body with its nine branches. The name *Loktak* implies the meeting place of breaks in the way in which the semen (*Phambi*) is the essence of limbs.¹⁴ The term Manipur is used by the *yogins* for *Nabhi Chakra*. As the hill circle of Manipur raised up high above the sea level, portion of water remained encircled and was checked of its outlet as if water already drunk remains in the navel. The towering hill circle resembles navel circle.

Eight stages (*angas*): *Yama* referring to the cultivation of negative virtues such as *himsa*, *asatya*, etc. *Niyama*, the cultivation of positive virtues like purity, *santosh* (sense of optimism), etc. are practised by the warriors, officials and the kings in the spirit in which they are enjoined. *Asana* or postures are called *Phamphams* and its three sub-divisions are assumed in meditation. *Pranayam* or breath control has been a favourite culture of the physicians, astrologers, warriors and

kings (Pakhangba, King Naothingkhong). We cannot say whether the Meiteis have full awareness of psycho-physical disciplines of Yoga or not. Their culture is bodily rather than mental and the *Yatras* (best wrestlers) in games and sports are pastmasters in the science of body building.¹⁵ For bodily improvement as well as god realisation they have certain practices described in terms almost identical with those which were used by the yoga in regard to certain ways of life.

Samadhi is popularly used in the sense of grave of a dead person or dedicated life. The *samadhi* of a Manipuri *bhakta* is not thorough-going as that of yoga philosophy. However the devotion displayed by King Bhagychandra and his daughter, Princess Sija-Lairoibi is highlighted to illustrate the *Turiya* (*samadhi*) state.

In line with yoga philosophy the Meiteis believe that god is the supreme being. *Prakriti* and *Purusa* are his powers. There is an identity and non-difference between *Mapu* and the individual souls like as between fire and sparks or as between the bearer of parts and parts. In yoga schools, *Parmatma* does not incarnate himself. He is devoid of bliss. As distinguished from their idea, in Manipuri belief do we find that the Almighty takes incarnation for his bliss and joy.¹⁶ Like the yoga school, the Meiteis lay great emphasis on *Isvara pranidhan* (complete surrender to god), meditation being the easiest way for attaining salvation. Dissolution (*pralaya*) is not knowledge since the root of bondage remains in this stage.

The *Samkhya* yoga system, by implication, subscribes to the pessimistic theory of the world and individual salvation. These ideas appeal to the Meitei mind. They practise it for getting mastery over the mind and the body very much in the same way as it is practised in the rest of India and Western countries.¹⁷

MANIPURI FAITH AND PURVA MIMAMSA

The philosophy of *Purva Mimamsa* arose in the context of rituals or *karma*. This kind of ritualistic thinking and the cult of priests flourished in Manipur before the coming of Hinduism in the form of Vaishnavism from the rest of India.

According to it, the welfare and indeed the very existence of the world, including even the gods, depended upon the due observance of rites-de-passages, festivals, etc. which grew in complexity from time to time. Like the Vedic Aryans, this line of ritual was developed by Meiteis at first and well represented by a number of priests and priestesses.

The *Mimamsa* upholds the inherent validity of the Vedic sentences (svatahpramanya) and their self-clarification. The Meiteis in the same fashion subscribe to the self-evident truth of the sentences written in the sacred *puyas* (lares).

The *Mimamsa* does not postulate a god either as the creator of the world. The *Apurva*, a potency which is a product of *Karma*, lifts the performer of the prescribed rituals to heaven which is full of supreme bliss. As distinguished from this view the Meities have the concept of god as the creator of the world and giver of merits and demerits to the proper. There is no place for a potency like *Apurva*.

Like the *Mimamsakas* the Meities do not accept the existence of *Thawai/Purusa/Soul* in the form of *Isvara*. They also maintain the two types of soul, the liberated and the unliberated. The unliberated soul is ghost. (The latter soul) which is not directed by the wind god to a woman's womb or Heaven is called *yenkha paodaba* and is striking terror to the people.

The *prabhakara mimamsa* is the most determined defender of similarity as a fundamental principle along with number (*Samkhya*) and potency (*Sakti*). The same is properly applicable to Manipuri idea.³¹

MANIPURI FAITH AND ADVAITA VEDANTA

There is a song in old Manipuri verse on *Panthoibi* (Devi) suffering from pangs of separation for Nongpokningthou (Siva). The song runs thus :

The female bird (Pombi) returned to her nest as the male bird (Chekla) had flown away after sitting together with her on the same resting place. Then the forlorn female bird, not knowing the place where-to the male bird had flown, suffered as she was love-lorn. And she laments thus : "O thou beloved

youth: thou the son of my mother-in-law, you are more precious than my life, so I can't bear separation from you. Come thou to me flying and flying from your golden hilly grove."

Here the poet takes two birds (Chekla) and (Pombi) as husband and wife living on the same tree, and in the same nest. The thought here is of the famous Vedantic doctrine of the universal soul (male bird) and the Individual soul (female bird). The male bird is the universal soul which is indescribable in words and inconceivable in mind. He is to be found here and there and everywhere. Pombi in the song stands for the soul who is still under the spell of illusion. She being under someone's domestication is in her cage and cannot fly away and waits weeping in the above way. The tree is represented as the human body. The male bird's place stands for the state of salvation which is described as golden nest in the hills which is above the world. The home is compared to the precious gold by every living being. Thus by writing the song the ancient poet has served two purposes at one and the same time. He has made the current of the Vedantic doctrine flow under the surface of poetical wave in the above story of *Panthoibi*.

The two descriptions of *Atingkok Guru Sidava* (Almighty Guru) which is the topic of supreme value in Manipur bears ample testimony to the Vedantic ideas. The essential and accidental description of the Absolute in quintessence is also the idea of *advaita* in the concept of *Swarupa* and *Tatastha laksanàs* of Brahman.

The famous *advaitic* saying that "Tat Twamsi" 'that thou art' finds utterance not only in our sayings and texts (*Sagok Sarum*) in which we call (*Iehakti Ishaworni*) reality is within us but the elderly *sadhakas* seem to have actually experienced this in state of meditation and trance that often visited them from time to time.¹⁸

A careful study of *Lai Haraoba* (merry-making of gods) which is the core of early Vaishnavite Manipur (before the 18th century) reveals that the two aspects of Brahman; *Saguna* and *Nirguna* has been corroborated by them in some places, the one being in the last day of the festival. For the easy comprehension of the people they create a god in the human

form whom they adore in the festival. The god in human representation continues till the end of the worship. They create the image of god everyday of the *Laiharaoba*. After the prayer is over that form does not exist.¹⁹

Whatever may be the nature of Manipuri faith, the world of attachment, appearance and temporariness in it can be safely traced to the Vedantic doctrine of *adhyasa* (superimposition) *Maya/Avidya* (Illusion). However they take the same to be the power of god.²⁰

Advaita proceeds in four stages, i.e., *sravana* (corresponding to wakefulness), *manana* (corresponding to a vivid dream), *nididhyasanam* (corresponding to a light and more or less dreamless sleep) and *turiya* (corresponding to deep sleep). A soul has to practise them for self-realisation. The Meiteis at least those of pre-Vaishnavite variety follow four-fold prescriptions for god-realisation. Correct observance of spiritual injunction which were enunciated by the prophets and sages is the first step to immortality. The other duties are meditation, spiritual knowledge and ancestor worship.²¹ In them lie the hope of their salvation. No reward could be expected if some one fails to adhere to these mandates.

MANIPURI FAITH AND SOME HETERODOX INDIAN SYSTEMS

MANIPURI FAITH AND BUDDHISM

Tracing history back to early times we notice that Manipur was one of land-routes through which the Buddhist and Hindu Brahman missionaries passed on their way to the South-East Asia and far eastern countries. A good case can be made for a cross cultural encounter having occurred between Manipur and Buddhist countries such as China, Burma, Thailand, Java, etc. through missionaries and traders. The people had a tradition that King Torenkha of the Khaba Salai (tribe) was a great champion of Buddhism by about 300 B.C. although it never became the State religion.²² The descendants of the Chinese Buddhist war captives and the Burmese Buddhists

from the neighbouring areas were allowed to settle in Susakameng, Chingmeirong Kabaw Leikai, etc. They were the specialists in silk culture. They never formed the Buddhist sect which was powerful enough to influence the rulers of Manipur and embraced Meitei religion in course of time. To quote T.C. Hodson, "It is curious to note the complete absence of any trace of Buddhism in Manipur, although it is reasonably certain that in historic times there has been a steady intercourse with Buddhist Burma. The Shans under Samlongba who invaded in the beginning of the 15th century seem to have left no trace of their occupation of the State upon the religious belief of the people, for the records distinctly show that up to the formal introduction of Hinduism in the reign of Pamheiba, the people buried their dead, ate meat, drunk ardent spirits and behaved just like the hill people of the present day. There is not a sign of contact with the lofty moral doctrines of Buddhism."²³

As against this opinion, we may point out that Buddhism started in this land with some force through *pouranic* Hinduism, Vaishnava religion, *Tantrism* and cult of Jagannath. It also contributes very much in the realm of temple architecture, sculpture and dress. It is supported by Buddha *Jata* (coil of hair) in dance, of Maharasa, pagoda like roofs of the temples and coffins and a number of Buddhist icons of the 19th century. The museums have succeeded in collecting 9 images of Buddha (bronze and white marble in *Bhumiparsha Mudra* and *Anjali mudra*) along with a stone *stupa* from the areas of Imphal and one from Tengnoupal district. A deep analysis reveals that they were imported from the eastern countries especially from Burma. There are instances of how the Burmese women came to Manipur with the sculptures of Buddha in Manipur valley for trade before World War II, how the Meiteis in Kondeng village near Burma border embraced Buddhism and erected Buddhist *kyangs* (temples) in their area and also of how the Kwatha Loi people (scheduled caste Meiteis growing betal nut) though not Buddhists were on good terms with the Buddhist monks (*phungy*) and held him in respect by building a portion of the *Kyang* in the beginning of the 20th century.²⁴ The rulers of Manipur did not recognise

it as the State religion on political grounds although they worshipped the indigenous forms of Buddha Deva as is evident from the stone statues in the hills of the valley since the 18th century. We are inclined to the more proofs of Buddhist influence on Manipuri culture on the strength of the mss. discovered from the descendants of *pong* settlers in Manipur, mss. illustrations of *Paphals* (dragon pictures of the Mon Buddhists of Burma), and relics like a silver horse without a rider, skull along with a fly whisk, ornaments, a silver casket, handle of a sword, etc. from Lamboi Ching hill of Imphal. The Meitei settlers in Burma have accepted Burmese Buddhism some generations ago. Recently the enlightened section of the younger generations fell in love with Buddha and embraced Buddhism under the auspices of All Manipur Buddhist Association.²⁵

We are concerned with the similarities and divergences between Buddhism in its different forms and Manipuri concept as found among the Manipuris.

METAPHYSICS AND RELIGION

Sanamahi (sun-god) has been occupying an important place among the tutelary deities of the Meiteis from times immemorial. According to Pandit Atombapu Sarma he is worshipped as *Shyen Mahya* in the early Vedic age, as *Sanamahi Apoiba* (destructive aspect of *Sanamahi*) in the age of *Atharva Veda* and *Tantras* and as God *Marjing* in the Buddhist age. *Marjing* is coming from the word *Marjit* which means one which is vigorous, refined, to control the swift mind, etc. The worship of *Marjing* as the guardian deity of north east direction and the presiding deity of horse (symbolic of swiftness) and the hymn employed by the Meitei *Maibas* throw sufficient light on the importance of his worship as the rider of the swift horse. In his estimate the Meiteis give the name *Marjing* to their god in this age. The habit of giving their own names to the image of a new god was very common, which leads them to prefer also names of their own new constructions to a primitive god to those used by the followers of that cult themselves. Buddha of the later age seems to

have been designated as Guru, Mahadeva, etc. in the *puranas*. It is to be noted that *Salagram* stone, images of Govinda, Raseswari, and images made of wood in the royal temple, all Vaishnavite and Saivaite idols in the hills and plain of Manipur are meditative with coils.

Buddha is not worshipped in the form in which he is done in the Buddhist world. The relationship the Meiteis have had with the *Kabaws/Avas* (Burma) people have not been too cordial. To them, the Burmese Buddhists are nothing but invaders, murderers and the most feminine type—and this impression is not very far from the historical events. However to the Burmese image of Buddha they make obsequiousness and worship him under the name of *Kautum muni Phayavaji*. They corrupted Gautam muni into *Kautum muni*—an epithet which they applied to a god living in Burma only.

Manipuri concept believes in god and soul; early Buddhism believes neither in god nor in the soul. It condemns the transcendental attitude.

Buddhism challenges the authority of the *Vedas*. It believes only in simple life unfettered by rituals although such tendencies are not extolled in Buddhist Sanskrit texts later. Between early Buddhism and Meitei concept there is much that is different. We may point out in precise terms that respect for Hindu scriptures and Meitei scriptures, adherence to rites and worship of house-hold deities, etc. are observed side by side with the new modes of belief of *puranas*.

There is a term called *Sun/sunya/sundrang (tarang)* in Manipuri.²⁶ It appears to have a Buddhist origin if we use it in the sense of void or zero. In Meitei thought *Sunya* means sky, to be unconscious (to go to *sul*), or to be devoid of sense, and the abode of the Infinite.

Sunyata is also taken in the sense of dependent or origination or that is produced by a series of causation. It does not imply complete elimination of all existence. It is *sunya* from the point of view of ultimate reality. This is the law which Buddha calls the *Dharma*. In the sense of Vedantic *maya* the transitory and empirical character of human life and the world has come to be accepted among the Manipuri Vaishnavas in the Vaishnava period. It also implies their attempt to conceive

god as an eternal tree which is neither beginningless nor endless.

Buddhism, by its dialectic, canonised the way of asceticism, laid out the path of ever lasting called the middle path full of the attitude of sweet reasonableness in the human heart. For the Buddhists it is the essence of life, the law of causality that underlies all phenomena. It brings out all that is best in the human being, the Buddha nature itself. This basic concept is well-established within the framework of Meitei cultural tradition. They strike a golden mean between the old and the new, between primitive and Vaishnava faith that specifically offers this attitude in a unique way.

The Meitei doctrine of *Langjaba* (sin or offence) against God and the customary laws and redemption corresponds to the four noble truths that form the background of Buddhism. They are (i) miseries or pains (ii) cause for miseries/pains, (iii) cure for miseries and (iv) path to the cure. Neglect of the due worship of the deities and turning away from the customary observance is a sin according to Meitei mind. The first two truths of Buddhism are equivalent to the dogma that human obstinacy and attachment to their ego are the cause of suffering and pain in worldly life.

The last two truths correspond to the concept of their means for saving the people from the fallen state and spirit of striving for salvation. Without the path it is unintelligent and remains a mere theory. As in Christianity, the path has the warmth of a redeemer in God *Sanamahi*. The path is also tied up with certain rituals and inner disciplines prescribed by the Meitei gurus and masters. Self-reflection is emphasised by Buddha and the Meitei gurus. Between them choice and consciousness are common. Both perceive the potentialities of them as the key to creation and happy life.²⁷

Pessimism so characteristic of early Buddhism can be detected in certain sayings of Manipur belief of the Vaishnava period. It is however to be noted that sorrow is not the pith and marrow of Meitei statement of existence. It declares with one voice that all existences spring from delight of the *Sidava Mapu*/Almighty Father. The Meiteis live in the doctrine of *lila* by regarding the world as the playground of God.²⁸

Buddhism is originally associated with the personality and teaching of historical Buddha whereas Manipuri faith is a revealed one said to have been revealed to a host of *Guru Pandits*, *Maibas* (priests), *Maibis* (priestesses) and spiritual teachers. They appear in this world to protect their religion and culture against foreign aggressors.

What is the nature of Buddha (the Enlightened) or *Bodhi*, *Sattvas* (Buddhist saints) or *Arhats*? The concept of Buddha is very close to Meitei concept of *Pakhangba* (one knows the *Pa*, the Almighty Father) who is to all intents and purposes a very good man, a true man of wisdom incorporating all the qualities of a perfect man.

The Meitei idea of three mortal gurus, pandits of King Naothingkhong and King Garibniwaz is analogous to the Buddhist *arhats* in essential respects.

Popular Buddhism recognises many Buddhas of whom we have detailed accounts in Pali literature. Buddha did not attain Buddhahood in one life. As a result of good deeds done in numerous births reaching back to countless ages Buddha attained salvation. The Pali and Sanskrit texts attribute miracles to the Buddha's births. The Buddhists by their theories of transmigration, *Karma*, etc. have given us a wealth of philosophical speculation. In the *avatara* theory of the Meiteis the number of births is limited to 7 to 10 only. In the Jataka tales Yasodhara was described as the beloved mate of Buddha. Similarly, the lovers in the legends of Meitei belief were found to go in pairs. References to the *avatara* theory are profusely scattered in the literature for it is incumbent upon every Meitei to respect a deity and his *avatars*. They have a habit of respecting a person of good character and gifted spirits as an incarnation of a god or goddess. While in Buddhism all the miracles and supernatural powers are explained by *Karma*, by the act continuing to operate through rebirth the Meitei miracles are a manifestation of god's grace and omnipotence and outcome of yogic and *tantric sadhana*.

Reference to Gautama Buddha as a god is found in Manipuri texts of the 19th century. And the author of the Manipuri version of the *Gita* following poet Jayadeva sings

of him in connection with Arjuna's prayer to the incarnation of Krishna as one who is born as the 9th incarnation of Vishnu and one who gives his light in this earth (*martalok Taibang*).²⁹

In reading through the life history of Naoriya Phulo, the founder of *Apokpa Marup* (cult of Meitei forefathers) from Jhabirvand, Cachar in Assam, we are struck by the great similarities in the personalities and teaching of these luminaries. The life and mission of Naoriya Phulo echoes, as it were, that of the Buddha and the echo reproduces the original clearly with some new tone since N. Phulo lived in the beginning of the 20th century. The first that strikes us is that like the Buddha's denial of Vedic authority and Brahmanic superiority, he challenged the authority of the Hindu Vedic, Vaishnavic scriptures as also the Brahmins. He is also silent on speculative metaphysical problems.³⁰ According to him, use of Sanskrit or Bengali language in the name of cultural attachment is a burden to the common Meiteis. The hymns, prayers and songs must be in one's mother tongue. In fact, it is natural for a Manipuri (Meitei) to make his supplication and utter god's glory in his mother tongue. He has given us a number of books on these subjects.

In Ethics and Political Philosophy : One must be attracted by Manipur's indigenous religious system and ethical principles propagated by the scholars of this lore, in such texts as *Langlon*, *Charairongba Khankum*, etc. In religious beliefs and ethical principles we find close similarity to the lofty teachings of Buddhism. We have an important text in the form of dialogues on this theme. The first conversation was held at the court of King Naothingkhong (663-763 on A.D.) where Luwang Guru and 64 *Phamdous* (nobles of the court) assembled to listen to this discourse from Mangang Guru. The next sitting took at the residence of Guru Khongnangthaba where he repeated the same with his observation to his junior pandits to enable them to gain entry into Heaven. He has given two types of characters, i.e., *asuric* (demoniac) and *Daivi* (Divine). Those who are intent on securing the following are demoniac, (i) crookedness, (ii) to spread the inimical words, (iii) envy, (iv) conceit, (v) telling lies, (vi) pride, (vii) mind surprise and (viii) selfishness. Divine characters are emphasized over

and over again by him for practice in life. The eight standards are (i) to speak the truth, (ii) fixity of mind, (iii) respect for human life (*ahimsa*), (iv) purity of heart, (v) to treat other's wife as my own mother, (vi) to live in a clean house, (vii) cleanliness in body and (viii) to take good food. The saying is paralleled by the teachings and *gathas* of the *Gita*, *Yogabhasya*, *Dharmapada* and *Manusmriti*. In Meitei tradition one can realise the self in him by following the divine qualities. So we may find that Manipuri culture is in no way inferior to the Buddhist culture and realises that many of the ideals the Buddhists had come all way to spread among the people of the Eastern countries via Manipur were already known to them. The people did not think it necessary to change their faith into Buddhism which teaches attachment to things only in terms of pure law of causality. The likeness between their codes of conduct is so striking that one might speak of the rebirth of Buddhist ethics in a Meitei personality and *vice versa*. The fact is that the true yoga is the same wherever it is found.

Buddhism taught us the example of renunciation and sacrifice viewed in Buddhist teaching we may point out that Puremba, the greatest hero of the epic of Moirang, is entitled to be a great example of renunciation. He died a premature death in order to save Chaoba Nongthon seeking shelter under him for the latter's unpardonable crime.

Panchashila : The Boddhi *dharma* says little but tells much. This way of life exposes to view the very roots of peaceful co-existence and *panchashila*. But the rulers and the chiefs of the *salais* took more from violence and war philosophy. In *Thawanthaba Hiran* and *Chainarol* is elucidated the idea of killing in this thought. In *Hiriphanba* and *Vipasana* (meditation)—the similarity found between them namely : (i) absence of speech and movement and (ii) the prevalence of universal salvation tend to the conclusion that one of them felt the influence of another. It is also closely allied to the meditation on *Ningsha* by the Meitei *Lainingshing*/Gurus. *Leirik Nonglon* says, "6 men ! be wise the great of the five souls is the *Ningsha* (breathing)." The path is in it. Meditation on it is vital element of our culture. The way of life is more or less based on meditation.

Practice of non-injury (Ahimsa) and killing: Ahimsa is the important doctrine in both of them; practice of killing is one of the sins although it can be permitted in times of war. *Thawai Ngakpa* (respect for soul) forms an instance of close affinity with the concept of *Ahimsa*. No killing is done in the month of *Mera*/October-November. In certain divinatory process the hen or the fish is set free and not killed. As far as animals are concerned, it is a light offence in the case of small creature (like ants, bees) and wild birds and a real offence in that of a large ones and totemistic birds on account of sacredness and greatness of efforts and owing to the greater size of the objects. Domestic animals like cows, cats and dogs are venerated by their codes. But sacrifice of pigs, fowls, hens, buffalows and ducks are recommended on religious grounds.

In case of human beings it entails a small offence in the case of immature boys, tribals, scheduled caste people and a great offence in that of being a great people like the killing of kings, Brahmans, high officials and pregnant women. Ways of killing by (i) one's own hand, (ii) on instigation, (iii) by plot and (iv) by art or sorcery (*Kapnaba*), are to be found in both Buddhism and Meitei belief. In both religions sin is most serious as it is directly connected with life itself. In modern times they begin to take note of moral and legal sins as having indirect influence on the core of life itself. It is only through performance of expiation ceremony recommended by astrologers that one's sin can be forgiven. It was a rule for the Meiteis to confess their sins before the idols (*Sri Govindaji*, *Radha Krishna*, etc.), and a formal ceremony conducted by the Brahmans. The customs of purificatory bathing in sacred *tirthas* and pilgrimages seem to have been practised by both.

Love: In Buddhism, Buddha emphasised that feeling or emotion is co-extensive with life or consciousness. He did not teach a gospel of God or divinity but his followers in order to satisfy spiritual needs developed the Mahayana religion with an emphasis on a compassionate giver. The Buddhist arts all over Asia have portrayed tenderness and mercy. Indeed Buddha, though one of the greatest ascetics,

yielded to great and noble emotions. The ancient Greek master Aristotle, some *Advaita* dialecticians in India, Spinoza and Kant, two renowned Western philosophers, take a distrustful value of imitative in their enthusiasm to emphasise the value of reason as the guiding light. He yielded to them and harnessed them with moral and spiritual life. In Meitei faith the value has been explored for ages and verified in their life. Some idea is given by the elders in Meitei *puranas* where it is said that love, which the people have toward earthly objects, animals and fellow beings and god, is called (Nungshiba) death of inner-self for god.

The Meiteis too are conversant with the essentiality of service to others of healing the sick and the down-trodden section, gentle love for even the most erratic and sinful. So in Buddhism, these examples of service and ministration have been explored for ages and developed in all aspects. Both emphasised mercy as the heart of religion and social relations.

The Buddhist views that the heaviest of all illness, both physical and mental, stemming from *Karma* is partially believed by the Manipuris. The chanting of a life force as the healing power from within is greatly practised by Buddhism and the Meitei people in times of adversity.

The history of Manipur deals with the killing of a father by his son, of killing of a brother by a young brother and so on. We may cite both Oedipus and Ajatshatru which originated some years ago, Ajatshatru being famous in Indian history and Oedipus towering as classic Greek tragedy. In history the Meiteis depict how Pamheiba kills his father Charairongba, how Tolentomba, the youngest son of King Garibniwaz, kills him and how the princes kill fathers and brothers for the throne. They ascribe the cause to the fact that King Charairongba killed the divine form of snake god *Pakhangba* (ancestor of the dynasty) though inadvertently. King Charairongba is led to realise the source of this fate and was cursed that he too might meet with tragic end at the hand of his son. He was driven by a number of things—obscure memory traces from a previous life, predictions of astrologers about patricide, sub-conscious feelings of hostility towards his father and brothers and finally, overriding sensations of guilt

that drove him to take advantage of the situation. However King Garibniwaz is able to repent, creating a happy life for himself by carrying out his father's last command in letter and spirit of "Invade and destroy the whole of Ava". He created history by conquering the Burmans and introducing Vaishnavism in his kingdom.³¹

In Buddhism the monastic order is taken to be the sole authority in matters philosophical and religious. In contrast to this, we find in Meiteism that not only the monks but the gurus, *Lainingsings*, Brahmans and *bhaktas* form the authority of their faith. A Meitei did not abandon the worldly life and remained a householder whose duty was to communicate the truths among the masses.

Both gave to the womenfolk rights in religious observances and society like the *Vihar* in Buddhist times and the *math* of the post-Buddhistic age, the groves of *Umang lais* (forest deities) and temples of Vaishnava villages, enriched the Meitei thought through its spread of moral and cultural ideals. The kings' court and *Loisangs* (departments) exercised control over them and effected their coordination.

Industrial and economic relations: A wide divergence is perceived between the Buddhist and Meitei belief when we discuss the economic and industrial concepts and did not encourage vocations or manual labour as he lays stress on contemplation than on earthly action. But Manipuri faith taught the dignity of manual labour by giving it a religious significance. Every kind of vocation was done in the spirit of service to God and society. A new economic order has been laid down by King Loyamba (1074-1122) in *Loyumba Shilel* according to which each person should take to any sort of work suited to his aptitude and environment. His mandate took its root in the land till 1891 and exists even now, although in a different way.

There is also much that is uncommon. Buddhism taught against caste system, untouchability and sacrificial rites. But Manipuri society associated social status with the nature of industrial work. Manipur's industry is mainly the contribution of the degraded scheduled caste communities. The unsympathy towards the *Yaithibis* (eternally degraded groups)

continued till the beginning of Gandhian philosophy in India.³²

As for the missionary orders of preaching, sea voyage, visits beyond the frontiers of the state, etc., the Buddhists took them seriously (when they were in power) whereas the Manipuris were apathetic to such features.

Parallels in Buddhist Tantrism : Scholars consider the north eastern parts of India, i.e., Manipur as one of the *tantric* belts of the people whose society and ritual are still full of non-Brahmanic or non-Vedic tradition. Early Manipuri literature is full of references to incantations, magic, charms and *rupa Kathas* or *Giti Kathas* (poetical portions in prose narratives) where the supernatural played important part in all works.³³ We are also led to think of some similarities between *Tantric* Buddhism and Manipuri belief in view of its association with the *tantric* Buddhist shrines/centres like Shrihat (Sylhet in Bangladesh) and of Shan Buddhists of Burma in historical times.

(a) Both amongst the *Sahajiya* Buddhists and the Meiteis there was a current fashion for themselves to regard as the wife of god. They, irrespective of men and women, wear the dress of woman. They use bells in their trance mood. The *Maibis* perform the works of priests whereas the *Sahajiya panthis* do not.

(b) The Buddhist word 'HUM' is found associated with the hymns and attributes of prominent Meitei deities such as *Sanamahi*, *Leimarel* and some personal names. It is surmised that the Meiteis might have assimilated this concept from the *tantric* Buddhists of the past. *HUM* which means air/ether is the sound of power forcing the *mantras* into realisation.

(c) The cult of Jagannath as found in Manipur has the effect of treating *tantric* or syncretic Buddhism in the sense of transformed and reformed Hindu religion. The Meiteis are quite aware of symbols of the central doctrine of Mahayana Buddhist thought.

(d) Like the popular theology of the *Tantric* Buddhist, we have extensive literature enunciating incantations, nocturnal worship, supernatural feats of the mystics and channels sometimes aspiring for god by spiritual paths (*siddhi*). Such features

we meet with in abundance in the concepts such as *Lai Sannaba* (Man in league with a particular deity/ Brahma), *Heloi Sannaba* (in league with seven goddesses or Heavenly nymphs/ *Dakini*, *Bhut Sannaba* (to be in alliance with ghost/demon), night worship and *Potsem* (sorcery) which had stamped the dark period of Manipuri history. Outwardly Manipuri practices find their counterparts in Buddhist esoteric elements.³⁴

However there is much that attract our attention. The main idea of *Tantric* Buddhism is *prajna* (knowledge). To them power (*Sakti*) is creating illusion from which only *prajna* can free us. In Manipuri belief faith is the focus of interest.

The Buddhist attitude is the return to the state of *Sunyata* which is beyond all creation. The process of enlightenment is represented by the union of male and female in the ecstasy of love where the active element is represented as a male, the passive by a female figure in a somewhat similar fashion to the Meitei ideas. In some cases, both male and females are supposed to be active by the Meiteis.

(e) Buddhist *tantra* knows no *Kundalini*, lays little stress on the lowest lotus and prefers to omit the lotus behind the genitals. On this point the Meitei concept is Hindu *tantric* rather than Buddhist *tantric*. The concept of *Paphal/Thengou* (a sacred dance of a sword and a shield on the diagrams/shapes of snake god *Pakhangba* is similar to that of *Kundalini*. It also seems to us that if we really set down to the available texts on human physiology, rituals and dance and we are not frightened by the allegation of some purists like *Apokpa Marup*, we shall find that the *Chakras*/nerve centres, root letters, petals and presiding deities of the places are in essence the same thing, the same teaching, between Hindu thought and Meitei concepts although using different modes of expressions. In exhaustive study of the similarities of *Tantrism* and Meitei belief may raise certain issues which demand a separate treatment in other research studies.

MANIPURI FAITH AND JAINISM

The present section undertakes a comparative study of the life views and religious beliefs according to the Meiteis and

the Jainas which form the central point of their way of life.

The belief in *Karma* and rebirth is common to both. The Manipuri practitioners of astrology were conversant with the Jaina notions of *Aghati Karma* such as *Ayu* (that which determines the term of physical existence), *Nama* (that which determines the colour and the physical organisation of the soul) and *gotra* (that which determines the birth of the particular soul in a certain family and in certain relations). The Meiteis have not so far studied the 14 *Gunasthanas* or spiritual stages on the way to absolute perfection.

Principles such as not to steal, speak to the truth, to be friends and lovers of all and to rejoice at others' happiness are common to both and by observing them one gets peace. Both Jainism and Meiteism have ordained a number of things in the name of religion, the *ahimsa*, love, fasting, charity, etc. Non-violence has been established by the Meiteis as in Jainism. Like the Buddhist or Jain custom the kings of Manipur distributed food amongst horses, cows and elephants and established institutions, with senior princes in charge of them. Their crematory rites are similar to those of the human beings.

On the day of worshipping Sri Govindaji or on the last hour of a person, asking his or her pardon for any misdeeds or harm done to somebody knowingly or unknowingly is believed. This is similar to the *paryashan* of the Jainas. Bitterness and ill feeling can be avoided. The obligation on the part of the people to hide nothing before Sri Govindaji and the kings made them at times peace lovers. Fasting for atonement is resorted by them. It was an important key for preservation of good health. Manipuri type of curry called *Champhut* (saltless and chillyless curry) is taken by them during the period of religious days (if death occurs in a family). Like that of Jainism, it proved effective to a number of people from the religious and health point of view.

Both emphasised the vow of *bramacharya* or celibacy. Married couples at the age of 50 or 60 accepted it in some cases. Some of the Meiteis join the order of *sadhus* and do not enter the family life at all. Meditation and chanting are common to both. Religious study and repeating *mantras* are necessary for both system.

Importance is given to pilgrimage in both. As discussed earlier, the Meiteis used to go to Vaishnava holy places in days when there were no railways and buses and they travelled on foot. They had contacts with the people of India by doing so. Such is the case with the Jainas living in different parts of India. The system of *Madhukari* is practised by both. The Vaishnava monks, like the Jaina *sadhus*, collected rice from different households. Their clothes are given to them by householders. The only difference is that the Vaishnava monks cook their own food and touch fire whereas the Jainas *sadhus* do not do so. But both follow the vow of non-possession.³⁵ Drinking boiled water is prescribed by both the Jainas and Meiteis for hygienic purposes. The Meities do not observe the Jaina habit of taking meal before sunset.

The Jaina monks and nuns cover their mouth by a piece of cloth while talking, so that their spit and smell may not pollute others, and germs may not spread. The Manipuris who are very polite and courteous cover their mouth by their hand at the time of talking to superiors. According to an age old convention the Brahman cooks closely wrap their mouth so that no spit or saliva or even the breath will contaminate the holy *prasad* at the time of *pūja* while serving the people.

Jainism permits one to commit suicide when one has no more desire and passions have left him or when one feels too weak to resist them. Suicide for genuine love has been extolled in Manipuri faith. The preference is given to commerce over agriculture because the latter involves killing many minute germs while ploughing. They walk with a veil for fear of inhaling living germs and nourishing of small creatures, e.g., to kill bed bugs, but to allow them to feed on themselves, are illustrations of this task. Manipuri belief is free from such drawbacks.³⁶

The Jaina attitude to utmost carefulness regarding speech and violent search for truth bears a close resemblance to the Manipuri concepts. The same is covered by some sayings of the Meiteis—Don't speak too much as if the tongue has no bone; Empty vessels sound much (foolish men talk much), Don't speak about the living men (talk of the Cevil, he will

appear). The cautiousness of speech, freedom from prejudice, stress on the merits of a fact, etc., have developed into a non-absolutistic view.

Meitei Philosophy and Syadvada : *Nayavada* and *Syadvada* comprise the two wings of *Anekanta*. In the Jaina doctrine we find the confluence of opposite theories, and universal outlook of synthetic nature. In the same way Manipuri belief aims to harmonise and coordinate the pre-Vaishnavite (*tantric* and Vedic thought) and Gaudiya beliefs into a consistent whole. Their respective view-points are blended in a curious way so as to make a distinctive Meitei faith.³⁷ The Jaina relativism is shown in a story of a group of seven persons, each of whom studies only one limb of the elephant (the tail, the trunk, etc.) and no one knows the structure and life of the elephant as a whole. The same tendency is revealed by Krishna to Arjuna in several passages of the *Gita*. The Meiteis follow Jiva Goswami's *acintya bheda bheda vada* (inconsiderable relation between the *Jiva* and the *Brahman*) and in doing so holds that empirical objects are describable absolutely. Out of regard for the same this school ignores the law of contradiction with regard to supersensuous things. The Jaina school does not make simultaneous predication of incompatible objects.

In contrast to this, the Jaina school does not make simultaneous predication of incompatible characters even with regard to the same. One of the judgments in the seven-fold formula of the Jainas seems to resemble *acintya bheda-bheda* insofar as it predicates both of presence and absence and declares its indescribable nature. "The Jaina school holds that contradictory qualities can co-exist in the same thing in different relations and not in the same part at the same moment." But Jiva Goswami admits such a position while explaining the relation between God and the soul.

As a religious system Jainism recognises a godhead but no God, nor a Supreme Being. It believes that the true conquest of man lies in the conquest of the self. According to them 24 *tirthankaras* have been born on this earth and have taught mankind the Jaina faith. It ignored the role played by the priests for obtaining religious merit. The Meitei concepts

and principles are different from those of Jainas on the above points. However, in both systems the status of *Lai* (god) or *tirthankara* is reserved for a chosen few only. The soul is not equally awakened at the same time on account of its uniqueness. In both systems the life history of a soul begins with embryonic stage and ends with the perfection. Meitei faith has also in common with Jainism features like choice of objects of worship (24 *tirthankaras/gurus*), caste system, *Karma* theory, cycle of births and deaths, existence of soul and its salvation, the concept of virtue and vice and the basic values of life. They explain these concepts in their own ways.

Jaina Influence in Manipur

Digambara Jaina community (*Kaniya/Mayang*) from Rajasthan has been living in the main bazar in Manipur as traders since the time of Churachand Singh (1891-1939). This group observes the festivals of Mahavir Jayanti, Nirvana Day, Dipavalli and *dashalakshan parva*. It also asks the Government of Manipur to observe holidays in all offices in connection with these celebrations. There are at present institutions, such as Jaina Club, one High School, Digambara Jaina Temple and Marawari Dharmasala in the main bazar. Manipuri Hindus along with Jainas celebrate festivals such as Vasanta Panchami, Akshayatritya, Raksha Bandhan, etc. It is to be noticed that the Jaina thought has influenced the thought of Manipuris through the teaching of the Mahatma Gandhi in matters of dignity, capacity of man and practice of *Ahimsa*. The Jaina Marwaris participate in many Meitei festivals since they live in the midst of them. The Meitei Holi *kirtans* participate in celebrating Jaina festivals in Imphal. They seldom arouse political antagonism.

Under the auspices of 2500th Bhagawan Mahavir Nirvana Mahotshab Celebration Committee, Manipur branch had fittingly celebrated the ceremony and it is gratifying to note that the tradition of reading his works and giving charity to the poor and sick persons are maintained by the Jainas of Manipur with enthusiasm.

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 26. Dr. Y. Bhagya Singh, op. cit. pp. 7-8. The Manipuris maintain doctrines which can be fairly compared with those of Buddhism. The doctrines are embodied in *Leisemlon*, *Hiri Nonglon* and the treatise on the game of *Kang*.
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 37. For details vide author's paper 'A Synoptic View of Lord Mahavir's Philosophy' published in the souvenir of Government of Manipur in connection with the 2500th Nirvan ceremony of Bhagawan Mahavir in 1975.

MANIPURI FAITH AND CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Contemporary Indian thought is mainly contributed by Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Rabindranath, Aurobindo, political leaders like Gandhiji and his followers (Acharya Vinoba and J.P. Narayan), and academic philosophers like S. Radhakrishnan, K.C. Bhattacharya, Bhagavandas and H. Halder played no small part to formulate it. It is not surprising that thinkers from Bengal and their works found a ready and happy response among the Meitei people on account of Manipur's traditional relations with Bengal. After the acceptance of Bengal Vaishnavism as the State religion of Manipur in the Eighteenth century Bengal enjoys the religious respect of the Manipuris in the same way in which the Muslim people have had for Mecca or the Christians for the Holy Land.¹ Traditionally Manipuri culture is inter-woven with that of Bengal. Bengal with Calcutta as its capital took the leading role in propagating the new culture and enlightenment in the Nineteenth century. In Manipur also the progressive minded and educated section became aware of the situation and sought inspiration from national leaders like B.G. Tilak, Bankim-chandra Chatterjee, Bipinchandra Pal and saint Vijoy Krishna Goswami of Dhaka who were powerful forces behind the national and political awakening of India. The people have been approving benevolent kings and nobles under whom a political existence has come into being. Monarchy suited the Meiteis than any other form of polity as the social and

religious sentiments of the people were in accord with it. Under the kings and the British colonial system they had developed peculiar beliefs, superstitions, social usages, etc. They have interpreted their beliefs in a slightly different manner that are in general way accepted in other modernised countries. Curiously enough some of the current teachings of the contemporary philosophers are found within the framework of Meitei belief which is but a fusion of old belief and Hinduism. The tremendous flood of new influences which has been flowing in Manipuri political and social life has not ceased though the early works are said to contain the approach. The main purpose of this chapter is simply to point out the parallels and differences between the ideas of contemporary Indian thinkers and that of the Meiteis. Movements like Arya Samaj and contemporary Islamic thought have been omitted quite frankly due to the fact that their ideas had few points of contact with Meitei tradition and Manipur is not much aware of the philosophical foundation of these movements at present.

Meitei belief and Ramakrishna : The return to *pauranic* culture was inaugurated by Ramakrishna in the characteristic Bengali way by worshipping the image of Kali as Rama Prasad had done before him. This system has some similarity to that of the Meiteis who have a wide culture of Saktism and Tantrism. He evinced great interest in caste-system and polytheism. Manipuri faith agrees with Ramakrishna's neo-Vedanta in the fundamental concepts such as *Brahman* as the Omnipresent Reality, different levels of consciousness, the responsiveness of Reality, the world as the sportive activity of *Brahman*, the functions of the ego, devotion and *avatara*. While for Ramakrishna Paramhansa, *avatara* is human medium for the expression and exposition of the love of God, for the Manipuris it is the manifestation of some Gods which are superior to the environment of man and matter at a particular age. The purpose is to perform constructive or destructive *lilas* and to teach Meitei philosophy and religion to the people.

Paramhansa presents the householder's life to be an obstacle for the realisation of freedom. Meitei faith is more concerned about a sound family life and the male lines as the

key to salvation. As noted in different contexts, a peculiar form of ancestor worship and preservation of race are a product of Meitei way of thinking. We feel justified in holding that Manipuri thought suit Vijoy Krishna Goswami's position in general because he lived with his family and discharged his family duties though his soul vibrated in complete union with the creator. Most of the Meiteis do not completely detach themselves from family life.

Indian mind is synthetic. Ramakrishna's *sadhana*, *Sarva Dharma Samanvaya* are unique and unparalleled. Scientific discoveries, Vivekananda's synthesis of Indian spiritualism and Western materialism and Aurobindo's synthesis of Yoga and gospel of integral Yoga are remarkable examples of the synthetic capacity of the Indian mind. Similarly equal respect of all religions (*sarva dharma sama-bhava*) by Gandhiji is an example of synthesising capacity. Vinobaji's "Samanvaya yoga" is an attempt to embrace the philosophy of economic, social and spiritual life at one sweep and wipe away the seemingly conflicts between economic and spiritual life. Manipuri attempt is worthy of note on finding the middle way, that path in which all relations are brought to fulfilment. The culture, religion, art, etc. represented a synthesis of pre-Vaishnavism and Bengal Vaishnavism. Stories were told to collate Hindu ideas with the primitive cults. The joint names, Nongpok Panthoibi, Guru Sidaba seem to be attempts of the kind which emphasize the fusion of cults, oneness of the deities at a time when followers of both were in conflict. Throughout its belief and culture runs the central concept of synthesis or the dialectic or the middle concept. Manipuri belief very luckily has been free from any blemish and there is no better proof of the validity of approach than the attitude described above.

Manipuri Faith and Vivekananda : Swamiji was a practical *vedantin* and realist whereas the Meiteis following Caitanya's cult raised the emotions to such an extent that they used to dance, chanting the name of God. Emotion is discarded in his philosophy. Image worship and untouchability which are living cults in Manipur are against him. Swamiji was speaking of universal salvation through service of mankind. Swamiji first

preached the ideal of service to man as the best form of worship of God. It was based on the teachings of *Vedanta* as was revealed to him by his master—Sri Ramakrishna. He has given message of four paths though he uses the term *Jnana* rather highly. But the Manipuri Vaishnavism emphasised *Bhakti* yoga. Some of them were also *karmayogis* of which Bir Tikendrajit, General Thangal and Paona Brajabashi were outstanding.² Every Manipuri mss. has given us three bodily positions centering on sitting, eating and sleeping. Swamiji, though a devotee of divine love, was a great champion of strength, eternal fearlessness, faith in oneself and use of force when necessary. Similarly the Manipuris were devotees of God, non-violent by nature. But when there is the question of saving their religion, nation or country they never tolerated and fought valiantly with the aggressors such as the Burmese, the British, etc.

Manipuri Belief and Gandhiji : It is interesting to know that *Gandhivad* or Gandhian thought has great significance to the Meitei people as well as their philosophy. We arrive at the conclusion that Gandhian thought or *Gandhidharma*, as the Manipuris call it, has been prevalent in Manipur even before the birth of Gandhi. It was established both as an ideal and a way of life for the people in essential aspects—political and economical. In point of popularity, he is second to none.

Religious concepts : The Manipuris have familiarised themselves with the doctrines of Ramanandi and Bengal School of Vaishnavism by the beginning of 18th century. Gandhiji's concept of Rama Rajya, recitations and devotional songs are familiar enough to everyone of us and everyone knows in a general way how he was rooted in a *Sanatana* faith. Gandhiji wrote and recited thousands of times 'Vaishnava Janato' during his long life of 79 summers. For him it was *Gita* in a nutshell. Gandhiji performed prayers regularly—morning, noon and evening and used to take the name of 'Rama' with every breath and his mind was fixed on God, in order to guide him along the thorny road to freedom. The Manipuris, on their part, have adhered to these principles in their life.

The treatment of God as truth is implied in the word *Laiminamchaba* (cheating) for the word *minanchaba* (to be-lie) is to *lai* (god). It is to their deep rooted conviction that truth speaking and just action is an imperative which ought to be obeyed for attaining efficiency in any undertaking. Manipuri understanding of the relation between Man and Truth and equation of Truth with Reality would be approved by Mahatma Gandhi.

Manipuri Belief and Sri Aurobindo : The reality for Aurobindo is the principle of *Saccidananda* which he includes and explains as pure existence, conscious force and bliss. Conscious force and bliss answer for how and why of creation respectively. It may be pointed out that the Manipuri Vaishnavas follow the interpretation of Valadeva Vidyabhushan that bliss (*ananda*) is a higher category than consciousness, and conscious (*cit*) is a higher category than being (*sat*). All spiritualists alike regard supreme bliss as the highest category. *Brahman* has sportively assumed the personal form to perform *lila* for his enjoyment. The Manipuri Vaishnavas fervently believe in this theory by striking a note in the exposition of dance and music (*Ras lila* and *Kirtan*). But in Manipuri belief we miss Aurobindo's conception of *Ras* as mental pleasures or vital enjoyment.

Aurobindo gives a list of supernals : *Saccidananda* is the Supermind. In the language of the *Gita* they are *Purusotam* (Brahman), *Kshara* (Iswara) and *Akshara* (Jiva). In earlier Manipuri belief the number and nature of steps between *Mapu* (Immortal Guru) and the world has been understood in such deities as *Leimarel* (immortal goddess or Earth goddess), *Sanamahi* (Sun-god) and *Pakhangba* (Moon-god). After adoption Gaudiya Vaishnavism they seem to have given to this concept for they have accepted Vishnu with Lakshmi, Sankarsana, Aniruddha and Pradyumna as categories after the Pancharatra system. Aurobindo's concept of matter which involved spirit and sacramental attitude in all dealings with *Brahman* may be favourably compared with Manipuri belief. In the *Gita* the act of taking of food is spoken of as a material sacrament or a sacrifice. To the Manipuri *Bhakti-margis*, uttering Krishna's name characterises a really spiritual outlook

in life. They utter the words 'Jaya Krishna' or 'Hare Krishna' before taking the first riceball or starting any work. The Meitei warriors recite religious slogan such as 'Jaya Krishna' in the battlefield implying thereby that they are not to advance but it is Sri Krishna/Govinda to advance.

Sri Aurobindo has explained the evolution from *Brahman*, the purpose of the *avatara* and the Supermind in his *Life-Divine, Essays on the Gita*, etc. We may refer to the anticipation of his insight that man can develop into Superman in the creation story of Man. The Supermind to which Aurobindo referred with a new meaning is the *Laipok* (god-man) mentioned in Meitei mss. and is well-known to them. The word has been used several times in reference to the innate divinity of man.

The Meitei people have already worked out their esoteric yoga, *tantric* system of *Kai Sadhana*, and meditation before they studied Aurobindo's teaching. The concept of immortality in their estimate means enjoying a full life of *Khoiren* (life-span), avoiding untimely death, inclusion of physical body in spiritual perfection. The chronicle gives the reigns of Pakhangba and his five immediate successors as more than 100 years which is rather difficult to ascertain. Similarly some of the mortal gurus like Mangang, Khumal and Luwang lived an unusual long life of 500 years.³ It appears that they practised *Vanaprastha*, mastered the science of breathing, physiological and psychological disciplines.

The canon Aurobindo's poetry reveals an incantory quality that reminds the vast *mantras* and *tantric* works of the Meiteis. Aurobindo gave new significance to the sciences of occultism and astrology. The Manipuris have been practising the astrological and *tantric* systems with remarkable success. We find Aurobindo making a yogic approach to poetry and not from the mental plane, but from the overhead thought. This note has not so far been known to the critics of modern Manipuri literature. However the ancient gurus and royal-pandits can be treated as poet-philosophers of Aurobindo's vision.

Aurobindo being a pronounced mother-worshipper calls the divine force the mother and interprets the four great powers

of the force along with other innumerable powers. The workings of the force which are outlined in the *Gita* and Sakta philosophy have been popularly clear to the Manipuri Vaishnavas through their culture. It is worth mentioning that Aurobindo brings in the concept of divine grace which frees us from restraints and ill luck. This theory reflects the concept of Krishna *kripa* or Guru *kripa* which have to be understood in appreciation and success of the Meitei artist.

Manipuri faith and Rabindranath Tagore: Tagore is a Vaishnava humanist par excellence. He takes a positive view of the world and the human life. The poetic form adopted by him is similar to that of the medieval Vaishnava poets like Kabir, Jayadeva, Chandidas and Sri Jiva. His utterances about bliss and joy remind us of the *Hladini Sakti* (Radha) of the Bengal Vaishnavas. Tagore is a *lilavadin* rather than a *mayavadin*. He was an *advaita* Vaishnava in which love plays a chief role in *advaita*. Manipuri faith both in its pre-Vaishnavite and Vaishnavite forms sounds akin to his doctrine.

Tagore is apt to address god as non-god (Narahari, Naranarayan), Man within the Mind (*Maner manus*) and Supreme Man (*Maha manva*). Echoes of these words are easy to find in Manipuri expressions such as *Laipok* (Half man resembling divine birth), *Mioi Laioi Thoubu* (Half man half god), *Mithoi Mihenba* (Man developing into divinity) and *Namu Pongbahanba*. (extraordinary man). God is called *Hanu Kokchao* (an old man with a large head) and *Hanu Leikham* (Last man). He also glorifies man as the crown of creation since he is nearer to god than any other being. This mode of admitting degrees of reality is not new to Manipuri faith. The Manipuri version of the *Gita* contains passages in proper places to praise human birth supposed to possess god's power in abundance. To regard man as the height in the scale of creation of Meitei myth largely fits in with the modern story though they ascribe to natural process.

Manipuri belief and Radhakrishnan: We may refer to some of the concepts reached by the Meiteis which have some basic substantial affinity with those of Dr. S. Radha-

krishnan. They agree in holding a spiritual philosophy, concepts of Absolute, god, double nature of the world and the soul; the world as the training ground, *maya* in terms of a mixture of the real and the unreal and the role of intellect. The Manipuri view is more faithful to those of Rabindranath Tagore than those of Dr. Radhakrishnan. We have already discussed Tagore's concept according to which the Absolute is connected with the world. His approach is that of a poet. On the other hand, Radhakrishnan gives priority to Logic in his intellectualistic Absolutism and its organic unity with the world. In his spiritualistic humanism there is an attempt to make a positive approach to the description of reality which is also admitted by the Meities.

The proverb "Awaba Sangbai, Nungaiba Laitang" which means the amount of sorrow is *Sangbai* (a standard basket for measuring corn) and that of joy is about as much as *Laitang* ($\frac{1}{4}$ th of a *Sangbai*). It is especially noticeable that this attitude reminds us of Dr. Radhakrishnan's meliorism which means that the relative amounts of good and evil are changeable, and that good is capable of improvement through human effort. They have all along propounded a view that god works through human beings, *avatars* and leaders of the nation in thought and action. The creation story tells us that *Sidaba* was very much delighted to see that humanity might make the world glorious by their laborious energy and posterity.

Like Radhakrishnan, the Meitei scriptures give insight into the close association of ethics, religion, liberal and tolerant evaluation of good life, criticism of extreme asceticism and stern ideals in the context of changing society. Such ideas from the extant *puyas* (*Sagok Lamlel*, *Khunglangi Artha* etc.) state the basic position of Meitei mind and inner life.

As to the differences we may note that Radhakrishnan speaks of simultaneous salvation of all *Jivas*. He also removes certain misconceptions according to which *karma* is related to reward and punishment and that moral *karmas* lead to success and evil to failure. The Meiteis do not go beyond the traditional concepts of *karma* and rebirth. Moreover, they have no

clear concept of cosmic salvation, for some of the realised souls are as powerful as the god himself.

Manipur had a fine example of stopping the killing of cows in the efforts of the Manipur Darbar and Churachand Singh and his son Bodhachandra Singh in the beginning and middle of the Nineteenth century. It is a historic truth that the Manipuri Vaishnavas challenged the slaughter of cows by the uncultured Europeans for eating in the latter part of the 19th century. Cow killing was made punishable with fines under the criminal law. The Darbar resolved to proclaim to the village headmen and the *chowkidars* of the valley for stopping the slaughter of cows and buffaloes. The President of the Darbar was requested to apply the same among the hill tribes. Maharaja Churachand wrote to the Political Agent of Manipur and the Chief Commissioner of Assam that he could not allow the killing to be committed in his State. He stood up resolutely that he would not set foot in Manipur until the matter was decided to his satisfaction and that if it was not, he would abdicate. But the British officers turned down with the remark that the legislation would be a serious interference with the time honoured custom and religious observance of the hill-tribes of Manipur. During the Second World War, the military personnel ungratefully killed cattle for eating them up. Bodhachandra Singh offered stiff resistance to the British policy of the Military Head, Governor and Political Agent of Manipur on grounds of religious sentiment of the Manipuri Vaishnavas as also on higher human sentiment by quoting the ancient Hindu *sastras*. The British Government could not dare to continue the same in the public interest and did respect their religious cult. It is obvious how close the Meitei belief is to the controversial issue of Acharya Vinobaji's *Satyagraha* on cow killing. Vinobaji's *Dharma* on the basis of social responsibilities, obligatory duties of sacrifice, gift, penance, etc., can be similarly compared with the Meitei ethical relativism.

MANIPURI FAITH AND TEACHINGS OF THEOSOPHY AND J. KRISHNAMURTI

Manipuri Faith and Theosophical Movement : The teachings of the Theosophy are associated with Mrs. Annie Besant, Dr. Bhagavandas and J. Krishnamurti (in his early years). Theosophy is neither a dogma nor a social organisation. It is a brotherhood of like-minded people free to profess any religion or none. It believes in the principle of universal brotherhood of man, sex, creed, etc. It investigates laws of nature and the powers latent in man through the study of comparative religions, philosophy and science. The method adopted by the Meitei is like that of a theosophist in its syncretic attitude by paying attention on the holy sayings underlying the fundamental nature of humanity.

The theosophist make use of occultism and clairvoyant practice and explore the past and the future lives of its leaders. They arrive at such conclusion as that Colonel Olcott, the founder was said to be Asoka in his former birth and that Mrs. Besant was Bruno in the 16th century. J. Krishnamurti (then a boy of 13) was identified with a great world teacher—a Christ or Boddhisattva. We can go on multiplying examples to show how the Meitei mind supports the past and future lives of the important figures of their lore. Many years have gone by since one left one's body and there is Meitei waiting for the time when he or she will come back in another body as he or she longed once again to fulfil the mission in another birth in Manipur. To treat a remarkable Chief Minister as incarnation of a Meitei god is in force even in our own days.

The Manipuri view is akin to Dr. Bhagavandas on such themes as the concept of *maya* as both being and non-being, the atomic nature of the *Jivas*, the apparent *dvaita-advaita* or *Bheda bheda* or even identity in differences between the *Brahman* and the world.

We have as yet to find out the similarity between Manipuri view and his concept of *Parmatman*/I-This-Not, *aham-etat-na* and the relation between *Brahman* and *Mula Prakriti* in terms of Negation and its different aspects. Dr. Bhagavandas' main purpose is to teach the essential unity of all

religions by quotations of texts from the scriptures of the living religions of the world. The Meiteis have done the same work in their land by inculcating respect for all sects and castes; with room for different objects and modes of worship it carries all sects of Hinduism, Buddhism, primitive religion, etc., under its synthetic wing. The gurus see and adore the Lord abiding in all creatures.

Manipuri mind and J. Krishnamurti: J. Krishnamurti began his early training under Mrs. Annie Besant as a theosophist. Later he broke away from Besant and the theosophical society altogether. He is an anti-traditionalist who rules out traditional methods of self-discipline, prayer, guru's guidance, meditation and leadership, authority, mediatorship, memory and all forms of conditioning. The essence of his teachings is self-awareness and value of human freedom supplied by man to man himself. While the Meitei belief stresses them and their importance they are not anti-traditionalist like Krishnamurti. To the followers of Meitei philosophy, he sounds a heretic from the point of view of Meitei philosophy and ideology.

According to him, the urge to grow its energy and direction must come from within, growth imposed is growth arrested. Right people are a must for the creation of right society. Nobody can set man right except by himself through full insight into what is wrong. Awareness is neither concentration nor focussing attention on things and people significant to our instinctual life towards self-protection and propagation. His awareness is without focus, choiceless, silent, wordless, free from likes and desires and fears. In his own words, to see importance of seeing things "as they are," uncoloured by feelings, unmoulded by ideas. In his book *Lainingthou Laipao* Naoriya Phulo discusses seriously about the philosophy of "I" which fits well into this type of awareness in spite of its theistic character. The same idea is dealt with the interpretation of meaning of Moirang by T. Bokul.

Krishnamurti is against the traditional yoga for the reason it implies resistance to all except one idea. But there is a kind of peculiar yoga in him. He is not so much concerned with what one does, as with why and how. Awareness of the

motives, attention given to the manner are the essence of his yoga. Material and mental growth of his yoga are the foundations; what matters is growth in consciousness, expression of awareness, deepening of intelligence and strengthening of love. Passage of *Sakok Lamlel*, on the other side, may have the same value of awareness and singleness of attention although it reiterates its faith on the knowledge of ancestry, training under a particular school and form of God.

According to him there is no God except a man purified, and there is no power which controls him. Change of mind cannot be brought about through the action of will but is possible through the action of intelligence. Such change is total, inner and instant transformation of psyche arising from the understanding of process of the consciousness. This is in accord with the teachings of Meitei gurus on the good character in such texts as *Nanglon* (study of darkness) *Leishemlon* and *Yaibi Irat*. He has the highest regard for religious quest which is free and capable of reflecting the Real. To quote him "only such mind that is completely quiet. . . that can perceive which is immeasurable." The *Maichous* of *Nongdam Sanglel* developed such attitude in their life. Religion is a quest rather than a sectarian worship for them.

From the above discussion we know that the doctrines of the Meiteis are quite similar to the doctrines of contemporary Indian thinkers, while in some other cases they differ from those of the thinkers as orange differs from the red. Among them Gandhi, Tagore, etc., have been so much a part of modern thinking in Manipur that nobody is able to escape their influence. Most of their works have been translated into Manipuri with varying degree of success. We only mean that Manipur is open to their influences. There are writers and reformers who extol humanism, revolution, synthesis and existentialist determination. Transcendentalism, pessimism, etc., which used to be the important features of Meitei thinking seem to have disappeared from current thinking. Pattern of ideas similar to Ramakrishna movement, theosophy and even anti-traditionalism of J. Krishnamurti appear in Meitei belief which are well-known and preserved in their books and life.

REFERENCES

1. It is the ambition of Manipuris to visit Nabadwip, Ambika, Vrindavana, Puri, and other sacred *tirthas* with the sacred association of Bengal Vaishnavism in their time. Vide also Supra chapter III A.
2. The death anniversaries of these warriors of the Manipuri war of 1891 have achieved a new significance in Manipuri life. Since independence, every year, tributes are paid to them at State level ceremonies and memorials erected at their graves to stand as the vanguard of liberty.
3. Vide the Mss of *Sakok Lamlel* and Royal dairy now edited and published may be consulted for this purpose.

PART II
CULTURE



9

CONTEMPORARY MANIPURI CULTURE AND INSTITUTIONS

Manipur has immensely contributed to the composite culture of India. She is open to external influences of the East and the West inspite of her geographical isolation from the rest of India. Its culture under the able kings has retained its distinctiveness amidst the give and take with countries of the world. For administrative purpose Manipur was under the Governor of Assam during the British regime, religiously it belongs to Bengal but linguistically and culturally it is independent.

The culture of Manipur is the product of various forces—native, Aryanism from the West and the Mongoloid from the Eastern countries. Aryan culture penetrated by slow degrees into the Meitei community, the hybrid race formed by the integration of such streams along with the people of the east and west settling in the valley while the Nagas and Kukies of the hill areas remained comparatively unaffected¹. Coming to trade and commercial products we may point out that Marwari, Punjabi and Madrasī traders lived in Imphal valley, hill sub-divisions and in Moreh (110 kms. border with Burma). Handloom products with artistic and aesthetic sense are demanded in many places of India. Khadi and village industries products and type of clothes made on the looms fetch high prices. Plenty of fruits and vegetables grow here. There is no dearth of cattle, chicken, sheep and goats. Birds are found mainly in the Loktak lake.²

364 *Umang lais* (forest deities) have been adored in Meitei pantheon, sects such as Gauriya Vaishnavism, Meitei Marup, Christianity, Muslim and tribalism flourished along the social spectrum and many rites have been characterised by daily activities.³ Manipur is distinguished from other parts of India by such features as the marketing by women, women police organisation (at a time when probably it did not exist in any other part of India), observance of the distinction between formal and informal dress, use of *phanek* (lower garment for women), wonderful practice of music and dance, abundance of *tantric* and love of freedom. Polo, of which Manipur is the mother, represents a special aspect of Manipuri culture.⁴

Festivals are almost characteristic of this place. An outsider if he stays long enough will find that its cults and festivals are special to them. The mode of performance often indicates the position of the worshipper. There are gods like *Lai Chakehtkpi* (levelling goddess), *Toknga* (deity of gossip), *Marjing* (presiding deity of polo) still worshipped occasionally by every Meitei.

Then there is the closing day and opening day of the Manipuri year of *Cheiraoba* when various items of prediction and astrological calculation are made by the court astrologer. There is *Ningol Chakouba* when fathers and brothers bless the daughters and sisters and feed them as best as they can. *Tan Katpa/Chaklon Katpa* is the day of offering cakes/rice dishes to the ancestors of each family.⁵

There are a number of great festivals such as *Ratha Yatra* (on the model of Puri), *Durga Puja* (on the model of Bengal) *Thabal Chongbi* (moonlit dance), *Deepavali*, etc. They were originated by the able Vaishnava rulers with great pomp and due splendour. In addition to this annual festivals the worship of Sri Govindaji in the royal palace and Radha Krishna in village temples is daily observed by the Brahmans of Manipur. *Lai Haraoba* (community dance), worship of *Sanamahi* (Sun-god) and *Pakhangba* (Moon-god in the form of a snake supposed to be the divine ancestor of the royal family) were common to them for it has been understood that the pre-Hindu priests inaugurated worshipping them in varying forms and compelled the Meiteis to worship the deities with

royal sanction.⁶ Visits to the shrines of primitive deities in Imphal valley and Vaishnava pilgrimage are considered as meritorious acts and part of their cultural life.⁷

Special traits of Meitei culture as of any other people will be found not only in their ethnic features, but also in habits of dressing clothes, taking food and in sports and religious gatherings, rites, and fine arts. The Manipuris do not use headgear but they use turban if they take part in religious festivals such as *Laiharaoba*, *Sankirtan*, etc. The *pung* players and *palas* put on *tilaka* marks on their foreheads and put on garments in the form of *trikatsa*, (the tying of three knots at three places) as decreed by the *shastras*. This mode of wearing is done in Vaishnava religious festivals. The outsider may be struck by the use of a special dress for males and females according to time, place and occasion. The covering of their head by the married women with a piece of cloth is a remarkable convention. They have been conscious of beauty, delicacy and choice of colour relative to the occasion.

One would stop on the way to watch the beautifully dressed women and men moving along the road for religious ceremonies like *Astisancaay* (bone gathering ceremonies and marriage ceremony, etc). For general ceremonies they use plain white attire signifying solemnity and sacredness. The eldest women use the yellow coloured *phanek* (lower garment) as a morning dress and white in the evening. Strict decorum is maintained about the sacredness and cleanliness by the older and orthodox circles about their health and dress. They have a well defined concept of the use of ornaments and good living before they use shop and modern articles.⁸

As per the codes all seasonal foods offered to the presiding deity of a religious gathering are made available to the public by *Arangpham* (manager) and his associates. It is obligatory to satisfy the guests with *Leichandan* (sacred flowers), *Nirmalaya* (flowers and not food in their concept), *pan*, fruits, money and *Mahaprasadan* (cooked dish). These articles assure serenity and the people carry them as a token of divinity and purity. These are principles, the like of which are

common to the temples of Puri, Nabadwip and Vrindavan. But there is a distinction between the recipients in getting the quantity or quality of things. The Brahmans, the princes having connection with the royal authority and persons of dignity are given the best items. The idea is a Meitei social one.⁹

It is again the food habit that makes out a Manipuri Vaishnava from other counterparts with the utmost distinctiveness. Fish holds a pride of place in his list of food, unless he is a confirmed *Vairagi* (monk), in which case he will take vegetarian diet prepared by himself or by a Brahman. It is to be noted that the Manipuri Vaishnavas are fish eaters. But the food items offered to Hindu dieties are vegetables and agricultural crops prepared by the Hindu Brahmans to suit local taste. There are as many as 108 items of curry, out of which some are to be prepared by cooking without salt, some with salt, some to be flavoured with chillies to make them hot, etc. *Laphu Iromba*—the art of flavouring the inner barks of the plantain tree with chilly and salt is an invariable item of dish for the service of Sri Govindaji and other Hindu dieties. So is the dish of *Sagol Hawai*.¹⁰

A great variety of palatable dishes can be made out of the combinations of vegetables and dried fish by Manipuri women. The *Pibas* of each family and Meitei Brahmans have fully utilized these recipes with skill.

Variety of rice and their products find forms here originally unknown to other lands, such as *Chengpak* (flattened rice), *Cheng Khoibak* (sweetmeat prepared from rice and sugar), *Chahao Khoibak* (sweetmeat made of a sweet scenting rice), *Kangsubi* (sweetmeat prepared out of sesamum and molasses.)¹¹

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3. Vide author's book "Manipuri Samaj Hangatlakpa", pp. 65-78.
4. Dr. M. Kirti Singh, *Religious Developments in Manipur in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, Imphal, 1980, chapter III, pp. 99-100.
5. L. Ibungohal Singh, *Introduction to Manipur*, Imphal, 1960, pp. 25-27.
6. Dr. M. Kirti Singh, op. it, pp. 261-270, also *Manipur Guidebooks* issued by the Tourism Department of the Government of Manipur, Imphal 1975, p. 14. Tribal festivals are left out of account for reasons of space and time.
7. Even to-day the shrines and sacred places are as much alive in their areas or hills as they were in the past.
8. Information given to the author by late Pandit M. Chandra Singh, who wrote several papers on Manipur culture.
9. This is a kind of social division strictly observed in Meitei society till the Sixties of this century.
10. Information given by Kaviraj Mera Singh.
11. These are prepared and eaten during the winter by a group of families. They are invariably necessary for social and religious festivals of the Meities.

MODERN CREATIVE LITERATURE

POETRY, NOVEL, SHORT-STORY AND DRAMA

Manipuri language has been the court language of Manipur since time immemorial. It has also a separate script of its own which is found in old mss. and began to evolve about the 17th century. The Meitei language and the script under the able kings brought about a great unification. Under the influence of Bengal Vaishnavism and the British rule, the people accepted the Bengali script for their language though the number of books reached its height in the 19th century. The modern Manipuri literature starts from the beginning of the 19th century after English pattern of administration had found a share among the people. The establishment of a first High School, i.e., Johnstone and its reorganisation in 1891 and affiliation to Calcutta University, are important steps.¹ Important works had been done by English officials and Meitei educationists who started writing about Manipur. In the beginning of the 20th century men like Rev. W. Pettigrew, Mr. Wince, Bengali teachers like Babu Ramsundar Roy and the educated Manipuris like H. Maker Singh, Munal Singh, Jatiswar Singh and Haodijam Chaitanya began to print Manipuri books in Bengali.² Maharaja Sir Churachand Singh was a great patron of Manipuri literature and culture. At first, the Manipuri literature was confined to writing text books for the beginners. New books were later written and published on a

variety of subjects. A steady output of books on Bengali model also appeared.

Manipur Sahitya Parisad was established in 1935 with L. Ibungohal Singh as its President and H. Irabot Singh as Secretary, with the purpose of promoting Manipuri language on the lines of Bangiya Sanskrit Parisad. It helped the coming of some talents in creative writing. Says poet Kh. Chaoba Singh, "Our vernacular is an humble tongue to an unknown head, Manipuri poet is yet to come out". In his estimate the nucleus of the future of Manipuri which if nurtured properly will make a great leap. By 1947-48 Meitei writers such as Atombapu Sarma, L. Ibungohal Singh, H. Irabot Singh, O. Gokulchandra Singh, Ch. Mayurdhwaja, M. Jhulon Singh, etc., who for many years until their death built up their literature, were prolific. Their writings cover all aspects of creative literature. Poetry has ever been the favourite form of literary expression in Manipur and seems to be so nowadays too, though it has changed very much. Poets of the old generation like Dr. Kamal, H. Anganghal, Kh. Chaoba Singh, A. Dorendro, A. Minaketan wrote lyrics and poems by drawing inspiration from folk songs, tradition and glory of Manipur. Dr. L. Kamal's *Leipareng*, Kh. Chaoba's *Thainagi Leirang*, Minaketan's *Vasant Sheireng*, Ch. Mayurdhwaja's *Sheireng Anouba*, H. Irabot's *Sheidam Sheireng* contain collection of poems. They have gained tremendous popularity. H. Anganghal Singh has written an epic poem containing 38 thousand lines on the legend of Khamba and Thoibi which was published in eight volumes under the title "Khamba Thoibigi Sheireng". His "Singel Indu" is another long narrative poem. A. Dorendro Singh produced his "Kamsa Bodha" on the model of Michael Modhusudan Datta's "Meghanad Bodha Kavya".

Post-independent Manipuri poetry is negligible. The writers have no *sadhana*. There have been Manipuri translations of *Meghanad Bodha Kavya*, *Gitanjali*, *Meghaduta*, *Raghuvamsa*, *Rape of Lucreces*, *Kumar Sambhava*, etc. Daily papers with their supplements, magazines of different types in Manipur encourage new creative writers and accelerate the new course of literature.

In the realm of novels we have to mention first and foremost Dr. Kamal's *Madhabi*, a romantic-realistic social novel in the Thirties of this century. It depicts the sacrifice of an unsophisticated girl, Madhabi, who inspired the people by the ideals of self-negation. The author becomes more prolific in the novel than in the poems. Kh. Chaoba's *Labanga-Lata* gives a picture of the romantic love themes of Labanga, a young soldier and Kunjalata, the princess. It gives the pomp and grandeur of the court in the time of Khagemba (1597-1652).

Jahera by H. Anganghal is on the theme of the love between a Manipuri Hindu youngman called Kunjo and a Muslim girl called Jahera. Short-story as a distinct literary form is hardly fifty years old in Manipur. Rajkumar Shitaljit Singh is regarded as the pioneer of short-story writer in Manipuri literature. In the Forties of this century two volumes, namely *Leikonungda* and *Leinungshi* were published by him. He has also to his credit a number of novels like *Thadokpa* and *Ima Rohini*. Now we have the numerous important novelists and short-story writers but they have not achieved a degree of success. Attempts are being made to introduce English, Bengali, Hindi and Russian works to Manipuri readers of the present generation.

Drama : The dramatists came out as drama writers first and actors afterwards. Dramas which need particular mention are *Nar Singh* of L. Ibungohal, *Sati Khongnang* and *Areppa Marup* of S. Lalit, *Mairang Thoibi* of A. Dorendrajit, *Mainu Pemcha* of A. Shyamsundar, *Kege Lamia* of S. Bormani Singh, *Bir Tikendrajit* of M. Bira Singh and *Kabai Keioiba* by A. Jai Singh. The most respected contemporary playwright writing numerous socio-economic problems is G.C. Tongbra with his 31 plays and some one-act plays.

With the development of radio-plays, theatre-yatra competitions and film industry scripts for new types of creations have been written or rewritten. It is obvious to name a few of them to the exclusion of others. I cannot name them individually as there are too many in this connection.

Dictionary : Manipur is very fortunate to have this branch developed. N. Dinachandra's *Khunung longi Artha* (meaning of archaic Manipuri), N. Khelchandra Singh's Manipuri to

Manipuri and English Dictionary, *Ariba Manipuri Longei* (Dictionary of old Manipuri), H. Dijwamani Sharma's Anglo-Manipuri Dictionary, Hindi-Manipuri Dictionary, L. Ibungohal's Beginner's Anglo-Manipuri Dictionary, R.K. Shitaljit's Pocket Manipuri-English Dictionary, Friend's English to Manipuri Dictionary, are worthwhile.

L. Radhamohan's Hindi-Manipuri Dictionary, L. Narayan Sharma's Manipuri to Hindi Sabdakosa, Dr. M. Kirti Singh's *Darsangi Longei* (Dictionary of Philosophy in Manipuri) etc., have enriched this line. The terminology committee set up by the Government of Manipur in 1975 has coined suitable Manipuri words in different subjects up to the pre-university standard.³

BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This form is in its infancy. L. Ibungohal Singh has written his autobiography. It was published by his son after his death entitled 'Jivancharit'. Many tour diaries were produced by the Political Agents and Presidents of Manipur State Darbar during the British regime. Many scholars and travellers of Manipur have published their reminiscences of travels. The autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi in Manipuri translation form was there in the Gandhi Centenary Year. The biographies of Gandhi, Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, the Mother, Vinoba, J.P., Indira Gandhi are available in Manipuri. Biographies of local men such as Bir Tikendrajit, General Thangal (two warriors of 1891 hanged by the British), H. Irabot Singh (Revolutionary) N. Bhadra Singh (Painter), Pandit Atombapu Sarma need special mention. Some life-sketches in the form of bio-data and articles/papers are also well-known.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL WORKS

Scholars of Manipur have written different types of histories : (1) General history of Manipur, (2) Cultural and literary history, (3) Dynastic histories, (4) Critical editions of texts written in Meitei script of the *puranas*. Manipur has

produced quite a number of historians/research scholars who have concentrated their critical faculties exclusively on Manipur's political history, developments in literature and culture, histories of several dynastic clans—such as Khumals, etc. Scores of traditional historians can also be mentioned who have enriched historical research by their addition of ancient Meitei texts with transliteration, modern Manipuri translation and explanations of the texts. Late M. Chandra Singh, Kh. Yaima Singh Pandit, R.K. Sanahal Singh, N. Khelchandra Singh, Pandit Ng. Kulachandra Singh, etc., are well-known in this field.

The musicians and dancers have worked diligently over the last 20 years to provide the important works on the systems of *tals*, dance forms. The more important names are Guru Maisnam Amubi Singh, I. Gulamjat Singh, R.K. Iboton Singh, Pandit Parikshit Sarma, etc.

The institutions which sought to promote idological studies were Vivodha-Janani Sabha of Maharaja Sir Churachand Singh, Manipur Itihas Gaveshna Samati (Historical Research Society), etc. which had been active in collecting mss. on medicine, astrology, clan traditions and rites until the Second World War when they had to close doors. The period from 1948 upto the present has been the period of founding many voluntary institutions with grants from the Government of Manipur. The editions and publications of the mss. (originally in Meitei script) now in Bengali script have started to be produced very swiftly. The number of such treatises number over 6000.

ESSAYS AND TRANSLATION WORKS

These distinct types came into existence during the past forty years. Editions of daily papers and the columnists of several papers and journals have successfully handled essay writings. A foretaste of the conditions before and after the Second World War, Indian independence and Manipur's integration with India has been given in them. This aspect has some high literary values.

Atombapu Sarma made translations into Manipuri of the

entire Shakti and religious texts of the Hindu viz., *Candi*, *Gita Govinda*, *Sarasyata Vyakarana*, etc. Kalachand Sastri had published his 30-volume translation of the entire Sanskrit *Mahabharata*. The translations of literary, poetical, religious and philosophical books into Manipuri from English, Hindi, Sanskrit and Bengali have penetrated Manipur. The translation of the works of Michael, Bankumchandra, Rabindranath, Krishnadas Kaviraj etc., from Bengali into Manipuri was completed and sold in Manipur. Some people have published the editions of the works of Shakespeare, Ibsen, Tolstoy, G.B. Shaw, copies of which can still be seen in some college libraries. Persons having education in Hindi got as far as the works of Tulsidas, Premchand, etc. There have been attempts by them to do the job on the translations of Khamba and Thoibi (epic story of hero Khamba and heroine Thoibi) into Bengali. W. Yumjao Singh devoted years to the English translation of the royal chronicle 'Cheitharel Kumbaba'. Unfortunately he died before its publication. The translation of the Old Testament was done as early as 1810 by Srirampur Christian Mission with the help of a local pandit. The Light of Life, Baskandi, Cachar, published the entire New Testament in Manipuri in 1930 for the students of the Bible correspondence course. The English version of some gospels has been brought out by S. Don Bosco, Imphal. They have studied Manipuri language to do their work. Coming to philosophical translations the author undertook faithful and paraphrase translations of philosophical treatise such as *Sankhya Karika*, *Republic* and *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* which are suited to the needs of students of philosophy.

The various communities like the Muslim, Sikh and the Jaina brought parts of their scriptures (the Quran, Nanak's teaching, Mahavira's teaching) through their private finance and printing. They have stressed the Manipuri translation and reading of religious scriptures. To the Manipuri lawyers and Brahmin pandits go the credit of getting legal texts such as I.P.C., Cr.P.C., Indian Constitution, Police Act, Panchayat Act and *Manu Samhita* translated into Manipuri. They are rather difficult for the common people to understand. They have retained a high percentage of English terms and phrases.

FOLK LITERATURE

Appreciable collection of folk songs, hymns and aspects of folk culture were published in the journals and incorporated in the books of dance such as *Laiharaoba* by Ng. Kulachandra, late Chandrasekhar Singh and Faubon Bowers. Institutions and individuals make huge collection of folk songs of the priests and priestesses who carry this traditional lore. The author has prepared certain papers on Manipuri proverbs, riddles, folk songs and dances and presented them at learned associations and congresses.

PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT AND LITERATURE

The peculiarity of Manipuri belief and religious concepts, however, is its great influence on almost all fields of cultural life—literature, art, pedagogics and even political life. The *maibis* (traditional priests and priestesses) and an intoxicated Vaishnavas who represented the living tradition of pre-war days came to dominate and seemed to have dominated the field ever since. They were too old to change their views; they continued the teaching of Hindu philosophy in the form of Gaudiya Vaishnavism as found in Manipur. Atombapu Sarma had published his volumes of the *Rig Veda*, the *Gita*, the *Bhagavata*, *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, etc. Teachings of Gandhi, Aurobindo, Vinoba, Gaudiya Vaishnava, missionaries were available in Manipuri with texts, notes and commentaries.

The development of philosophical literature is linked with the Sanskrit scholars and Manipuri philosophy professors who not only taught them in schools and colleges but wrote versions of works nearest to the originals than those already current and translation works of Rabindranath, Gandhi, Aurobindo, Vivekananda and Ramakrishna, etc. They promoted the centenary celebrations and jubilees of these contemporary thinkers. This glance on philosophical thought cannot be complete without mentioning the published books and journals of Vivekananda Kendra, Aurobindo Society, Imphal branches, Gita Mandal, Sarbodaya Mandal, Imphal, Divine Life Society of Swami Sivananda, Imphal branch of

ISCON and anti-Hindu organisations such as Apokpa Marup, Meitei National Front.

Through state unit of Communist Party, Manipur too had links with Communist philosophy of Russia and modern China. Publication of pamphlets, daily papers and magazines and election works were intended for the popularisation of Marxist ideas among the political parties. Dialectical materialism was translated into Manipuri for use of the party members in 1950.

In the publications of political parties we note many diverse strands such as the total revolution of J.P., Janata ideology, Socialist ideas, R.S.S. programme, the Meitei nationalism and the glorification of Manipur of the past.⁴ Their impacts were quickly seen on politics and literature.

So far as academic philosophical thought is concerned the present author has contributed a lot. His own philosophical position is reflected in his books "Religious Developments in Manipur", several research papers presented at International and national sessions of I.P.C., A.I.O.C. etc. He has published 12 books with the important volumes on space and time (*Darsangi Mityengda Mapham Amasung Matam*), *Aspects of Aurobindo's Thought*, *Aurobindo Amasung Srimagi Darsan Vichar*, *Darsangi Maruoiba Lairiksing* and logical positivism.

There are other philosophical trends such as logical positivism, philosophy of language, Marxism, Gandhism, Integralism, etc., in Manipur of today but they are confined to the academic thinking only.

PROSE AND CRITICISM

Post-independence era has given a brilliant batch of young essayists and critics. Most of them are College and University lecturers who are in touch with Manipuri modern literature. But none of them has made a critical and serious study of old mss. and texts. They have yet to write books and submit research papers on different aspects of literary progress and essays.

Journalism in Manipuri language is popular. We have 30 daily papers, two English weekly papers, numerous fortnightly and

monthly papers/magazines. Manipuri language is the State language. Its script is also recognised by the Government for teaching. The publication of Manipuri magazines has considerably increased. Publications of Manipuri Government's *Angangsingi Numit* (Children Day on November 14), *Manipur* (fortnightly) from the Director of Information and Public Relations, bulletins of different Government Departments and souvenirs of many literary organisations are noteworthy. The important names in all these magazines include *Matamgi Khongthang* published by Universal Literary Association, Lamlong Bazar, *Yeningtha* published by Young Writers' Forum, Imphal. They have been successful in creating taste for Manipuri magazines in the intelligentsia.

As far as the prospect of Manipuri literature is concerned, we have better hopes. With the spread of literacy, production of research degree holders, study of old Meitei *puranas* through the culture of Meitei script by different sections, better conditions for writers and scholars through the patronage and co-operation of ministers will put Manipuri literature on the path of progress.

THE CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

The pre-War literature was composed in metrical form which restricted the poets' choice of words and rhythm. They depended for their themes and sources upon the lores of Manipur, glory of the rulers and Hindu epics. There was a deep faith among them in Vaishnava philosophy and aesthetics as practised in Manipur. Their writings have points in common with traditional Sanskrit culture. The general trend was spiritual rather than secular.

On the other hand, the modern writers have given up many time-honoured conventions. They have come in contact with the varied strands of English literature which is rich in all respects. They have learnt new forms with pleasure and zeal. Modern writers are well equipped with the art of printing. Varieties of Manipuri literature began to be produced very rapidly in a different atmosphere. Post-independence literature is becoming regional in form and content rather than national.

They are not so much concerned with national as with their problems of a community literally cut off from the rest of the world by a difficult communication system and of their small number.

Manipur Sahitya Parishad which has completed its 48 years of active existence is trying to make Manipuri literature up-to-date through collection of old books, publishing books, organising annual sessions in different places and conferring suitable titles on the artists of traditional Manipuri school. Among other institutions are Naharol Sahitya Sabha, Naharol Sahitya Samiti, Premi Samiti, Cultural Forum, Astrological Society, Universal Literary Association, etc.; all of them have rendered significant service to the Manipuri language and literature.

M.S.U. (Manipur Students' Union) is an association of Manipuri young students who live in the State. The tradition of heroic deeds, chivalry and distinctive culture has developed strong regional consciousness in them. The sacred land and its history remain a source of inspiration to the young Meitei mind. The members have taken up arms against any humiliation, to do within their power by strikes, agitations and propaganda, to restore Manipur's ancient glory, to include Manipuri language in the 8th Schedule of Indian Constitution, to recognise it as a subject in Manipur Public Service Examination and to continue research work in this language. They impress in the mind of Manipuris an interest in treating Manipur as the land of the ancient people and expelling new comers by an Act of the State.

The resultant effects of their efforts have been the measures adopted by the State in these demands.

Manipuri literature has the credit of receiving recognition of the Sahitya Akademy almost every year. Some of the Manipuri writers have been awarded the Akademy's prizes though the traditions of pre-War output have not been kept in the same spirit in these fields.

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1. *A.A.R.M.S.* 1892, p. 96; 1947, Section on Education; L. Ibungohal Singh, Introduction to Manipur, Imphal, 1960, p. 75.

2. These books are recommended as text books for the lower primary and upper primary stages. Recently R.K. Sanahal Singh, B. Com, a noted writer of Manipur, has collected and published all the works of late H. Chaitanya Singh with notes and sketches in 1982.
3. Its report was submitted to the Director of Education but no suitable action was taken up. The Legislative Assembly of Manipur has taken some initiative in giving suitable Manipuri terms of some subjects under the initiative of Y. Yaima Singh, Speaker (1979-85). Some individual writers have published glossaries of political, legal, literary and geographical terms in Manipuri.
4. Papers printed on International seminar on folk culture in Cuttack in 1978, Indian Science Congress held in Tirupati in 1983 may be cited.

MANIPURI DANCE AND DRAMA

Spiritual character of Manipuri Dance : Manipur is known to the world through its dances and polo. Its most important feature is the close association of religion with music and dance. The distinctive approach to culture is best seen in the fact that dance is religious and its aim a spiritual experience. Development of music and dance has been through religious festivals and daily activities of lives. Not only is dance a medium of worship and enjoyment, a door to the divine, but indispensable for ceremonies like the birth of a child, marriage, *shraddh*¹ etc. Dancing in all its pre-Vaishnavite or Vaishnavite varieties was performed before the ruling dieties with strict humility and surrender. The Meiteis are completely ignorant about the use of dance for the sake of dancing and contract system. We point out here some characteristic features of Manipuri dancing which are as under :

- (1) The places where dances are held are sacred. It is considered to be a crime or sin to violate the decorum of the sacred texts, conventions, etc. Any time, any place is not good enough.²
- (2) Dances are devotional or ritualistic rather than entertainment of the eyes. It is a "Sadhan-Bhakti"—a kind of devotion to God for both dancers and the on-lookers. The second of the nine forms of *bhakti* is felt

by the dancers, that is production of religious ecstasy of *bhakti rasa* (*prema bhakti rasa*). The first of the nine forms is felt by the onlookers. It establishes relation between them and the close attendants of the Lord, who are superior to them. Being responsible to the suggestion of the movement, the spectators feel a tendency to identify themselves with the dancers. The theme relates to the spiritual life of the spectators. It enables both the dancers and the onlookers to have access to the company of the close associates of the Lord and then to join His play.³

- (3) With its grace and sweetness, devoid of any adulteration, sensuality and communication between the dancers and the audience by words or through gestures of any part of the body, it is a thing of joy and beauty, supremacy adaptable to group dancing.

It is the dance of all men, women, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, of all Manipuris inspite of their sophisticated developments in choreography and intricate *talas*. Dancing as a profession for few classes of people is unknown to them. Every Manipuri can dance without additional effort and considerable time.

The movements of the participants are restrained and graceful and with exquisite customs it produces a great impact on devotees. To quote Ram Gopal, "Manipuri dance is soft and graceful, resembling nature in her kinder aspects. The dancers appear like corn stirring in the breeze, or waves rippling in soft undulations."

The Dances of Manipur: As in other aspects we may broadly classify dances into two, i.e., (1) Pre-Vaishnavite forms and (2) those connected with the Hindu cult in the 18th century. The two types are associated with religious motifs and mutually involve each other as we find them today. We don't have evidence of sculpture, temple architecture and inscriptions of pre-Vaishnavite form of dances apart from the living traditions and manuscripts in Meitei script. The palace *Loisang* (Royal archives in Imphal) and the various texts in the

possession of Pandits and Gurus throw valuable light on the two divisions of dance.

Laiharaoba : The ancient people have developed a most comprehensive form of dance popularly known as *Laiharaoba* which mirrors the pre-Vaishnavite culture and other types of solo, duet, group, etc., within its body. It is performed generally between the spring and the rainy season. Sometime during March and April before the temples of *Umanglais* (sylvan gods and goddesses) of the valley in strict accordance with the early Manipuri tradition.⁴ It has been in vogue since the creation of the earth by God Ashiba, 9-*Lai Pakhang* (male god in the prime of youth) and 7-*Lainuras* (female goddesses in their virginity). As mentioned in the sacred texts, the kings arranged this dance of (merrymaking of the deities) annually for imitating the play of gods and chanting actions *Hoirrou Haya* (songs sung by Guru Sidava and God Ashiba) while receiving the things given from the Guru's body.

The *Laiharaoba* is an important festival giving us a glimpse of life and art of small kingdoms. The kings, members of the royal family, title holders and the common people participate in it under the direction of high priests and priestesses (*Maibas* and *Maibis*). It is customary for them that the kings danced with their queens, unmarried princes with the girls of their choice, princesses with prospective youths as their partners. Husbands and wives, boys and girls take part in it for the peace and prosperity of the country. Thousands of villagers, both males and females of all ages, ought to dance together in the same way in a group dance. A sort of undeclared competition for the presentation in dance and costumes exist among them. In this way Manipuri society acts as a medium for the promotion of its distinctive culture.

Laiharaoba has several varieties, the most typical of which are (i) *Kunglei Haraoba* in spring includes all our rites connected with the romantic life of Nongpok Ningthou (Siva) and Nongpok Panthoibi (Parvati), (ii) *Moirang Haraoba* in autumn depicts the rites connected with the life of god Thangjing and (iii) *Chakpa Haraoba* in summer, describing the rites connected with the human efforts to please the Highest God. The

Laiharaoba of Moirang Thangjing in the grove of lake Laktak is attractive. People flock there to witness the beauty of their past glory.⁵

It consists of several rituals and dance themes. In the initial part called *Maibi* dance, the *Maibi* holds such items as breath-taking ceremony of the God on the bank of a river or pond, summoning its spirit in an earthen pot through nine threads and seven threads for gods and goddesses, dance of the *Maibis* holding the leaves of the sacred plant called *Langthrei* between the fingers, trance revealing the God's message and the *Laipou* dance (the creation and evolution of earth). In the most important stage we have the circular dance of the mass participation of the villagers under the leadership of the *Maibis* experts where there are the dances of the love story of Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi, sowing of the human seed in the womb, birth of the child, attainment of maturity, problem of housing, weaving, cultivation, etc., one by one through the movement of the fingers, hands, etc. There are many taboos to be observed strictly by all during the dance. They sing songs and pray in archaic Manipuri and express through them the welfare and prosperity of the king and the subjects of the country.⁶

This dance lasts for about 10 to 15 days or more and end with some old games and sports such as *Sagol Kangjei* (polo), *Khong Kangjei* (foot-hockey), *Thouri Chingnaba* (tug of war), *Hiyang tanaba* (boat race), spear dance, sword dance and races that the gods and goddesses are supposed to have played. The *Lairen Mathek* (curve of the python), *Paphan taret* (complicated diagrams of the serpent coil representing different aims and objects) and *Augrihangel* dance depicting the Tangkhul Naga in the role of a farmer are performed on the night of the last day as variable items of the festival. It is believed that any slight error on the part of performers will imply the wrath of gods in form of epidemics, war, evil consequences and natural calamities. The ruling deities of this dance are said to be Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi⁷.

A big *dholak* and flutes, *pena* (a string instrument) and bells (for the *Maibis*) are invariably used in this dance. Lyrics

are sung by *pena sakpa*. Tight *dhoties* and turbans for the males, striped *phanek* (lower garment), *Inaphis* (scarf) for the women participants, long loose hair of the virgin and the hair tied in a bun for the elderly women, flowers and necklaces look colourful and elegant. The *Maibis* put on special costumes such as tight fitting white uniform, *sarong phi* (a sheet of cloth with special skirt), *reshan phurit* for this performance. The *Maibis* donning female costume appear in this ritual whether they are men or women. The male *maibis* (males playing the role of priestess) are allowed to use *chamar* to avoid the movement by order of Maharaj Bodhachandra.

On the day of *Lamthokpa* (going out of the enclosure) all interested persons dress as they like in the form of fancy dress. Some of the youths are seen wearing the dress of Khamba. Girls are seen to wear the dress of Princess Thoibi. Persons playing the role of Naga tribes are frequently seen in those dresses. The dress or uniform is not confined to any class.⁸

The *Laiharaoba* dance as it stands at present does not exist in its pure form that prevailed in the past. The world famous *Ras Lila* has developed form and content of *Laiharaoba* by the Manipuri mind. *Parakeeya Rasa* and *Lila* of Nongpokingthou (Siva) and Panthoibi (Durga) of *Laiharaoba* provide scope for the same themes which are integral to Bengal Vaishnavism.⁹

The underlying ideas, *takas*, *mudras* employed in different parts of *Laiharaoba* have certain affinities with those of Indian dance texts. Manipur under the able rulers has evolved a new form of dance in its own form with Vaishnava and Hindu touches. *Laiharaoba* flourished in the groves of the *Umanglais* where it became an annual feature for the Meiteis. It spread to Meitei inhabited areas in Burma, Assam, Bengal and Tripura. They were performed under the direction of high priests and priestesses. Of late, however it has ceased to function as a standard of high philosophy. It is in the process of gradual liquidation on account of the following : (i) Irresistible inroads of band music into an otherwise sanctified atmosphere of traditional fiddle and song, (ii) deterioration in the use of *swars*, careless innovation of allied body move-

ments, (iii) arbitrary performance without knowing the nature and attribute of the concerned deity, (iv) entry into the fold of *Laiharaoba* dance by persons representing the roles of the Panjabis, Muslims, fishermen, Pathans and their performances of dances during the sacred festival, and (v) dressing of the male *Maibi* as a pure woman for playing as a practical joke.

The palace *loisang* for *Maibis* and *Maibis* and scholars served as the centre of this dance under the kings. Successive heads of these departments were responsible for the innumerable compositions, elaborate rites and leaving a considerable number of formalities for each god or goddess.¹⁰

Management of the temples of *Umanglais* (forest deities) and *Laiharaoba* festival : The temples of about 480 *Umanglais* in whose worship the *Haraoba* festival takes place can be divided into the following : (a) *Umanglais* for the whole country such as Pakhangba, Nongpokningthou, Thangjing, Wangbaron etc., (b) *Umanglais* for all the Manipuris but their *seva* is done by a particular clan being Laikhurembi (Durga) worshipped by Taibungjam, Soraren (Indira) by Sorensangbam, and (c) *Umanglais* for the *Sageis*, viz. Hijam Lairema of Hijam, Lainingthou Ishingchaiba of Paonam, etc. These temples along with household deities (like Sanamahi—Sun-god and fire) in a house form the backbone of pre-Vaishnavite culture in Manipur. The Maharaja being the religious head visits all the temples and gives timely directions and instructions with the help of his *pandit loisang*, *Maiba* and *Maibi loisang* on matters of *Laiharaoba* and connected items. Some of the important deities have rent-free land for their maintenance. The concerned people or village with the help of the local people raise funds for the festival. It is believed that they would incur divine displeasure if they neglect the service. The spiritual service is carried on through the persons who have the authority and proficiency in Meitei lore and dance. The temples which were managed by the Maharajas through their *Loisang* are now under the control of Sri Govindaji Temple Board of the Government of Manipur, since 1976. The *Loisang* as affiliated body of the Board has survived almost in name. All the *Umanglais* in spite of the pre-Hindu character do not come under any control, either of

Sanamahi Temple Board (since He is not an *Umanglai* in Meitei belief) or a separate board. But many voluntary organisations at different places have been established due largely to the revivalist interest. An institution called All Manipur Lai Haraoba Committee was set up in 1968. Scholars interested in Meitei script and lore have identified themselves with it. It projects its works through the observance of *Maichou* day (day of scholars) and publications of a quarterly journal namely *Umang Lai Khunda*. Some publications on *Laiharaoba* and *Umanglais* are brought out from time to time. It confers degrees on the persons dedicated to Manipuri script, culture and literature. It promotes awareness about wealth of Manipur's heritage. Its activities are linked with other organisations.

New brick temples and good grounds are constructed and improvements effected out of donations and endowments from the pro-revivalist members of the Meiteis. In the past, the festival in most villages was purely parochial as only the inhabitants of the concerned village were allowed to be present. The organisers were instructed to take proper care of the shrine, and not to allow any Rajkumar to approach it for should one of the royal family contrived to worship there and offer gold and silver, he would certainly try for the throne and might cause endless trouble. The palace which once used to produce well qualified *Maibas*, *Maibis* and singers and dancers now remain defunct and almost came to a stop by 1960. In the changing conditions such practices adversely affect the public sympathy and effort on which the success of this festival rests mostly.

It is the moral responsibility of every Meitei to organise this festival and maintain temples of the locality. Many of the fine arts such as mask-making of the deities, preparation of several designs of cloth, dances and music are also fast disappearing. A successful organisation of this festival would naturally mean the promotion of those fine arts.

The *Maibas* and *Maibis* are remarkable as they are the indispensable characters from the beginning to the end of this ritual dance. They are either male or female living like *Devadasis*. They dress themselves in white uniforms in

spiritual works. According to local convention the entry into *maibihood* is preceded by certain mode of thinking and action. The men or women who would be *maibis* had a call which is evidenced by the suffering of an unidentified disease for a long time, incoherent speech and peculiar accent and tragic call of fate. After purification of their body by the *teiren* leaves (sacred plant) and clean clothes they require training under a *mama guri* (mother guru) of the same temperament and inclination. Though they are illiterate they get *Leinunglöl* (Khununglöl/God's words) by heart. They become possessed by the spirit of gods and goddesses like Pakhangba, Mahadeva, Durga, or the three Gurus in utterances. To quote from F. Bowers "*Maibis* are more numerous in the profession.....Afterwards they resume their normal return to their homes and husbands (if they ever married) but the centre of the life and their means of livelihood have shifted to predicting the future, officiating at ceremonies and as choreographers, a leader of the *Laiharaoba*." Ordinary ways of life do not operate in this case, they abstain from eating fish with thorns such as *Ngakra* (clarias batrachus), *Ngamu* (mud fish) *Sereng* (sheath fish) and *Ukabi* (a kind of fish), food cooked by other man and use of coloured or dyed cloth. They are under obligation to use only the fire produced by the friction of woods. They are enjoined to sleep alone and to perform divination or oracles with the help of bells, coins of the country or sticks. They take fixed rates of fees for fortune telling, the customers stand in queue to get the reading of the *Maibis*. There was the belief that the *Maibis* fail to get the correct prediction if some one violates the due order.

The spiritual partners of the *Maibis* are *Maibas* who conduct the festival with their knowledge of ancient lores, scripts, incantations and psycho-analytic methods. He has to receive training in the *Loisang* which was attached to the court for a period for 5 or 6 years. After schooling himself long enough in this field, he is qualified to be ordained as a recognised *Maiba*. The main difference between the *Maibi* and the *Maiba* is that the former is god-gifted and ordained completely while the latter is made and trained through his labour and research.¹¹

Ras Lilas : When the entire state adopted Gaudiya Vaishnavism as the official religion, the Manipuris produced the beautiful *Ras Lila* under the patronage of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra (1768-1798). The first *Ras* strictly after the classical tradition was dedicated to Sri Govindaji at a *Ras mandal* at Langthabal (now Kanchipur) on *Mera Purnima* (fullmoon day of Sept-Oct.). The present *Ras* varieties are the sum total of the contributions made by different teachers of the succeeding generations who were convinced that the pre-Vaishnavite traditions of dance as in *Laiharaoaba*, sword and spear dances and the Vaishnavite expressions are complementary and not contradictory. The old tradition provided plenty of basis for the proper estimate. The foundation of *Ras*, techniques, the costumes, ornaments and make-up etc., are said to be revealed to Rajarshi Bhagyachandra in his dream. In the sphere of religious history, Rajarshi occupies the same place as Constantine in European/Christian history. He and his daughter Vimbabati were ardent devotees of Sri Govindaji. Dance is the medium of the *Bhakti marga*. It represents the finest flowering of Vaishnavite culture as an extension of *Sankirtan* tradition. *Ras* is not for showing to the onlookers but it is a meditation of God who plays in Vrindavan in human form. The eye glances are kept on the two sides of the nose. In fact one never says that he is going to witness the *Ras* but he says that he is bowing down before the *Ras*. It is considered sinful to talk of the *Ras* in the mundane or material plane. The place is thought to be the *Ras mandal* in Vrindavan where nobody can enter and touch Sri Krishna, Radha and the *gopis* during the *Ras* performance. The pious *Meiteis* hold that no one witnessed the *Ras* in the material world prior to its exhibition in Manipur, the second Vaikuntha. Nobody except Siva, the gate-keeper sees the *Ras* as their mind was deeply engrossed in meditation of Sri Krishna.¹²

Description of Ras Nartan : An ardent devotee should possess necessary stamina to observe vows, penance and perform the necessary rituals such as worship of Sri Govindaji, Sanamahi, *tulsi* plant, abstaining from fish and worship of earthen pot, and sanctification of the dance arena. The male *Nata pala kirtan* which begins in the night must serve as a

sort of prologue to *Ras* in which they sing songs of Caitanya, King Bhagyachandra and personages for the proposed dance. After this, the *sutradharas* (mostly females) in the north west corner of the hall sing the songs of Krishna's divine love play as described in the *Bhagavata*. According to the song, the *gopis* along with Krishna performed the dance on the bank of the Yamuna. The plays such as the arrival of Krishna, Radha and the *gopis* at the appointed place, Krishna's disappearance from the company of *gopis* and Radha searching for the Lord through song on the bank of Yamuna, *Prema Seva* of the *gopis* towards Him, questioning Him by the *gopis*, His answers to the questions, His *Ras Lila* with the *gopis*, *Jalakeli*, wandering in the forest and *gopis'* return to their homes at the end of the night are performed in due order. It ends with the *Arati Nritya* in which the whole audience stands up and takes part.

It was the policy of Vaishnava kings to allow the people in using a foreign language in their vehicle of expression. By doing so the audience is induced to believe that the dialogues and songs which were of the deities were really the words of the deities and not of the ordinary people. The Vaishnava songs can arouse the awe, reverence, etc., in the minds of people. They were made to appeal to the rulers, audience etc., because of their culture in those days. It is worthy to note that Vaishnava kings of Manipur composed devotional songs in Brajavali which is an artificial language containing Maithili, Bengali and Sanskrit words.¹³

There are four main types of *Ras*, namely, *Maharas* (on the night of fullmoon day of *Hiyangei* (in November), *Kunjaras* (on the night of the fullmoon of *Mera* (in October), *Vasantaras* on the night of the fullmoon of *Hiyangei* (in November) and *Nitya Ras* (no specific time). The palace held *ras lilas* of the first three categories. They can be performed locally only after the performances in the palace or selected temples with care and extreme orthodoxy. The departure in new compositions and reasonable alterations is allowed in *Nitya Ras* which is further subdivided into *Dibaras* (in the day time) and *Nishiras* (at night). It revolves round Krishna's play with Radha and *gopis* without separation, fear, anger,

etc., in presentation. Late Guru Amubi is of the opinion that *Diva Ras* was introduced by Maharaja Churachand Singh.

Emphasis on a particular episode, songs, *ragas* and *raginis* are found to differ from category to category. Certain episode in one *ras* is excluded in other categories. *Abir Khel* (sprinkling of coloured water) and appearance of Chandravali as Radha's rival is found only in *Vasantaras*. Some of the solo and duet dance presentation of Krishna, Radha, Chandravali, etc., which figure prominently in other *Ras* do not apply to Govindaji Temple where the wooden images of Rajeswari (at first Sija Laiobibi, daughter of King Bhagyachandra Singh) and Sri Govindaji were placed at the centre of the pavilion. Palace *Ras lilas* consist of the *gopis* only. Music provided by the voice in the background with the *manjiras* (small cymbals) has different *ragas* and *raginis* for different *Rasas*. The music with metre forms a separate style whether it is in Bengali or in Manipuri (as at present).

There are *parengs* (series) which are performed at the beginning of a *Ras*. The more common ones among them being Vrindavana *pareng*, Khurumba *pareng*. Bhagi *pareng* Achouba, etc. which are classical compositions of dedicated Gurus. They are presented in the form of group dances. While presenting them the members of the audience cannot leave the place till its presentation is complete. It is now held that the period covering a night is too inadequate for a dance consisting of several themes, performances and many *parengs*. It creates a world of phantasy by its music and dance, acting and speech, dress and background orchestra.¹⁴ The Gurus/Ojha Pural (equally well versed in song, keeping time and suggesting ideas by hand gestures and movements) in his capacity as the leader of orchestra party and structure of the *Ras* must exercise his discretion in editing them to suit the performances. Unlike other dances, Manipuri feature lies mainly in *chali* (steps) *Uplei* (*bhramari*) *Longlei* and soft and effortless movements. The *talas* employed for songs are *Tintal*, *Mel*, *Tanche* and *Menkup* (three beats and one stress) and *Rajmel* (in the *Vilamvita Laya* according to the *mridanga* players of Manipuri Nata Sankirtana. We have innumerable *talas* of dance and *pung*

(drum) playing as set forth in the texts such as *Sri Krishna Rasa Sangeet Sangrasa* of Thakur Bhakti Siddhanta, *Padamrita Samudra*, etc. The *talas* and rhythm pattern range from 4 to 54 beats. There are as many as 120 *talas* in all in a treatise called *Gorinda Sangit Lila Vilas*. The *talas* of Meitei drum consists of *Ragas* and *tala prabhandhas* (when two or more *talas* are combined in a single composition) in addition to the usual *vistaras* and *bols* (a syllable uttered to accompany each movement). Some of the *talas* in *pung* (drum) are neither mentioned by the texts of North India nor by those of South India. They are the creative expressions of the old *ojhas/gurus* in their own way.

Almost all the scientific treatises on the *talas* of Manipuri music and dance have been discovered and are being edited and published with translations in modern Manipuri. For technique, *Trital*, *Rupak*, *Jhaptal*, *Chowtal*, *Dashkush* are in common use. The *Bhangimas* are done in *Lofatal* followed by *Dadra* and *Kanarwa*.¹⁵

It is but proper to discuss something about costumes, ornaments and make up of Manipuri *Ras*. There are many *potloi setpas* (those who keep these costumes, ornaments after making them) who rent them for the performance at some rates. The costumes last for 50 or 60 years and earn them a good deal of money. The costume makers as well as the participants are guided by the spirit of production and use of new costumes and designs within the accepted norms. They are good instances of Manipuri workmanship. The *potloi setpa* enters into a contract with the participant (except the professional) on some fixed charges, part of which has to be spent for the costume and ornaments. It is the cherished ambition of every Manipur girl and the aged woman to participate in the *Ras* by putting on costumes and ornaments. The costume for Krishna consists of a blue silk *dhoti*, crown of flowers topped with fan like piece embossed with silver *jari* and peacock feather, a silver flute with flowers, rings, bangles, bracelets, armbands for the hand and silver *jari* beads and ornaments for the foot.¹⁶

The costume and ornaments for Radha and other *gopis* consist of an embroidered brightly coloured silk skirt (called

kumin), a blouse called *Rasham phurit* (green colour for Radha and red colour for all *gopis*), a short flair of silver gauze over the silk skirt, a girdle round the waist, and a veil thrown over the head with various ornaments on different parts of the body.

Kumil, the costume of *Ras* is the design developed out of the *Fanek*, the traditional garment for women under the order of King Jaysinha. They do their hair high up with flowers round the coiffure (Buddha *Jata* style). The veil covering the head represents the *utteriya*. Mask is generally put on in connection with *Gostha lila* and *Kaliya daman*.

The dressing is so designed as to free them from any stimulus, excitement to the opposite sex. Dance is but the rhythmic expression of actions and activities of life on the upper part of the body. The parts below the neck to the feet are covered with cloth. The women hide the movements of the lower position of the body while dancing.¹⁷

Dibaras is performed by the *gopis* by wearing *sari*. The theme is drawn from the *Bhajan lila* of Thakur Mahasay by the *ojhas* during the reign of Maharaja Bodhachandra. The *Nitya Ras* belongs to villages, and its another form is called *Nartta* which is dedicated to Sri Govinda on any day of the year. This has been in existence since the time of Sir Churachand Maharaj. When the British became the rulers of Manipur, they wanted to see *Ras* by divesting it of time factors. They took it from the main temple to *Hapta Bangla* (British residency) of Major Maxwell, the Political Agent, where his wife, Princess Sanatombi Devi, played the role of *Makok chingbi* (Vrinda Sakhi). The gurus recast its dress and name to meet the need of the British officials and called it *Natta* or *Nartta rasa*. *Beni* (braid of hair) of the *Bai* is used in this dance which has become a recognised fashion for all dance dresses. *Koktumbi* (coiffure) which was used for the *Ras* in the villages is being replaced by it. But the traditional *Nitya Ras* is restricted to the *Asta Kala Seva* of Sri Govinda and does not go out of the temple. We face several technical problems from within and without in presenting Manipur *Ras* in modern context. Manipuri *Ras* being well known for its devotion and well defined codes do not favour modern trends which generate the following declining trends.

- (1) The playing of Radha *nartan* and Krishna *nartan* before *Bhangi Pareng* without maintaining the order.
- (2) The incorporation of elements from Kathak and Bharatanatyam and modern elements in classical Manipuri dance which one felt was leaving the traditional style.
- (3) Giving *talas* with the ankle bells and use of Hindustani musical instruments without proper authority.
- (4) Mixing of *Rasa's* dress with *sari* in some cases of *gopis*.
- (5) Deficiency of the *Ras* teachers causes chances of being debased.
- (6) Uncongenial atmosphere arising from the distribution of money, clothes by the people which goes counter to the sanctity of *Ras* tradition.
- (7) Excessive show of different gods and goddesses with the help of robes, etc., as part of the *Ras*.
- (8) Punctuation of dancing with songs in a foreign language.
- (9) Age limit of Krishna and the *gopis*. The performers are women and girls, except in the case of Krishna, who is impersonated by a young boy or a girl of 6 to 8 years old. For *Thourani* (Radha) and the *gopis* there is no age limit. The practice of beginning in a childhood without knowing the meaning, theory and significance is inimical to progress.¹⁸

Today as a result of modern pressures and internal reflections the gurus in spite of orthodoxy have worked on new productions on the stage, compressed one whole night *Ras Lila* to a 10 or 15 minute piece, the lyrics of which are in Manipuri translations. With movies, T.V. cameras the film producers have started to use *Ras* dances in some films.

METHOD OF ORGANISATION

The organisation of palace category is different from that of the villages in the detail. During the reign of the Hindu

Maharajas funds were set apart for celebration of festivals including the *Rasas*. Now the management has been entrusted to Sri Govindaji Temple Board with the ex-ruler as the chairman and laying down policies which are executed by the D.C. of Imphal Central. The Vaishnava kings made the ruling that they should send their children to play the main roles of the *Ras* of the palace. The circumstances leading to the organisation are fulfilment of a promise to god on the eve of the birth of a son or daughter, promotion or prosperity in life. By playing such roles in the sacred dance children are thought to counter the evil effects of their *karma*, bad *dashas* and evil eye.¹⁹

As per the convention, willing people contact the person in charge of the dance for permission to enable their children to play the role of *Lai* or *gopi*. Children of the royal family or top ranking officials are normally given the chance in the temple of Sri Govindaji, Vijaya Govindaji or famous temples which had royal sanction. The young girls selected for participation in the *rasa* dances of the palace receive their training from the *Rashdhari* (approved guru) for a period of 2 or 3 months. The children can show talents for this dance since they live with the devoted people in the environment of a sacred land. The professionals are also requisitioned for their contribution on the final day of the performance. The full time dancers, other members like *sutradharies*, flute players and instrumentalists are handsomely rewarded. The rates of charge are relative to their position, efficiency and performance. They have maintained their own glorious tradition. They enjoy an enviable position in society as teachers of culture.²⁰

As for the *rasas* in the villages or cities they are conducted by the well-to-do families voluntarily. The parents of the children acting main roles raise higher subscription to the same.

There is a marked tendency towards collective patronage of *Ras* and *Nata* performance. Friends and relatives in great number of the persons whose children play the leading roles come and offer in cash or in kind or a garland of rupee notes to the sole performance of the leading roles in the dance arena. Such presents are collected by the concerned parents after the dance. A man with considerable influence may receive in cash

or kind the value which can meet the expenses. Some critics are against this commercialising trend. The collective patronage within the framework of *Ras* tradition will be a healthy sign. We must however reform *Ras* dance by cleansing it of undesirable things such as undue show of money power and give it a scientific look. Such collective patronage supply the organisers with some money and live purely on faith for the supply of their needs. The days of royal patronage are gone for good. The interest of the *Zamindars* may wane and forget the trend. But the voluntary efforts of the general people will continue to make a major contribution by not forgetting the needs of the people whose economic standard will continue to be low for years to come.

Thus the age-old method of sacred tradition continues to this day, egged on by an enthusiastic public, including the high dignitaries and admirers.

Udukhol—Krishna's *Valya lila* and *Vatsalya Ras* is enacted through dance and devotional music. The dance in its present form commemorates the following :

(1) *Gaura Chandrika* song by the *sutra* party, (2) birth of Nalkuber and Manibhadra as Yamarjan trees due to the curse of sage Narada, (3) marriage of Devaki, putting Vasudeva and Devaki under guard by Kamsa, (4) birth of Krishna and exchange of Yasoda's baby with Krishna, (5) killing of Putna, (6) killing of Trenavarta, (7) awakening of Krishna Balaram at Nandalaya, feeding and eating, (8) teaching dance to the boys, (9) milking and *Surya puja* by Yasoda, (10) stealing and eating of butter by Krishna and his party (11) playing with *danda*/sticks, (12) *Madhumangol Khel* (play with Subhadra Sakha son of Upananda), (13) complaint by milk maids to Yasoda, Krishna's denial of allegations and the prayer of the milk maids, (14) tying of Krishna to a mortar by Yasoda, felling of the trees and salvation of Nalkuber and Manibhadra and (15) repair to Vrindavana by Nanda with his kinsmen and cowherds.

The Vaishnava *bhakta* remained often absorbed in the divine play of Sri Krishna. With child Krishna *Vanavihari* type and with the role of mother Yasoda, *ghaghari* are still approved. The dress of Nanda and other *gopas* have been

prepared after the model of the *Vrajabasis*. The credit for this must go to a large number of *ojha*-artists such as late G. Iboton Sarma alias Ngakramacha Sarma, late Karatombi Singh, late M. Jadu Singh, late Kh. Nongyai Singh, M. Tilak, N. Maku Ibungo/Ibohal and Th. Kunjo Singh who enriched it through their teachings and performing roles. Maharaja Chura-chand encouraged it with his appreciation and he himself visited and paid his respect to his brother-in-law Tomchou Singh who first hosted this performance. The Kunjo impressed us in the role of *Gopa* Nanda reciting Brajabhasa verses which he had learnt from Dinabandhu Babaji, the Mahanta of Mahabali temple.

Sansenva/Gosthalila (cow-tending dance): This is a kind of religious dance, wherein the story of Krishna and his *gopa* friends is performed, by the small children dressed as Krishna with sticks and flutes. Sri Krishna's game, association with the pastoral boys, Yasoda's love for her son, the coming of sage Narada to the palace of Nanda and teaching Krishna and Balaram how to milch and graze the cattle are invariably shown. Then the *gopas* go for tending cattle with the permission of the parents. When they start playing, two demons come in the guise of *Dhenukasur* (cattle) and *Bhaksur* (egret) and attempt to kill them by order of Kamsa. The two princes slay them and thereby saving the lives of the *gopas* and the cattle. The roles of Nanda, his brothers, Yasoda and Rohini, Narada and his disciples are performed by the elderly people. Masks containing the demon's head are worn by players representing them. Such is the case with the players representing Hanuman, Bakasura, etc. Bodily decorations include false hair, false beards and suitable ornaments. The faces of Krishna, Radha and *gopas* are painted with white colour while of the demons with red and black colours.²¹

Every year on the *Gostastami*, 8th day of *Kartika* (*Hiyangei*), this dance in its due order takes place at the temples of Sri Govindaji (Palace), Shri Vijaya Govindaji (Sagolband) and Gopinath at Ningthoukhong. No performance of the same is allowed in other temples on and before this particular day, a day which is specially reserved for royal performance. It may be followed by several similar perform-

ances all over the valley and Meitei inhabited areas.

The time theory of the different parts of the dance is still being adhered to strictly in the temple of Sri Govindaji. But this is not being followed in practice in private places in view of the weakening role of the Director (Rasdhari) of the dance and commercialising trend of the professional artists who lend their service in it. *Phere gostha* is held after *Gwalarti* when it is to be done just in time. The dance item to be shown before 9.30 a.m. is shown at 12 p.m. instead of performing it in one day as an independent item it is expanded into many days in combination with such items as *Krishna Valya lila* and *Kangsha badha* (killing of Kamsa by Sri Krishna), the dress of Krishna is more or less similar to that of Radha. In the *gostha* they sing a verse from Bengali *padavali* which was in fashion: "Shyamnaba Jala dhara Natabar besh Tribhanga Bhangima Talasi Bare."

The noted female artists in the roles are Mangi Devi, Subadani Devi, Muktarei Devi, Maipakpi Devi, Thanghaibi and Nar Singh Ibetombi Devi. Success went to late S. Mera Singh and A. Khomdon as demon, Trinavarta and Kamsa, Tomba Singh and Gouradas Sharma as monkey, Y. Chaoba and Narada, A. Lokhon as Narada, late T. Thamal Angou, Top Thambal Angou and Gourahari Sarma as Balbasu (follower of Sage Narada). It would be completing a fruitful period of 50 years of its existence by 1990. It is nurtured and patronaged by the well-to-do families voluntarily through the organisation of Udukhala and other cultural dances.²² Their children play the main roles, some Krishna, some Baldeva and so on. All must contribute their mite to its success. Witnessing them in the place is a matter of religious merit.

Gouralila : It is performed by boys of the age group of 8 to 10 years in different areas of the rich people. Some parts are meant for the professionals who have attained popularity in their roles. The *lila* orchestra is constituted by the director/teacher of the boys, other noted people and instrumentalists which provide explanations, announcements and timings.²³

The costumes for the 20 or 30 *pala*, *machas*/boys consist of reddish/*pisindri* *dhotti* with black borders, *Moirangphi*

Changkhrang tabi (a short white and thin cloth) as belt, *tulsi* beads, *uttari* (string used as scarf), sacred thread and 12 marks of *chandan* (sacred paste). *Sonarik Pareng* (local made necklace), garlands decorate the neck. *Tal*, bracelets and armbands are in the foot. The main roles are painted white and are made to wear *luhups* (crown) with silver star. The *dhoties* of green for Nitai, red for Nimai and blue for Gadadhar are richly decorated with some patterns. There are various ornaments for the waist, neck and the feet for the three roles. The dress and make-up of Visnupriya (wife of Chaitanya) is somewhat akin to that of a *gopi*.²⁴ A piece of cloth is placed on a velvet and is used as the *asanas* of three roles, namely, Nitai, Nimai and Gadadhar (known as *Laisabas*) at the centre of the stage.

After *Loi Chandan*, the three roles begin to shout "Haribol" thrice. It is followed by the words *Hare Hare*. Then follows *Sankirtan* of the Nata Pala pattern. After the Rajmel Abhinaya by the boys, Nimai (Chaitanya) is shown to fall in a deep trance and whispering *Hari nam* by the two and coming back to life. Then the representation of Chaitanya's *lila* such as Nimai's meeting with Kesava Bharati, preparation for monkhood, the touching scene of Vishnupriya's separation, bidding farewell in the guise of a cuckoo, shaving by Madhe, the principal barber of the town, refusal of Madhu to do which he has been asked, his attempt to attack Nimai and intervention of Madhumata, Sanyasi under the name of Krishna Chaitanya, Nitai's tricks upon Chaitanya by leaving him towards Santipur instead of Vrindavan and the great dinner at Advaita's place are charmingly composed and shown at the direction of Siddhapurush Ngangbam Mala Singh during the reign of Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh.²⁵

During the reign of Maharaja Churachand Singh, R.K. Koli equipped himself with the *Bhakti granthas* and added the performance of Madhumata (mother of barber) with songs and added the popular appeal to the people. It is again Ojha A. Chagemton who introduced *Abhiram Prasanga* (meeting with Sudem in another *lila*). Change of two *tantrics* like Jogai and Madhai, insertion of the role of Tirthabasi (one who goes to the holy places) which are still in vogue, *Dol Lila* of

S. Tomchou and late Kh. Anganghal is now forgotten.²⁶ The addition of other *rasas* such as *Gangasnan*, *Brahma mohan* (captivation of Brahma, the creator), *Ganga para* (crossing of the Ganges) and *Samudra Patan* (falling in the sea) and *Laksman Saktisen* by late Ng. Jugindro Singh, a noted authority of *Manohar Sai*, *Prabhu Janma lila*, *Sarvabhoulma sanga* (meeting with Sarvabhoulma) and *Kuru Kshetra Milan* by Th. Kunjakishore Singh (an Akademi award winner in his role as Nanda) and their joint venture to popularise *Kaji Daman* (conquest of Kasi Chand by Chaitanya) as a part of *Gaura lila* are reported to be a high watermark in entertainment. We accept most of their additions as a matter of course, today.²⁷ It is understood that many realised persons like Khoydong Sarma (in the role of barber), Kalimubi Devi (Madhumata), S. Tomchou, Mera, late Kunjo, Samenyaima Sarma (as Jogai and Madhai) Ng. Yogindro, A. Lokhon (as Kesav Bharti), R.K. Ratan Sana (as barber), Chandrakala (as Madhumata), etc., have been performing several parts in this *lila* contributing to its power of attraction.²⁸

Pung cholom/Mridanga Kirtan (dance of Manipuri *mridanga*): This drum-dance may be performed either as an integral part of *Nat Sankirtan* or independently. As a part of *nata*, it is performed by two players but as an independent dance at least 14 players follow the sequence of *Nat Sankirtan* with about 40 complicated *talas* and *sanchars* (particular compositions of complicated rhythms). The rulers patronised and organised 4 distinct types in connection with Hindu religious festivals like Durga Puja. The number of players may go up to 100. Various types of bodily movements are executed with great artistry and excitement. It articulates the sounds of thunder, voice of birds and animals. The movements are initially soft, but become momentous and vigorous. They have a special type of turban which they drop by their flicking of head and movements.²⁹

It is a convention for them to dedicate their drumming to Nityananda, Advaita, Gadadhar, Divadas Gopal (12 gopals), S Sadhus/Manantas, 6 Goswamis of Vrindavan, 64 mahantas, innumerable devotees of Gauranga, *Sat Samprudaya*

(7 Schools), 14 *pung* players, all the *bhaktas* and lastly Radha and Krishna. Some of the companions of Chaitanya are associated with *mridanga*. Our great kings and princes are exponents of *mridanga*, *talas* and *choloms*.

It is highly stylistic and ritualistic. Every part that is shown has decades of training behind it. It is not a mere course. Right from the teens, the aspirant must offer his worship at the altar of his muse for decades before he can claim recognition. Unmindful of expenses and bodily injury and troubles of hands in beating the drum, one must love his art, his hobby, his profession and his mission.³⁰

Mridanga pung was barred to women according to Manipuri convention and code. It was held that women did not have either the physical or mental ability or the time to practise its *cholom*. It was meant for the male warriors only. Women's use of *pung* was seriously objected to by the dictates of the people and king's *Loisang*. With the opening of dance college and cinema, television, etc., it is held that women have the right to use *pung*. The rules with *pung* and *kirtan* for women have been waived. We have a long series of famous women practitioners of *pung cholom* since 1950. To cite the examples, Savita N. Mehta of Bombay Parimal Academy, Darsana Jhaveri of Manipuri Nartakalaya, Tondon Devi, Malavati Devi, noted dancers etc., achieved fame through their demonstrations.³¹

As parts of classical dances, the young artists are honoured. The Sangit Natak Akademi awards, state prizes and the palace honours are proving a great incentive for the artists in the field.

Khamba and Thoibi dance : It is performed either as a part of *Laiharaoba* or independently. We have observed above that men pick up their partners; girls all dressed gaily dance with flowers in their hands. Khamba-Thoibi dance is a duet dance which tells the story of Khamba, a poor but brave lad of the Khuman clan who fell in love with Thoibi, a princess of Moirang. They succeeded in love affair after a series of heroic deeds on the part of the hero and the exile of Thoibi by her father for defying his will. They are fabled to dance so nicely in the *haraoba* of god Thangjing that they came to be

regarded as the incarnations of Siva and Parvati respectively, who were responsible for the famous *Ras* of Manipur. This dance typically represents the *Tandava* and *Lasya* aspects of *Laiharaoaba* movements.³²

This picturesque dresses of Khamba and Thoibi reflect the old culture of Moirang (28 miles to the south west of Imphal) with which the love stories, epics and beliefs of the Manipuris are associated. Khamba's performance is a war-like and robust dance. It is most dynamic and forceful. The restrained and delicate movements of Princess Thoibi have an appeal of grace and refinement.³³

Thabal Chongbi : We have stated elsewhere that the festival of *Yaosang/Dolyatra* was celebrated for Lord Gouranga accompanied by such as building and burning of a hut near a river, holy singing, feasts of the boys, typically Manipuri Vaishnavite in character (consisting of rice, *dal*, *bhaji*, *iromba*, etc.) and collection of funds by the girls, etc. Another aspect in its dance form called *Thambal Chongba* is of very great attraction to the aesthetic mind.

It means jumping in the moonlit night by the youths and girls in a courtyard. The Meiteis have been performing this dance since the pre-Hindu period in the name of Keiyen (a dance encircling Pakhangba) by joining hands of nine gods and seven goddesses) and jumping anti-clockwise so that Sanamahi (as tiger) cannot break the circle or *Ke-krchongba*. The youths and girls form circle with hands joined to each other. If the number is great they may form two or three rows so that everybody and anybody can participate in the dance. Of its special interest is the dance of the legs and of the mind by the side of the girl on the part of the males and also by the side of youth on the part of the females and hand in hand dancing. They wear no make-up and special costume for the same.³⁴

During the old days a main singer or a well trained artist with *Haribola* (Hail to god) sang religious songs, historical ballads, epics of Moirang, etc. The participants echoed his words in a chorus. The *dholak* beating supplied the tempo and rhythm of the dancers. When the dance progressed, the singing ceases, they continued swift jumping. They sometimes

played the *Lairen Mathek chatpa* (zig zag course of the pythons) with one leader at the head of each row.³⁵ By doing so they raised hands and fell with the swinging legs in close touch with the beating of *dholak* and other instruments. Its peculiarity lay in the fact that they exhibited their skill of legs with some success without any formal training as if they were born with its talent.

In the past, the dance was concluded with the song of *Mikon Thagouba* wherein the *Pancha Bhoot* with the shadow of the body was asked or made to reside in the body just below the navel after a train of questions and the soul's reply to them.

There has been a big change in the last 20 years. The aspiration of the people attempted to revolutionise this aspect—one by replacing the simple *dholak* by expensive band party and elaborate light arrangements in the dance arenas and the rest by missing the sole songs and interesting ballads. The practice of performing it during the festival has been violated by the people nowadays. The practice is still continued among them. The unmarried girls go about demanding money from men, and unless satisfied proceed at once to strip them of their clothing which they only return on receiving compensation.

Opinions have been expressed by the reformers against the continuance of this festival in a extravagant and easy contact fashion between the boys and girls. The undue liberty in the name of religion and chances for love making and quarrels between the rival groups must be stopped by voluntary checking. The upholders of Sanamahi cult want to take away the Vaishnavite garb and fusion out of it. During the regime of the Maharajas it was organised with due care and the whole programme was gone through with their approval, which extracted remarks from the observers and visitors. One can be impressed by several items of work, constructive and creative in character, in its celebration. We learn more about God of our cult when we celebrate this festival. The tradition is too important to be uprooted suddenly. However, the detrimental effects of the unconscious merry makings, heavy drinking and killing among themselves during the performances of this dance must be checked by us in time.³⁶

Augrihangel and *Thengkou* are sacred and secret dances performed by capable persons with sword and a shield or spear, the purpose of which is creation, preservation and destruction. *Augrihangel* is a part of *Kanglei* rhythmic dance in a circle singing a hymn for the ruin of an occupied territory, at least for a short time, if not forever. Constructive *Augri* can be sung for the good government and peace of the country. The earliest performance of it with extreme caution is found in old texts such as *Panthoibi Khongun*, *Naotheringkhong Phambal Kaba* and the *Royal Chronicle*. Persons joining the dance in a circle are obliged to be very careful not to cause any break of the circle while dancing. The code forbids the imparting of this sacred knowledge to those who are not ready for various steps of *tantric* ritualism.

Nine (some say to 10) *Thengkourols* are symbolic movement which are coordinated either with the steps of dancing or with the skilled movements of a sword or spear. Nine kinds of diagrams of the snake-god (Pakhangba) are technically called *Paphals* which are said to be supporting the earth. Figures of the leg movements for sword and spear *thengkou* are related to the hood of the snake Pakhangba Ananta. All the 35 letters are interwoven with this science. A sacred text *Thengkourol* tells us that God Ashiba started to make the earth with the performance of *Thengkou* dance. The teaching or performance takes place with the approval of the king in one of the following places : Lalambung, Heibok hill, Takyel lake and Lamphel lake. A lucky day, hour and star according to Maitei belief are always chosen on which to do all these works. They are absolutely obliged to spread the flour over the dancing arena, above the flour, *kokan* leaves, after which the place is pure. Out of these 9 forms, two namely, *Athou Achouba* and *Athou Macha* were performed by Maharaja Bhagyachandra and his son Maharaja Gambhir Singh during the Burmese devastation of Manipur at Khebu hill and Lamangdong (Visnupur). They were so successful in spear dances that the people of Manipur thought them to be the liberators of the country and restorers of normal life against the Burmese devastations. Instances can be multiplied. After the abolition of the monarchy, the above dance forms have become stale and lifeless.

There are also dances normally at the social structure and social system under these categories : (a) women in domestic affairs, (b) rice pounding dance, (c) harvest dance and (d) weaving dance. Numerous dance dramas and ballets are developing out of these forms.

GAMES AND SPORTS DANCES

As a fighting race in defence of freedom and independence of the country Manipuris are well versed in the use of swords, spears, Yubi Lakpi (games of one vs. many), arrows, hockey, polo and Manipur style of wrestling. There are unavoidable items of *Laiharaoba* and Kwak Jatra festival (Vijaya Dasami day of Durga Puja) before the distinguished gathering which include the titleholders, dignitaries and prominent members. *Mukha* (wrestling or breaking the balance of a man with special tricks of legs), use of arrow and missile (known as *Arambal*), foorhockey in combination with wrestling, polo (hockey on horseback) and various items of physical culture are coloured by religious beliefs and are dedicated to different presiding deities of different seasons. Martial arts particularly in the use of spear and sword and use of horses and the names of their own constructions have been practised in their own ways. Sword constitutes the body and spear, the soul, so goes the saying of the Meiteis. One can find much similarities between the movements of *Thang Ta* (sword and spear dance) on the one hand and those of the movements of *Laiharaoba*, *Rasa lila*, *Pung* and *Pala choloms* on the other.

These dances which had been relegated to the background due to the use of modern weapons, bombs and guns have of late prospered and made rapid strides. Manipuri martial acts like *Thang Yannaba* showing the skill of self-defence by swords in hand in a continuous series of aggressive and defensive gestures and artistic movements of body, throwing spear and catching it by other, *Ta khousaba* (skill and experience in the use of spear against the wild animals like wild boar and tiger) has won the applause of foreign observers and these are included as a variety in the National School of Drama (Delhi).³⁷

Polo was resuscitated by the All Manipur Polo Club/Riding and Polo Training Institute and Horse through their simplification of rules, (removing of dangerous practices), polo tournaments both in old *pana* style and new style and uplift of its standard. In the past it had the support of the rulers and nobles. The women of Manipur as is customary among them turn up in their best to witness it and offer garlands, sweets, fruits, *pan* to the players to encourage them. This is known as *Potlanba*. The British officers who were captivated by its style studied it and propagated it in Europe when they went back home. Leading women such as Maharani Gayatri Devi of Jaipur and Savita N. Mehta of Bombay developed an interest in it.³⁸

Voluntary associations such as Hurla under the initiative of Birjit Ngangomba, the Huyen Lalong Tha Cultural Association under the directorship of G. Gourakishore Sharma (H.L.M.-T.H.TA), Kanglei Nat Sindam Sang under the inspiring leadership of L. Heramot Meitei (Kongpal) attempted to impart training and study in this field of sword and spear. These centres are imparting training in different methods of pre-Hindu and post-Hindu styles of training through books, seminar papers and regular demonstrations. This variety has become a world art by its inherent technique and greatness. It can be favourably compared with karate, zendo, etc. After independence and particularly after the attainment of Manipur's statehood, honours have gone to the gurus of the Thang Ta from the State and the Government of India. Manipur Sahitya Parisad honoured P. Tharango Singh for his service in the field of Thang Ta. Then followed the Padma Sri award for Damo Singh in 1983.

Along with the different dances of the Meiteis, a number of folk dances have developed among the Naga-Kuki tribals, like Kabui Naga, Tangkhul Naga, Mao Maram Naga dances, bamboo dance of the Thadou Kukis, etc. The non-Naga tribal groups perform 14 different types of dances on different festivals. The folk dance festival has become an integral part of the annual Republic Day celebrations of the State and the Centre.

Kathak dance was introduced by Kunjo Mishri and

Gopimohan in Maharaja Chandrakirti's palace which the Meitei called *Marbak Jagoi* (foreign dance). After Manipuri war of 1891 this form came to be associated with loose moral character and the girls branded as women of easy virtue got interested in extracting money from the low class people of Manipur. Under the British regime and the influence of Western civilisation, the younger generation hated the dance itself.³⁹ It degenerated so badly that the sacred religious dance of *Raslila* became the exclusive monopoly of some sections only. The people frowned and looked down upon erotic dance of *Laiharaoba* as a relic of folk culture and less civilised past. The period of the Second World War also witnessed the declining trend in the values of the religious dances.⁴⁰

The witness of the *Raslila* and sacred dances by the non-Hindu Manipuris and non-Meiteis is indiscriminately prohibited by the Maharajas and the orthodox community. Dances had been in the hands of gurus as there was neither the public nor private schools. Any composition was censured by the Maharaja. For the first time, a *Raslila* in Vrindavan was dedicated by Maharaja Sir Churachand Singh, and a small portion of *Bhangi pareng* (Krishna in *Tribhanga* pose) was shown before the Prince of Wales in Calcutta in 1921. The wise and capable Maharaja could control the social uproar that must have risen over the decision to admit forth into the audience including the Europeans. The preliminary work of popularising *Raslila* outside Manipur has been followed by other steps which include the opening of Manipuri dance in Visvabharati by Tagore with the help of teachers from Tripura and Manipur, the founding of institutions such as Jawaharlal Nehru Dance Academy, Sri Sri Govindaji Narttalaya, Manipur, Narttalaya (Bombay, Imphal and Calcutta), Parimal Academy (Bombay), Jagoi Marup, Kala Kendra, etc. Great exponents of this style were M. Amubi, Amudon Sharma, H. Tomba, R.K. Priyagopal, Bepin, A. Amubi, R.K. Shinghajit, etc. Females who have devoted their life to performance and research are Savita N. Mehta, Zhabheri sisters of Bombay, Dr Kapila Vatsayayan, Devajani Chaliha, Thambal Anganbi Devi, Tondon Devi, Ibetombi Devi Ngangi Devi, Nayani Devi, etc. Some of them were lucky enough to receive

awards and official patronage. Many of them are handing over this art to their children and students.⁴¹

REFERENCES

1. Dr. Kapila Vatsayayan's article "Dancing a door to the Divine", published in Bhavan's journal, vol. XIX, No. 13, January 21, 1973, pp. 65-68.
2. There was a seminar on dance and music from October 24 to 29, 1971, at Jawaharlal Nehru Dance Academy, Imphal. The gurus refused to demonstrate the dance items and ragas on the platform, but public pressure compelled them to do so.
3. Atombapu Sarma and Guru M. Amubi Singh, *The Brief Description of Manipuri Dance*, pp. 10-11.
4. The time is related to the leisure time of the organisers/owners of the concerned deity. It is fixed by the *Pandit Laisang* of the Maharaja.
5. For minute discussions and ritual significance, *The Religion of Manipur*, pp. 430-440.
6. We have important publications on the *Laiharaoba* in recent years. Pandit Ng. Kulachandra's *Laiharaoba*, 1969; Pandit Kh. Yaima's series of *Anoirol* in 4 volumes 1979-83; Kh. Chandrasekhar's *Laiharaoba Laisol* (1982), etc., deal with the ritual aspects and are helpful guides.
7. L. Ibungohal Singh, op. cit. pp. 26-27.
8. Orthodox people want to check modern trends in songs, dresses and movements in order to preserve the purity of this style of dance.
9. Dr. M. Kirti Singh, op. cit., pp. 178-180.
10. Vide author's paper "Cultural and Religious Institutions of Ancient Manipur" presented in the history section of AIOC held in Jaipur, 1982, pp. 344-45 of the summaries of papers.
11. For details vide F. Bowers, *The Dance in India*, pp. 123-128; Kh. Chandra Sekhar Singh (ed.) *Umanglai Khunda* (quarterly Manipur Journal), 5 and 6th issue, 1981, pp. 1-3 (editorial portion).
12. H. Kulabidhu, *Manipuri Dances*, Imphal, 1964; section on the origin of *Ras* dance, pp. 12-13.
13. Dr. M. Kirti Singh, op. cit. pp. 159, 147, 168, etc.
14. L. Ibungohal Singh, op. cit. pp. 112-120.
15. Of important research publications the following are (i) *Dashkus Tal* in Manipuri by S.N. Mehta in 1982 and (2) *Tala system of Manipur* (English) by Darsana Jhaveri in the souvenir, 1969, Rubi Mukherj's article "Manipur Dancing," The Publications Division, Delhi, 1956 pp. 77-79.
16. For details "costumes, ornaments and make-up" in the *Classical*

and *Folk Dances of India*, 1965. *Mitei Phijet Leiting* by Iboton Sharma in Manipuri in 1973 contains interesting points in this connection.

17. Information supplied by the gurus of Manipur when the author discussed the issue with them.
18. F. Bowers, *op cit*, pp. 146-47.
19. With the Meitei, his concept is an important one as one of the sacred sacraments.
20. Vide the author's speech delivered on the condolence *Sabha* of late Guru Amudon Sharma Padmasri, a great guru of Manipuri dance, in 1977.
21. The papers presented by Surchand Sarma, Lokeswar Singh, etc. during the 7-day seminar in 1971, may be consulted. There is a particular guru for teaching Sansenba (tending the cow) in the royal temple of Sri Govindaji even now.
22. The author personally enjoyed their performances in their lifetime at different places. Some of the points are obtained from them when he discussed with them.
23. In Manipuri parlance, they are called *Sutra Sakpas* who explain the important events in Brajabali and Manipuri.
24. Bisnupriya appears with a *Chamar* (made of the busy tail of Yak) and begins dancing like the step of Khambrangchak bird (a peacock-like bird).
25. Cited to the author by late Th. Kunjakishor Singh and Gha Naran Singh, who are famous for their performances and innovations.
26. K. Dhano Singh, *Manipur Sankirtan*. Imphal, pp. 177-178.
27. The palace is empowered to control the performances during the regime of the Maharajas. Now public criticism and voice are the only watch-word in such performances. Also K. Dhano Singh, *Sankirtan Mahatmya*, 1971, pp. 79-80.
28. The author has been in contact with the named artists and gurus during the last 30 years and have seen their artistic talents.
29. F. Bowers; *op. cit.* pp. 126-129.
30. Some of the author's relatives are noted *pung Yaibas* who experienced these troubles.
31. The author's experience as an investigator; opinions have been published in the papers, details and magazines for and against the issue. Ultimately it ended with victory to the woman-participants in the context of equality.
32. H. Kulabidhu Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9; Dr. M. Kirti Singh, *op. cit.* pp. 230; The love story of Khamba and Thoibi rendered into many languages is sufficient to establish its popularity and is an addition to the vast folk aspects in the form of fiddle (Pera) songs, folk dances and balled forms (with a *dholak*) and *yatras*.
33. *Loc. cit.*

34. H. Kulabidhu Singh, op. cit., pp. 32-33; 37-42; F. Bowers, op. cit., pp. 143-144.
35. Loc. cit.
36. Some reforming organisations issued leaflets and pamphlets criticising the filthy mind. The anti-Hindu associations are emphatic in exposing the defects of Hindu festivals.
37. Shri Gourakishore Sarma, a noted guru of martial art, has been honoured by this national forum.
38. Maharani Gayatri Devi visited Manipur in 1982 and made a thorough study of this game.
39. L. Ibungohal Singh, op. cit., pp. 118-120.
40. Vide Supra, Chapter I Section C—(Reign of Maharaja Bodha-chandra).
41. Mulk Raj Anand (ed); *The Classical and Folk Dances of India* pp., 48-49; A Short bio-data of Savita N. Mehta in *Dashakusha Tala*; Sunil Kothari's article "Nayana Jhaveri" in Bhavan's journal, March 26, 1978, pp. 17-22.

MANIPURI THEATRE AND YATRAS

It is the theatre and *yatra* that have the honour of being the chief cultural and artistic forms during the past few decades, the other and perhaps more worldwide being its dance and *kirtan* forms of music. The Meitei people with their concept of the world as the sport of god are particularly fond of theatre and *yatra*. This type of communication through characters had achieved phenomenal success through their *Laiharaoba* dance, operas and plays of Sri Krishna as far as the form, content and expression are concerned.

The contemporary theatre is a continuation of the earlier tradition. The Bengali community living in Imphal gave an impetus to this culture. They founded in 1903 Bamancharan Mukhopadhyaya Bendhab Natya Sala for purpose of staging Bengali dramas especially on festive occasions. The first drama in the true sense was a Bengali drama *Pravas Milan* in 1902 played in the courtyard of Sri Govindaji adjacent to the royal palace of Maharaj Sir Churachand Singh who was a patron as well.¹ The actors were all Manipuris and it was directed by two persons. One was Gophal Singh Selungna and the other was a Bengali—Saratchandra Ghose. In 1904, the institution was renamed as 'Friends Dramatic Union' with a permanent stage (without permanent auditorium) at Babupara under the guidance of a committee.

The first play with a regular plot, divided into acts and

scenes, 'Pagalini' was a comic one written in Manipuri language by Bihari Singh, Head Master of Pettigrew L.P. School. It was enacted in 1905 at his place without stage. It was followed by another social play 'Bijoy Malati' of A.K. Amubi Singh. Some of the well-known Bengali plays have been translated into Manipuri and staged. Mention can be made of *Bilwamangal*, *Pratapaditya*, *Kedar Roy*, *Bange Bargee*, *Chandragupta*, *Savitri Satyenban*, *Tipu Sultan*, *Sita Devala Devi*, etc. Both communities, say, the Manipuris and Bengalees took part in the theatrical performances. Regular performances were made possible in the permanent hall of a club namely 'Victoria Club' formed in 1910.

Theatre was upto this time confined to Imphal town. Play houses went up in the palace, the main temples and the out-houses of well-to-do persons and even in the private buildings. Maharaj Churachand, true to the Manipur tradition of patronising the art forms, helped with men and money. It went ahead with the work of giving medals to the talented artists for their roles and performances. At his command it became a practice with school boys to perform a play under the able director-teacher in the annual Saraswati Puja celebrations. Then artists with new spirit came and introduced new experiments and techniques more congenial to the Manipur stage. L. Ibungohal's *Nar Singh*, (historical play dealing with the exploits of King Nar Singh), Angahals' *Gouranga Lalit's Satikhongnang* (tragedy showing the *Sati dah* of a women) and *Arappa Marup* (a social tragedy full of human, lust and morality) have met with hearty appreciation of the people.² Most of the writers which we have noted in connection with drama were writer-producer-actor-dramatists. A purely Manipuri stage came out of its infancy. With the establishment of the Manipur Dramatic Union in 1931 started a new phase of drama in Manipur. S. Lalit was the pioneer of Manipuri theatre. Many actors, playwrights and able singers came forward from this institution. Institutions came into existence in the suburbs of the town as well as in smaller rural areas. State officials and school masters alike produced them for survival of Manipuri theatre. The credit for all this activity in between 1930 and 1940 not merely goes to urban

societies like Aryan Theatre, Chitrangada Natya Mandir, Imphal Theatre and Naba Natya Mandir but also to rural organisations in Nambol and Kakching Lila Samiti (later Nambol Dramatic Union).³

In Manipur theatrical life was shaken by the Second World War. On account of Japanese bombing the Manipuri people fled to quieter places for life. All big towns were filled up with military people. In these turmoils starvation came upon the theatre group. The organisations ceased functioning for the time being. But the passionate love of the people could be destroyed by the brief spell of war. Within a few years new organisations like Rup Mahal Theatre Society etc., came forth. New talents and play are produced through these bodies.⁴

The writers started reading modern Western literature and the effect was seen almost in manifold ways. Post-war drama reflected a series of changes which occurred in the mind of the people after the war and Indian independence. The composers before the war had a fine command over Bengali and Sanskrit. Devotion of music and dance were considered essential for the plays. The themes were mostly drawn from Hindu religious texts. The courtlife of the king was vividly brought out in the dramas. The important roles required gaudy costumes, necklaces of pearls, make-up, etc. The administration of the Maharajas was sound; the artists and writers had a traditional loyalty for the kings in all respects. Churachand was one of the greatest patrons of Manipuri literature and drama in his days.⁵ But such type of performances were seriously affected when the Congress Government took over the administration of the kingdom. The Congress movement under Gandhiji had the effect of changing costly costumes into local made cloth and simple ornaments. Rupmahal Theatre established in 1943 produced varieties of new, literary and popular dramas. Its director, M. Bira Singh, looked out for heroes, who fought against the British and wrote a noted drama called *Tikendrajit* a Manipuri martyr who was hanged in 1891 for his war with the British. It is a well-known historical play. It has also produced genuine folk plays such as *Yaithingkonu*, *Moirang Thoibi* (well-known epics of Moirang)

which are undoubtedly the best dramas about romantic stories of this region. *Mainu Pemcha* had a great success. How attached Maharaja Bodhachandra was to this play written by A. Shyamsunder could be seen from his suggestion to add certain elements in the character of Thakur Borachaoba's betrayal and to the suicide of Mainu Pemcha.⁶

Distinguished visitors such as Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, U.Nu, Premier of Burma, ambassadors, central ministers, artists and many visitors enjoyed the performances of its play during their stay in Imphal.

Manipuri stage became very prosperous through G.C. Tongbra's problem plays, social plays, and satirical dramas. He made Manipuri version of G.B. Shaw's works, Shakespeare's Hamlet into Manipuri life besides 30 volumes. His works *Mani Mamou*, *Ngabong Khao*, *Andolan*, *Lamja Parsuram* and *Mangal Adu* have been very popular, some of which like *Ngabong Khao* are being still performed, more than 60 times. His full length play are mostly performed, by Society Theatre. He attempted to touch the existential approach to such plays as *Kab Phabi* (catching the bull and Eikhoigi Baji (Our Father).

Following the success of Rupmala's 'folk plays, Manipuri Natya Sangha produced *Santha lembi*. Manipur Dramatic Union has achieved success in folk plays like Haorang Leisnag *Saphabi*, *Thambalnu*, etc.

Important theatrical personalities of the older generation are Kh. Munal Singh, N. Thanil Singh, S. Lalit. Kh. Nabakishore Singh, Kh. Nongyai, Kh. Madhumangol, Ph. Iboton Singh, K. Amuba. Gokulchandra Singh, Kh. Dhanachandra, Ng. Jugolchandra, H. Nilamani Singh, H. Nutanchandra Sarma, M. Bira Singh, Ng. Tilak Singh, M. Biramangol Singh, L. Notrajit Singh. Some of them are still with us. Notable actresses are Gouramani Devi, Tambal Angoubi Devi, Tendon Devi, Bimola Devi⁷ etc.

The stage has the honour of having Manipuri painters such as H. Shyame Sarma, etc., who used to do the scenery painting and production works. The movement had a vigorous development with the writing of modern plays on national integration, prohibition, family planning and Gandhiji's ideas. Many places of Imphal valley began to build

their clubs and drama halls. Some of the drama scripts are put in print. Artists are coming up with regular technical training in direction, acting, lighting, etc., from National School of Drama, New Delhi. Some of them occupied places of eminence in theatrical society. They tried experiments in psychological play, abstract play, modern techniques and styles. Competitive drama festivals were conducted by the Publicity Department of the Government of Manipur from 1965 to 1972.⁸ Later it was entrusted to Manipur State Kala Akademi.

The drama festival conducted by the Publicity Department has been instrumental in encouraging folk and modern plays. It publishes only abstracts of the scripts to be performed in the competition. Some of the magazines that have contributed to the growth of drama, one act plays, films and *yatras* are quarterly publications, annual souvenir of Manipur Secretariat Club, *Sumanglila* (enactment in the courtyard), *Filmi Taibang* (universe of films).

In the present dramatics, one act play has got a considerable importance. Prize distribution competition organised by schools, colleges and state departments have encouraged dramas among the students through one act plays. These short plays were broadcast by A.I.R. G.C. Tongbra is also a writer of popular one act plays. Sri H. Kanhailal, Director of Kala Kshetra, used to enact short plays. Some of them are published in the form of collections.

The all Manipur short play competition was annually organised by some institutions and young playwrights have taken to it in order to express their talents.⁹

Radio plays : All India Radio with its station at Gauhati and later at Imphal has been doing a distinct service in this respect. Its drama section or radio adaptations of the old dramas and plays has encouraged new creations. Film industry and radio dramas are making rapid progress. There is a vivid theatrical life in Manipur of today through the ear if not through the eye.

Yatra : The folk play is known by such names as *Phagi lila* (farcical play), *Sumanglila* (enactment in the courtyard) and *Jatra wali*. We have many precedents in this kingdom

before the introduction of Vaishnavism in the 18th century. The concept of ground play is an institution which is as old as the history itself. *Sumanglila* means a play enacted in front of a house which is a sacked place. The courtyard is a miniature Vrindavan (abode of god) for purpose of religious rites. *Lila* is a term which denotes the deeds of gods as against those of a common people. *Jatra* is considered to be originated after Manipur's contact with the mainstream of Indian culture. *Phagi lila* (comic play) is in some respects similar to the *Jatras* of Assam and Bengal and has remained as the medium of mass communication and education among the lower strata of Manipuri society. It is inseparable from its socio-cultural set-up. It is a theatre of the people, by the people and for the people. It has, at present, almost eclipsed modern theatre in view of its association with the wide public popularity. The *Jatra*, unlike its fate in the rest of India, can compete favourably with the modern films in respect of income and popularity.

Evolution of Manipuri *Sumanglila* : The music and dances which are widely cultured in this land may be stated to be the precursor of *jatra* type. *Abhinava* is expressed in various *Rasalilas*, *Nata sankirtan* and religious *lilas*. Maharaja Chandrakirti (1850-1886) had court jesters exactly like the old English fashion of having court jesters to amuse the king and the nobles. The speciousness of one man show for fun, skits, caricature and wisdom were associated with the names of Abujam Saiton, Oinam Bijando, Thokchao Thingbai Mera and Kharibam Laisuba. Peels of laughter proceeded from seeing and hearing their appearance, speaking and acting.¹⁰

The reign of Churachand Singh could be the first phase of modern *Sumanglila*. Pangamba *phagi* (comedian of Pangambam family) was the first leading comedian who laid the foundation of *Jatra* on the secular side. On February 4, 1908, he began to perform his role on the occasion of the installation ceremony of the Maharaja. His very name has become a byword with of the people. Other farcical enactments after him were those of Chengba *phagi* (Chengba's joke), *Yotsubi phagi* (joke of Black Tripod performed by Phanjoubam Chaoba Singh), thereafter Laithangba, Urit

Mapu, etc. The jokes introduced by them are drawn from their appearance and mode of enacting. These *jatras* were taken up with their groups on various occasions as Durgapuja, visit of Lord Kitchenar, Viceroy of India, to Manipur in 1904 and of the Maharaja of Tripura. Important places were the king's court, Kalimai *mandop* in police area and famous *mandops* (pavilions) in villages. The cast in these comics were male actors. The actors to play female roles were Yaimabi in Chengba *phagi*, Dourembam Ibomcha etc., who had creditable talents. Like the pure Meitei women they had quantity of long black hair and they cut their hair in front in a straight manner all around their forehead while back part hung loose. On the religious side there was a parallel developments of *jatras* such as *Pala you* (with emphasis on music), *Phadibi pala/toubul pala* (introduced by Rajendro Sana, S. Tomchou Singh) and *Kabul pala*. The last mentioned *lila* was said to be introduced by R.K. Sanamacha Singh after observing the Pathans who came from Burma as British soldiers in Manipuri war with the British in 1891. Its performance and songs are full of jokes. The language consists of Hindi, English and Kabaw (Shon) whose meaning worked a surprise on the people.¹¹ Turn, rhythm and acting of this play had the effect of transporting the congregation to a different world. It consisted of the singing/producing sounds (by lips) to the accompaniment of thatch-made-buggles, drones, cornets and clarionets. Religion being the source of their superiority they considered the instruments of band party unclean for use. This play was performed in the presence of Lord Curzon, Governor General, and Churachand Singh under the direction of Rajkumar of Yaikul.

After the death of Chengba the epoch of *phagi lila* came to an end and the very word is deleted from the name of *lila*. New *jatras* like *Harischandra* from Sagolband (and other places also), *Savitri Satyavan*, *Thengulila*, *Moirang Parva* old and new, *Meiraba charan*, *Thoklila*, *Chandrajini*, *Satyacharit*, etc., have provided entertainment to the Manipuri community. The veteran actors (actresses also in one or two cases) were received with much respect by the public. This was because of them that the *Jatra* had a tremendous impact on the mass

mind. During the reign of the Maharaja decorum and mannerism with the *jatra* people was strictly enforced. No body was allowed to use half pant, half shirt and red clothes. Button for the neck¹² and wrists must be fastened tightly. Nobody was to let loose the front tuck of the *dhoti*. Under no circumstances a woman could expose her head without a piece of cover. After some time *longi* (blouse) and trousers were permitted. But a person playing the role of a king and minister must not stand up or sit cross-legged and touch the two arms of a chair. Most of the above *jatras* were performed under this form. It is to be noted that comic roles were introduced by way of relief in intervals of serious *jatras*. Small boys/girls who could not understand any thing of the main story took interest in the farcical scenes. This they indicated by applause and juvenile laughter. A practice also arose whereby a joker was not seriously taken by the Maharaja though he criticised him for jest's sake. T. Thambal Angou, the veteran director, taught the other *jatras*, namely *Bidhata purusa*, *Dhrub charit* and *Thok lila* to his disciples for public entertainment. *Thok lila* is an indirect attack on the autocracy of the king and his neglect of the son born outside the palace. A practice in the shape of political and social themes and indirect criticism of evils came into free use by wit and humour of Ch. Ibohal Singh at a time when the British authority and Maharaja did not allow it. His younger contemporary Khutamacha (L. Gourachandra) surprised the audience by his satirical speech and songs. There is also evidence of Hindustani Ramalila having been performed in Imphal by the permission of the State authority in 1920.

In Manipuri society the roles in a play/*lila* have a great purport. Some of the popular names (not the real names) are borne by the persons appearing in the roles. These people used to identify them with the roles they performed to such an extent that in real life they are given the names they assumed as actors or actresses. The actual names were replaced by the names of the roles they played. Thus Ksh. Kanhai is better known as Thonglen (the warrior in Moirang epic), T. Nabakumar as Manao Ibungo (brother of the King), L. Gourachandra as Khutamacha, Gourahari Sarma as Sisya Saba, Manao as

Kaibi, etc. some of the gifted persons became famous by appearing in female roles. In this way Natho Singh came to be named as Budhipati, Bamon Ibungo/Herany and Garva Sarma as Kesavati, Meisnam Ibobi as Leinou Sabi, Rudra Singh as Princess Thoibi. The veteran actor Jadumani Singh, the D.S.P. of Manipuri Police, began his early life as appearing in the role of Princess Chandrajini. In the folk play 'Harischandra' the Brahman of Kashi who had bought queen Sabhya and her son Rohitas used to find fault with him and beat him. The little son was treated even worse. The audience called the hard task master as Bamon Phataba (bad Brahman) Manoharmayum Gogal Sarma. The death of Rohitas due to the bite of a poisonous snake, the lamentations of the queen and the penitent attitude of the Brahman are taken as real one by the audience.

The *lila* of Moirang *parva* (epic of the love theme of Khamba and Princess Thoibi) by both parties, old and new, was performed in a choice language and songs were brilliant. The gifted actors were able to project the immortal theme in the public mind. The materials are drawn from the *pena*/fiddle songs. The Kongpan Moirang *parva* of Kh. Kanhal is a powerful *lila* with an important wording and acting of Moirang. It is reckoned as an opera of Manipuri.

During the time of Maharaja Bodhachandra the above *jatra* troupes very actively ran their shows in different parts of Imphal and Meitei inhabited areas in Assam and Bengal. At the advice of court pandit the Maharaja is said to have issued a temporary ban on the two parties of Moirang *parva*, the reason being that his eldest daughter was an incarnation of Princess Thoibi, the heroine of the play. In the meantime the old Moirang *parva jatra* under the leadership of Ksh. Kanhai performed a *lila* called *Subhana Suri Huranba* (the stealing of the knife by Subhadra). The new Moirang *parva* under the direction of Loitam Yaima managed to show Keiroilakpagi Macha Ngangbiton.¹³ The year 1942 was a turning point in the history of Manipur. Imphal looked like a ghost town with the British army and a few economic adventurers and opportunists in connection with the bombing of Imphal by the Japanese. The old feudal economy was shattered; drastic

changes in their lives were gradually felt. The post-war *jatra* can be said to have been born in 1945 when the Meitei community came to normal situation and renovated their theatre halls and resumed their stage functions. From Imphal as the war zone seemed to have come many of the ideas of native dramas which were never done before. The people began to search for a distinct cultural identity after self-analysis and an enquiry into the moribund stages of culture. We can note the existence of two other parallel streams in the post-war era. The first was the *pauranic*/folk type with techniques and writing of the past. The other was the social *jatras* giving a picture of contemporary society and culture. To the first category can be ascribed such *jatras* as Bhagyachandra Shamu Phabe (the catching of a wild elephant by king Joisinha during his stay in the Ahom capital in Assam), Phadok Pemcha (another variant form of Bhagyachandra play with emphasis on social themes), Puran Meithaba (the burning of Meitei scripts by king Pamheiba at the instance of Santidas Babajit), Charairongba, Mahaprabhu *pita* Onba (the measurement of the idol of Lord Chaitanya by the forester), Paona Brajavasi, Modhu Maloti, Nongpok Pandhoibi, Nongin Phava, Yaithing Konu, Puremba Pakhangba Sayon (incarnation of Pakhangba), Mainu Pemcha, Leisangnu Saphabi, Nongban Pombi Luwaoba, Khoris Phaba, Henju Naha, Thokchao Siki, Jela Darbar, Tikendrajit, etc. These *lilas* have had successful and long runs. Social folk plays which drew repeated applause from the people are *B.A. Mapa Lamboiba* (the ordination of monkhood for a father of a graduate), *50* (fifty thousand), *Nungsi Leirang*, *Minister Chakkouba*, *Chaktangba* (Famine), *Pocket Marr* (Pick-Pocket), *Areiba Vote* (purchased vote), *Abir*, *Khan Daku Juga Singh* etc. The changes in administrative set-up such as the keeping of record, file work, the extension of Cr. P.C., I.P.C. in Manipur and the modern education, method of appointment, evils of corruption, neglect of values etc., were also highlighted in the *jatras* of 1952. The gospel of democracy and socialism gave them to make any experiment, agitation for State Assembly, statehood, Naga hostiles' activity and demand for a separate status for the Manipuris are also reflected in the *jatras*. Materials have been exploited

from all possible sources which now cover romance, satirical sketches, heroic sacrifices mythological and historical episodes. Contemporary *Sumanglilas* started performing stages plays and Western plays like *Hamlet*, *Durges Nandini*, *Madhabi* (written by Dr. L. Kamal in the form of a novel). Some of the folk themes were adopted to the service, symbol and crisis of the present day society. Mention can be made of successful performances of *Kabui Keiroiba* (A monster, half tiger and half man), *Sanarembi Chaisra*, in this context. Some of the Hindu mythological plays such as *Harischandra*, *Nala Damayanti*, *Pralhad Charit*, *Bhimna Mantri Oiba*, *Sita Vanavas*, *Akasint Swayamvara*, *Chandrajini*, etc., were freshly written and performed by different parties at the same time. There are talented writers-cum-directors of yester-years who figure even today in the these *jatras*. They are Bamon Nongmaijing Sarma, Ningombam Angouton Singh, Ranjit Singh, Lukhoi Chowkidar, etc. A Ch. Joykumar, H. Tomba, and series of actors in male and female roles have lent their names to the creation of a living historic tradition. Tragic fates took away the lives of actors in the performance. One Kasi Shyama, a noted Sanskrit scholar, did the role of Hanuman in Ramlila in 1960. His tail caught fire and got himself burnt to death. His jumping with the burning tail and real cries were mistaken by the spectators for the show only. A certain Ramo killed a snake in the play of *Pakhangba Sayon* (incarnation of Snake-god Pakhangba) in the presence of the audience. It is believed that the deity had come upon them as snake in the *jatra* for blessing. The actor, particularly after killing the divine snake, died the same night in a mysterious way.

The younger artists of this soil who are now making a solid contribution in this arena are Jugeswar Sarma, T. Brajabidhu, Babu Singh, Nabadwip Sarma, Kitnamayum Manikchand Singh, Nanda Sarma, M. Binod Singh, M. Tharoungou, Gandhar Singh, H. Bari Singh, (for female roles), N. Ibobi Singh, Gourachandra Sarma, Baburam (Amusana Sabi), P. Ibotombi Singh, Y. Rabei, Kh. Haridas Singh, Jilangamba, Krisnamani, Tomcha Singh, Nilakamal, Syamkanhai etc. They have powerful voices which in the days when

mikes were unknown reached all the corners when they spoke and sang. Some of them are equally well-known in the field of dramas and Manipuri films.

We now come to the more important types of *Jatras* : (1) Female *Jatras*, (2) Children *Jatras* and (3) *Ishei Lila*.¹⁴

(i) *Female Jatra* : The patriarchal society has been influential in determining the position of women in their life. The position was traditional; woman being a housewife did not take much interest in *jatras*. In the 20th century equality of sexes has become a practical reality in all areas. They are participating in social service and cultural items. We find actresses, small girls playing the part of boys, although their number is exceedingly limited. It was during the drama-*jatra* festivals in 1976 that the female groups began to contest in the *jatra* competition. There are as many as 20 associations out of which Meidingu Khagemba Nupi Jatra deserves special notice. The *jatras* performed by them are mostly of the episodes of the immortal epic of Khamba and Thoibi. The group consists of female performers only, the part of males being performed by robust females by dressing themselves as males. Of course the volumes are written and directed by such veteran artists like Achou Singh, Phalendra Singh, etc. It has become a peculiar form of entertainment in Manipuri society. The A.I.R. Imphal has immensely contributed to the popularisation of this item as monthly programme. Many woman *jatra* artists have come up as members.

(ii) *Children Jatra* : We don't have an organised association to take the *jatra* of small children. Some small boys and girls have, at times, applied their talents to the performances by joining the *jatra* groups from their early career at the suggestion of the concerned directors. Around 1963-64, the author happened to witness the children's show as a part of the epic of Khamba and Thoibi/Moirang *parva* at different places of Imphal. The audience gave the play a thundering ovation for their training in voice control, modulation and make-up. Some of the boys have set up a group temporarily for participating in the *jatra*/drama festivals. The *jatra* programme of this group is held from time to time by A.I.R. Imphal and by organisations

of some schools. There are at present six children *jatra* associations to provide scope for expressing their needs.

(iii) *Ishei lila* (music *jatra*) : It was around 1975 that a new type of *Sumanglila* with plenty of music and orchestra and modern instruments as an item was introduced to enliven entertainment of the audience. With it are connected modern singers like Suren Goswami, Y. Suren etc. The performers have commissioned the work of several playwrights for acting. Legitimate occasions are enacted for music and the relationship between words and music. There are, at present, 14 permanent associations which have so far produced such *lilas*. The direction, acting and problems are different from those of dialogue types. The song-plays in spite of public support are not recognised by the state.

ONE MAN'S JATRA/IPOM

In one man's show an actor performs all the characters of a play through his voice modulation and songs (sometimes with a slight change of dress). Among the artists of this category, the names of B. Achau Sarma who play the entire *lila* of Gouranga (Saint Chaitanya of Bengal) by himself in *Satya charit*, G. Gourahari Sarma in his role as *Sisya* (disciple in the same play) plays all the characters of Krishna, Radhika and *gopis* by himself, and Gandhar Singh who plays the roles of an aged man, aged woman, main singer and drummer through his voice training.¹⁵

Ipom is a form of entertainment where two or three *jatra* personalities take part and discuss something. The themes are social/political in nature which evoke the laughter of the audience. The A.I.R. Imphal is providing regular programme of leading jokers of the *jatra*.

Production style : The production style of the popular *Sumanglila* is simple with the action area being the courtyard, *mandap* (pavilion of temple), street, a place on the bank of a river, etc., in the centre and the spectators around the place. The instrumentalists and the chorus singers of about two or three sit in a suitable place close to the circular play of the actors. The green room is at a distance of a few yards and

a narrow path is left for the actor's entrance and exit. This passage also serves as an additional shouting and acting area. A particular actor by advancing a few steps from the place from where he stood, used to describe another scene as if he actually traversed all the distance. Artists of not less than 10 in number formed a troupe normally, co-acting with 3 or 4 females were at first seen in some *jatras*. Nowadays there is no dearth of the young to appear in female roles with artistry and grace. Sometimes they are found to throw away their dresses and dress themselves as women in full view of the public, while playing the serious part of women of high rank. Some of them might be observed to wear on their face and body some left over mark that had adorned their previous part.

There are some chairs which serve as the king's throne or the seat of the nobles, bed, mat, bench, branches of trees, hiding places and some weapons in the *jatra*. Modern equipments like gas lanterns, violins, harmoniums and guns have also been introduced. There are modern influences in their make-up.

The performances upto 1971 were usually done in the night and lasted three hours. The first ten minutes are spent in singing the glory of Meitei *Leima* (goddess of Manipur), and of a presiding deity of the play with *dholak* and cymbals. All *jatras* are concluded with a closing song to the accompaniment of *dholak* and cymbals and clapping.¹⁶

The audience compressed people of all ranks though it was very popular among the village women and the children. It was a free entertainment to which the cultured persons, Muslims, Naga tribals were allowed to see. As per the convention, early comers occupied the front places, irrespective of their position, and late comers had to take back seats. People however did not miss them. The people stood for hours together without minding the trouble of seating arrangement and courtesy.

In spite of the want of aesthetic perception the notable *jatras* can charm the audience. The people used to throw stones or pieces of earth if the performers failed in their work. The comedians/singers come frequently into the midst of performers, making a little commentary and thereby drawing the public

attention to the scene. The *jatras* without any scenery, and story and proper costumes can arouse emotion which are nowadays seen in film and dramas.

We may offer here some observations on the merits and demerits of early and contemporary *jatras*.

(1) The *lila mis* (actors of yester-years) had inborn qualities which dominated the scene. So high was their acting of their part that the audience under a sort of spell made gifts to them on their *abhinaya* and their acting earned appreciation. A single *jatra* troupe cannot continue its years of active existence. The present *jatra* party started performing 5 or 6 plays at a time so that they could cater to the various needs on commercial basis. The present phase of society has placed the *jatra* actors/script writers in the literary field along with actors and dancers.

(2) The present make-up, technique and dress are completely different from what we found before the war. The aged artists made use of *chandan* (sacred *tilaka* earth), *tiki* (small cakes made of charcoal dust used to kindle tobacco in the bowl of a *hooka*). The modern tendencies of the last 30 years have been to follow the model of Bombay film, Hollywood film and killings in Texas. Formerly the organisers who requested the play had to provide mirrors, female shirts and dress for the artists. Now the actual actors/actresses have managed them at their own cost. All extraneous elements of the drama and films have been introduced to win over the growing spectators to the *lilas*.

(3) It was customary for the common roles to display their feats before the king or nobles in early performances. They used to perform feats such as magic, acrobatics, wrestling, sword play, spear play and to lay a body on the top of six bayonets. The points of the bayonet cannot pierce the flesh of the person when he lays down along the upward tops of the bayonet. Enthusiastic spectators in the know of the same can participate in the display of the skill. Nobody could object to such feats. The modern *jatras* have to discard such feats in their performances.

(4) A word of caution is needed in the performance of folk plays in the present context. The modern artists are apt

to use improper dress, ornaments and make-up without any dignity. According to Meitei codes, an unmarried maiden has to wear her lower garment round the loin, the upper part of the body being kept bare. A married women has to cover herself from the calf to the top of the breasts. The two ends are folded round the body under the armpit and over the breast. The ultra modern person in informal roles does not observe this decorum. A king in the *lila* is shown to wear *Ajmeri* turban, a practice which is not approved by the community. A folk Meitei lady is shown to paint vermilion mark and wear *sari* dress. The folk dresses are a unique feature of Manipur and provide a lively contrast to the modern dress.¹⁷

(5) The *jatra* troupes have not so far arranged their auditorium, a central stage and seats, *pandals*. Arrangement are made for a mobile stage and a courtyard.

(6) The circular acting area in the centre is supposed to be the temple of Hari Krisna. No *jatra* artists can dare to put on shoes when he enters the central area. No spectator is permitted to do so although we can multiply such instances of using shoes in the dramas. The performers cannot dispense with the sentiment and therefore though modern fashions can come in, the politeness has been retained.

(7) The money payable to a *jatra* troupe for their show is technically termed *Dakshina* (gift for play) in Manipur society. In pre-War period the charge per show was Rs. 27. Now it is raised upto Rs. 300 or more. Despite the high rates the *jatras* are in great demand in connection with state celebrations and festivals performed by the girls in the season after *Doljatra*. The money making girls and boys are still fond of them. After long hard work, domestic activities they forget their worries by enjoying the *jatras* at proper time. The early tradition continues successfully till today.¹⁸

(8) In pre-war period the veteran and experienced persons joined the *Jatra* with the object of reforming the society. At present there is enough of art loving and style oriented young-men. They are not behind in modulating, in inflicting voices in several ways. Young persons who represent females have become enemy to the real females.

(9) In pre-War times *jatras* were extemporised and were

taught to the artists through rehearsals over a long period. But they were more or less durable in the mind of the audience. Now many scripts have been written though they were not preserved in print. They have to depend on easy means as were available at hand and working very easily within the minimum of time.

(10) *Sumanglila* as a whole has its root in Manipur. Modern *lilas* were given new forms as they were influenced by modern ideology and impact of foreign writers. The trends of science, technology and corruption in administration have affected the writers no doubt. The sensitive writers ventured to impress the audience through their works. But they retained nevertheless their native essence and content.

(11) More than forty *Sumanglila* troupes are touring the length and breadth of Imphal valley in order to satisfy the creative needs of some eight lakh Meiteis. However we have no instance of the hill tribes and the Muslim community in having the organised *Sumanglilas* every year. Selected *jatra* groups are sent for tours in different parts of India. It is a very good item of inter-state cultural exchange. They arrange performances on social themes as also folk themes. The number of *jatras* taken up by the groups can be fixed at more than one thousand. A number of offices have been opened in Imphal with paid staff and employees. The *jatras* have enriched the cultural life in their own way.¹⁹

We may sum up that developments have taken place in respect of (a) its association with the mass opinion, (b) organised voluntary methods of solving their problems, (c) increasing popularity in our society and at present there is a permanent organisation to fight for the rights of *Jatra* people and their membership rights and privileges. There is plenty of achievement of the oriented men in Manipur. Some of them have achieved excellence comparable to the best anywhere in the world. The artists are recognised by the Sangit Natak Akademi for suitable awards at the national level.²⁰

FOLK SONGS

The Manipuri word for folk music is called *Khunning Ishei*

or *Khutlang Ishei* which covers the entire range of human activity. Manipur lives in villages and village folks have evolved different types of songs to suit their vocations, geographical positions, beliefs and practices. The ancient *Yek/Salais* and the different groups of the tribals have their distinct variety of folk music. They are the precursors of modern *Sankirtan* variety. *Bangdesh* (old form of *Kirtan*), *Nat Kirtan*, etc., owe their origin to folk tunes. The folk songs have a direct and spontaneous appeal and have a way of touching the innermost chords of the heart, they symbolise the hopes, aspirations, the joys and sorrows of the people. There are several songs relating to craft or occupation such as *Loutarol* (ploughing at the time of spring), *Phisa ishei* (weaving) and *Hijin Hirao* (wood cutting etc). We come across ritualistic types such as *Augri*, *Khemco*, *Ahonglon*, *Yakaiba* (awakening the king), *Langyonshei* (coronation of the Meitei kings), etc., which are to be found on the ceremonial and religious occasions of the royal family. They are still preserved in the folk tunes of the *Maibas* and *Maibis* in *Laiharaoba* festival and grand functions. There are songs of rain (Nonglao and Nongkham) as well as songs of the vernal rain (Kumdam Sei). There are songs such as "Nongthangleima Haraba Paosa" (songs of goddess of lightening and god of destruction), *Lai Pakhang Lainura* (of 9 gods and 7 goddesses) which are in the form of erotic riddles. So also are the songs of *Khutlang Ishei* and *Laiharaoba* which are immensely enjoyed by the youth. The underlying idea of these songs teaches us the philosophy of life and principles of conducting oneself in society. There are songs of mythological or historical importance, which through their simple tunes can enlighten the listeners with the stories of creation and the tough subjects in easy methods. Such songs narrating the deeds of heroes, especially the warrior rulers and patriots convey the true sentiments and feelings to the young generations.

During the reign of the Vaishnava kings, i.e. 18th and 19th centuries, due to the influence of Hinduism, folk music was affected much in the court or the valley areas and less in the remote villages. The oral tradition has been retained as far as possible among the schedule caste people (Lois) and tribal

people. Thus two systems developed which at present are categorised as (i) pre-Hindu and (ii) post-Hindu folk system according to the period of evolution.

Some of the most widely known classes of folk music today are (i) *Khutlang Isei*—a type of song exchanged by the male and female lovers regarding their love affair and preparation for family life as its theme content. They are sung without musical instruments at work in the fields or boat songs at lake Loktak, (2) *Pena* song sung by the male singer with a *pena*/string instrument in connection with the epics of Moirang and immortal love story of Khamba and Thoibi (Siva and Durga) and (3) *Khongjom parva*—Here the singer sings stories of the epics of Moirang, Battle of Khongjom, 1891, royal chronology of the rulers, the Hindu epics, etc., in close tune with the *dholak*. The last two styles are popular among the youth. They may assume types of solos, duets, etc., by male or female singers or by both. But *pena* is usually meant for the male performers only. These however do not exhaust the list.

A closer scrutiny of the early songs reveals that songs expressing sorrow, lamentation and sympathy were expressed in *Svara madhyama* whereas moods expressing joy and devotional prayers to gods were expressed in *Svara Panchame*. *Khongjom parva* style has come to us as the expression of Hindu, *raga* and *tala* systems. It was Dhobi Lairou (who was a washerman during the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891 and eyewitness to the patriotism of the Manipuri heroes) who popularised this variety and gave it a popular style.²¹

Folk music had suffered eclipses for many years. Oral tradition is one of the characteristic features. Attention is not bestowed on it although the youths promote it through voluntary subscriptions. It was H. Anganghal Singh, the great poet of Manipur, who presented the folk story of Khamba and Thoibi after collecting material from Ch. Manikchand Singh, the foremost *Pena* singer. Notation of these songs with the help of *ragas* and *talas* has been attempted by the renowned artists of AIR. Noted *Pena* and *Khongjom parva* artists have enriched Manipuri folk music by the publication of books, papers and suggestions in this sphere, and regular AIR programmes for mass education. The author is one of

those who take keen interest in the revival of the above variety of folk music in Manipur so that the future will look back at the rich heritage which alone sheds light on our culture.

With the help of teachers and scholars it is possible to collect from the different corners of Manipur valley and the 29 groups of tribals, varieties of folk music, instruments, etc., of which some are fast fading out. Mere collection is not enough unless they are made use of in education and culture of the masses. The effort of Manipur Folklore Society, Imphal, ought to be encouraged although it is, as yet, in its infant stage.

Mancharshahi Kirtan: Garenhati, Manoharshahi, Ranihati etc., were different schools of Bengali *Kirtan*. Each school has its own particular theme and style. They too were exercising their influence on Manipur culture. A few Bengali singers who visited the Royal court from time to time at the behest of the rulers had also their share in popularising this type. The Manipuri artists have learnt at their feet and assimilated its features, but do not recognise the distinctive features of these schools. All are collectively known as Manoharshahi—a school of *Kirtan* approved by the Maharajas. It is not as popular as the *Nata* performance.

The Bengali *Padavali* songs such as *Mana Siksa*, *Prarthana*, *Bhajan* and *Lalsa* provide the text. Like the traditional *Nata*, it has such parts as *Gourachandika*, *Nitya Pada* (song in praise of Nityai, the saint of Bengal). It is found to be different from the *Natas* on the following concept of *Yugal Murti* (God symbolised by *dhoti* and wrapper) two rounds in *Bedighat* and *laghu* and *guru*. The artists do not wear shirt, turban, etc. The cymbals having a small tail and *Khol* (long wooden drums), etc., are the most popular instruments of them.²²

We have a long list of the Gurus and *Khol* players who were responsible for the popularity of this performance. Maharaja Bodhachandra was a *Manoharshahi* loving ruler. Brought up under the care of his pious father he showed his skill in playing *khol* and *dholak* at a tender age. He played the role of the main *khol* player in many performances. The

award of *Mancharshahi Vadya Siromani* by the Sabha after his death is a recognition of his talent.

This style is now surviving in the state as it has been a part of the cultural life of the Manipuri Vaishnavas. The tradition of this school is being ably carried on by the Manipuri Manoharshahi Sabha. Their regular performances in religious festivals and A.I.R. programmes deserve also to be remembered with gratitude. Attempts have already been made to translate the Bengali *Padavali* texts into Manipuri and to perform it in Manipur by these exponents. Age-long customary connection under the Maharajas do not allow the singing of it wholly in Manipuri. It is to be noted that spadework for explaining the Bengali *Padavali* verses and musical tunes have been done by the singers and drummers as early as the beginning of the 1950's. We have yet to find out the intensity of devotional urge and elegance of composition in their works.

Bangdesb Pala: It is said that old variety of *Kirtan* singing is the gift of Ramanadi school and earlier schools of Vaishnavism of East Bengal. It suggests a link with Ojha Pali music of Assam in respect of tunes, movements and words. Elements due to early local tunes and texts are also found in its evolution. The themes are from Bengali *Padavalis* and Chaitanya *lila*. It is rooted in Indian system of *raga* and *talas*. The *Palas* put on yellow turban, Ngabong as waist-band. A large-sized drum and cymbal are used. The performances of this kind remained in fashion in the 18th century during the reign of Charairongba and his son, Garibniwaz. The group did not stop the service of Sri Govindaji in the dark period when Manipur was in the cruel hand of the Burmese.

This style of old singing is rapidly disappearing although some survivals are still available in tape records and films and also among the people living outside Manipur (say, Burma, Tripura and Cachar).

NAT SANKIRTAN

Prayers and songs are the favourite practices of Bengal Vaishnavas. This cult is vital among the Manipuri Vaishnavas of today. They were taught the doctrine of the efficacy of

Hari nama as the best method of salvation by the preachers. With this object in view they practise *sankritan* and dances in their own ways. King Jayasimha is said to have initiated the present form of *Nata Kirtan* style, its stages, stage decoration, dimension, design, auditorium, arrangement of fruit, flowers and the detailed code in this connection. He with the help of the learned and dedicated Gurus and scholars adopted the Bengali devotional songs. As he was not wholly influenced by Bengali ways he set his own compositions in the *Nata* style to which he gave original form which is quite distinctive. Judged by its formal contexts, it is not found anywhere. *Raga*, *Alapa* etc., have grafted their impact on Manipuri movements, methods of worshipping, etc.²³

It is par-excellence, the expressions of Vaishnavite culture in Meitei soil. It is a form of collective worship, service and devotional prayers expressed through a series of songs, movements on the part of the *Pala singers* (from 10 to 20/30) with big cymbals in their hands and the players of the *Pung* (at least two). *Nata Sankirtan* is an invariable item for the life-cycle of the Meitei and religious festivals. Nothing from birth to death is complete without it. It is usual for the kings and the high class people to participate in it. The *Palas* under two leaders i.e. *Iseihauba* (main singer) and *Duhar* (leader of the *Choom* part) with white turbans and *dhoties* perform the *Kirtan*. The four *talas*, i.e. *Tintal* (7 beats and 3 stresses), *Mel*, *Menkup*, and *Tanche* along with some *sanchars* are shown in it. They are preserved and displayed by the combination of cymbal, *mridanga* and songs.

It has two aspects: (1) *Cholom* aspect and (2) language of *Pala Cholom* and *Pung Cholom* songs is equally noteworthy. Reference to *Pung Cholom* has been made separately. Cymbal players with the *Dohar* as the leader exhibits movements ranging from the softest to the most exciting feats against songs and *bol* (*mridanga*). They produce the gait of the elephant, swan, crane and peacock. The movements relate to hand, neck, shoulder, waist, etc. *Cholom* aspects of *Pung* and *Pala* have been approved by the Sangeet Natak Academy at Pan with the classical dance thanks to the efforts of Manipur Dance College authorities. The specialists in

the *Choloms* of *Pung* and *Pala* (Kartal) have been presented the Akademi awards some years back.

Language of the Padavalis : The rendering of the Vaishnava *Padavalis* and Sanskrit texts/*slokas* in Bengali/Brajabali has been an inalienable duty with the community of the Vaishnavas of the court. The main singer sings *Sabha Bandana*, *Guru Bandana*, *Gourachandrika* and other *Padavali* texts. He ends with *Nityai Pada* in praise of the Nityai Nanda, the companion of Sri Caitanya. Singing the Vaishnava songs in Manipur deserved the disapproval of the King's court. We know already that they were hostile to old Meitei literature and language or to the continuance of *Pana Laiharaoba*, etc., for the service of Hindu gods. Their erratic policy was responsible for the dark sides these decrees provoked later. They were in a hurry to think that there was ornamentation, humility, artistic display and suggestions which revealed the mystic import in the *padavalis*. The poet saints/*Pada Kartas*, give us perennial questions of spiritual symbolism which cannot be retained in Manipuri vernacular. The artists took care in the collection of books written in Bengali which were added to the royal *Loisangs*. Such a position they continued up to the reign of Maharajas.²⁴

Quite natural to their beliefs and practices are the musical talents of the singers and dogmatic acceptance of the themes, which keep the audience spell bound in any performance. Like the true devotees they are above language, content and Brahmanic method. What has surprised the people is the manner of giving fee. They have evolved a system in which the owner of the *Sankirtan* offers to the *Nat Pala* singers and president of the assembly locally made clothes and *pan* and *prasads* and fruits.²⁵

But many have forgotten the meaning of it. For the artists it has become only a time for earning on a contract or semi-contract basis where Lord Caitanya would be most unwelcome. Even the performances during the religious occasions, loses all the *bhava*/sense for it serves often as prelude to the rivalries of the singers and contestants of the songs that are to follow. Some of the singers fought for their participation in the *kirtan* by contacting the relatives of the patrons.

They are not just remembering the sanctity of the *Sankirtan*.

Does this trend imply that the Meitei philosophy is wrong and the people are deceived when they think in terms of profit and loss? No, the nature of the Meiteis is true and the cult in its pure form still lives today.

To the Manipuri Vaishnava, *Nat Pala* is a *Mahayajna*. The very soul of their philosophy and culture, the role of the *Mahayajnas* in keeping alive and patronising it through *Loisang* deserve special notice. There had been succession of noted Gurus of *Pung* (mridangs) music, *Kartal Cholom* of all age groups and castes who worshipped Sri Govindaji. Their contribution to popularise the *Nata Sankirtan* in Tripura, Cachar and Nabadwip (West Bengal) has been notable. They hold the audience captive in the world of music.

The tradition for the *Nata* singers is to follow the pure forms and no variation and cheap trends should be made in this practice in thoughtless ways. But the changes which have occurred in the past 30 years also have been responsible for presenting it on the platform/stage without *Hari Dhvani* and the conch-blowing. One can listen to the *Sankirtan* music in tape-record, gramophone, radio, films, etc.²⁶

The issue of language has been seriously debated in many seminars and conferences from time to time. R.K. Surja Boro Singh, a close associate of poet Rabindranath, adopted the innovation and showed that by singing in Manipuri medium. But the conservative people of those days boycotted him. Again the follower of Meitei Apokpa (revivalist) group are averse to Bengali/Sanskrit songs; to them it is loss of their culture and they relish their composition of ancient lores in archaic language as much as the Vaishnavas love the *Kirtans* while the dedicated Gurus appreciate the significance of the *Padavalis*, some singers learned songs like the parrot from the Guru who had no academic background. The audience is also strange to the language under the spell of a misguided tradition. Some of the terms and words were not correctly pronounced. In view of the loss of meaning and damage to the Manipuri psyche there is a strong movement to sing the devotional *padavalis* in Manipuri medium. Most of the well-known Gurus have published books in Manipur with editions

and comments. Students learn it by reading notations. A number of *Nata Sankirtan* institutions have been started in Manipur, the more prominent being the classes of Jawaharlal Nehru Dance Academy and Nat Sangit Ashram of Kongba Kshetri Leikai, Imphal. They have done something in the matter by organising regular festivals of *Kirtan* in Manipuri and preservation of the voice of musicians and remembering the work of the great gurus and drummers. The public response is satisfactory.

Raga oriented recitation of the Vaishnava scriptures play also an effective role in the programme of *Lairik Thiba* and *Heiba* which means the singing of musical lyrics and its interpretation. One who is trained in *Raga/Raganis* has to sing the sacred texts in prayers in Bengali while another interpretes the idea content in Manipuri. This was popular among the Vaishnava circles in the month of *Kalen* (April-May) or in any religious festival.

Holi : Holi singing during the *Dol yatra* has added a new chapter to the history of dance and music of Manipur. By the time of Maharaja Churachand, this style had come in use for singing at the temple at Sri Govindaji on the *Pichkari* day (second day of the 5-day festival) and at the temple of Vijay-govindaji on *Halankar* day (6th day) and was just an instrument of devotional entertainment. The parties consisting of singers, drummers (dholak) and instrumental musicians sing the Krishna themes in *Basanta Raga*. It is well known that unofficial Holi parties can sing the music in Manipuri by orders of Maharaja Churachand Singh. There are two categories of Holi parties out of which official/royal parties require the participation of the king. The next category consists of those coming from different parts of the valley for voluntary presentation of songs. There are more than 100 such parties which may be male or female. We can mention names such as *Sana Pala*, the golden *pala*, *Yogi pala* etc., as official Holi *dals* in this respect. The groups have special dresses and turbans of different colours for identification. They perform one by one in quick succession within a very limited time in the form of a competition without any reward. Use of vermilion, spray of red

powder, water, etc., are important features. *Bhol*, *Tafat*, *Ram-tal*, long pipes and *dholak* dances have independent programmes in the midst of the Holi songs. Other aspects of *Dol Yatra* festival will be discussed in due course/places. This variety has been nurtured by the rulers, Gurus of music and drummers and the voluntary work of the masses. Even today Holi songs are as much alive in the important temples as they were some 60 years ago. In spite of opposition from the followers of the Apokpa Marup, and secular nature of the Government it has not lost its place in the new mass culture that is gaining ground in the State.

JAYA DEVA AND KHUBAK ISEI

The Manipuri Hindus observed *Kangchingba/Rath Jatra* (drawing the car) of Lord Jagannath on the model of the world famous Puri festival. On the days of the *Rath Yatra* (2nd day of *Ingen*) and *Kanglen/Purna Yatra* (10th day of *Ingen* June/July) at the main gate of the Palace thousands of people including the kings, princes and the common people considered it holy to pull the ropes of the big car. According to Meitei tradition every temple in every place will observe it with the active support of the people who contribute their mite to its success. It has a 9-day programme of devotional music and dances followed by the free distribution of *Khechri* (a dish made of rice and split pulses) and *Mangalutti* (a kind of curry with pea and lye) on lotus leaves.²⁹

The two kinds of music, namely, *Jaya Deva* and *Khubak Isei* are the gifts of *Rath Jatra* in Manipuri culture. The significant events for the daily service during the nine days, apart from the above, are listening to sacred texts explained by a specialist in the day, the recitation and singing of *Dasa Avetera slak* of poet Saideta and performance of *Khubak Isei* (clapping song) by the male or female artists. Clapping song is mainly performed by the female singers with a male drummer in the time of Maharaja Churachand Singh. They sing the song of Radha's pang of separation after Krishna left her and the *gopis* and went to Mathura on a car to join Kamsa's

yajna. The local innovation under the Maharajas has introduced singing by clapping and honouring the great God of the World through male or female movements.

Professional parties are in fact in the forefront during the festival by going from temple to temple on invitation for their songs. Gurus give new compositions of songs and dances and training to interested *maloks* and females of different age groups who have sweet and charming voices. Well-to-do people or the group of families who are in charge of the particular day encourage them with rewards of money and clothes. Non-professional singers confine their performances to their places on devotional service. The society has changed a lot during the past sixty years and the *Kirtans* are not as active as it was during the time of the Maharaja and his government. A.I.R. Imphal station has been taking a prominent part in communicating and relaying these types of songs and discourses.

Basak : *Basak* is a kind of *Sankirtan* for males and females alike. It was promoted and popularised in the Vaishnava period through important events and competitive performances which were held in the important temples in all seasons of the year. The *palas*, at least three or four, used to participate in it with cymbals whether big or small. The theme of the performance is derived from "*Basak Sajya*", which means the preparation of a seat for Sri Krishna by Radhika and her maids with flowers. A religious theme like this is an excellent instrument to serve the ends of non-formal education in Manipur. The themes relate to the life of Sri Krishna in Vrindavana, his relation with the *gopis*, his frolics with them in the groves, the preparation of the flower seats, Radha's anxiety for his arrival at midnight, Sri Krishna's meeting with Chandravali on the way and his inability to escape, dismantling of the flower seat by Radha and her vow not to see Krishna again. It ends with the apology by Krishna for his delay in reaching the grove. It is performed in the manner of reciting the *Padavali* songs and commenting on it in Manipuri with the help of Bhakti texts on the part of the *Iseihanba* and repetition of the same on the part of the *Dohar*. The rest help them by their combined voice. Other themes such as the *padavalis* of

Jayadeva, Chandidas, Nimai Sanyas (entry into monkhood by Sri Caitanya) are also sung by them in course of time. The star performers of such contests attract a large audience and are very much in demand. The Vaishnavas think that the chanting of *padavali* music lends additional attraction to the devotional services. Their songs are perfectly in tune with the sentiments they express.

In the past the *Phangnabas* used to be performed by the well-to-do people in their place or temple in memory of their ancestors. Now any cultural organisation comes into being to organise it in a modern way although it has shown a substantial decline these days. The *Phangnaba* (contest) provided scope for talent search for the musical heritage of the people. The musical party has now almost disappeared and along with its theme the whole Vaishnava cosmos of the early years. Worse still, the participants lack the *Sadhana*, training and *Bhakti*.

Another interesting event is the origin and development of what is called *Moirangsai* (singing the epic love story of Khamba and Thoibi of Moirang) the female artists in Basak Ishei in the Sixties of this century. It met with widespread acceptance from the younger generation and a few songs in *Moirangsai* have become an integral part of Basak songs of girls and aged women.

The Sanamahi preachers are astute thinkers who know how deeply religious the public is and how the Basaks left impact on the people. So they launched a new Basak form of singing the themes of this cult in pure Manipuri language and encouraged the people to organise themselves into groups for its observance and enjoyment. Attempt was made to perform it through Hindi language by some groups. I have gone through some Basaks where the female singer sings on political themes and Hindi or Manipuri film songs and use English sentences.²⁸

Nupi Pala : This is a kind of *kirtan* performed by females in sitting position with *mandiras* (small cymbals) in hand. Rules for female (different age groups) singers as prescribed in Rajarsi Bhgyachandra code, viz. use of *Raginis*, feminine charms are adhered to. *Nupi palas* at the village level are the outcome

of two festivals, namely, Durga Puja and Jhulan Jatra. Rasswari *pala* patronised by Maharaj Jayasimha and Jalakili *pala* patronised by Maharaja Narsingh are two female *kirtans* held in the Maharaja's palace in connection with religious festivals. The princesses of the groups perform dance of steps (*chali*) towards the end of the *kirtan*.

The female participants who perform this *Sankirtan* are the products of *guru-sisya* relationship. They become for some month disciples of the Ojhas of this type. The two drummers and conch players are professional. This is confined to the temples of Sri Govindaji and village temples where the devotees take part. The style of singing in Bengali/Brajabali by the elderly women remain still the same, as set down during the rule of the Maharajas.

Dhop Kirtan : Another school of *kirtan* from Bengal made its entry in Manipur during the time of Maharaja Gambhir Singh when he became the ruler after the Burmese war. It has been popularised by one Oja Kisherdas of Jayanta (Jayantia) and is different from the famous *padakarta* of Bengali. It falls into two kinds : (1) singing by sitting and (2) singing by standing. The latter is further sub-divided into two, namely, *Nam pala* and Chaitanya Sampradaya. A decree was passed by Maharaja Chandrakiti, son of Maharaja Gambhir Singh, recommending that ordinary *dhop* singing must be held in connection with Durga Puja and Jhulan Jatra. *Nam pala* during the holy month of Mera (Sept/October) and Chaitanya Sampradaya on the day of *Shradha* and annual ceremonies of the deceased relatives. *Dhop* singers when they got up and danced like the *Nata pala* singers came to be known as Chaitanya Sampradaya. The palace *kirtan* (the day on which a feast is held in honour of the forefathers of the Maharaja) enjoys a unique place. A smaller form of Chaitanya Sampradaya *kirtan* is observed in most of the places of the valley. It is customary for the Maharaja to act as the main singer of some *dhop kirtans* in the private places.

Dress and musical instruments : Dress comprising *Koyet Salai* (turban for the ancient warrior), *Langra* (a kind of locally made wrapper) and a loose shirt are popular with the *dhop*. The main accompaniments to this are *pakhawaj* or

dholak and not cymbal. There is a seat in the centre set apart for the Maharaja. The *nam pala* singers participate in the song by holding a bright *Zhal* to produce sound. They put the front tuck of *dhoti* behind the waist. The singers of the Chaitanya Sampradaya use *salai* (turban), *Sakalia* (a kind of Kalbandhi shirt etc). It is customary for the main singer to wear shirt reaching to the knees and to let loose the front tuck of the *dhoti*. Four drummers take part in the singing. During the time of Maharaja Bodhachandra *Khol* replaced Meitei-Pung.²⁹

Dhop of the Devi Puja is a ten-day festival in which the religious minded Vaishnavas practise the devotional service of beginning with *Dhop* style and concluding with the same. There is no fixity of the number of participants. The king acts as the main singer. *Dholak*, *tabla*, *pakhawaj* (and not *kartal*) are played in course of singing. After the distribution of the incense and flowers and prostration to the goddesses they start singing *Alap*. No *raga* is needed. They sit in a circular way and unfold the stone through such songs as *Gourachandrika*, *Krisnaswarup*, *Devi Prarthana*, *Arati* and *Manasiksa*. These they do for ten days by changing songs except *Arati* and *Manasiksa*. But a particular song is specially sung on the day of the entry of Devi in her house.

Dhop of Jhulan jatra : Among the Manipuri Vaishnavas, *Jhulan* begins with the third day and ends with *Purnima* and thus it lasts for 13 days as during the reign of Maharaja Churachand. It is similar to that of Vrindavan. The beginning and concluding of the celebration by *Dhop Kirtan* is one feature of each day. The items are common to both *Devi puja* and *Jhulan jatra* except on the last day where a special *arati* with the song of 6 *goswamis* and words *Jay bhai* are held. It is the most beautiful of all. Use of *zhal*, a Manipuri *mridanga*, etc., lend to the beauty of the night in the *arati*. They are very particular to observe the devotional songs and items till day break. We can see the difference in the presentation of *Raga*. The devotional songs are culled from *Gourachandra*, *Dal lila*, *Sambhog* (enjoyment, copulation) *Prarthana*, *Arati* and *Manasiksa*. The *Dholak* accompanist usually provides the *tal*. Formerly the accompaniments were *tanpura*, *tabla* and

pakhawaj. The songs are mainly focussed on *sambhog* (love in union which is direct and indirect). The celebration of *Jhulan* is at present confined to the palace and certain Brahman families in a small way. The tendency towards community (voluntary) rather than individual Devi worship has increased owing to the change of economic set up and slow disintegration of old traditions. They decorate and illuminate palace with an extra row of coloured bulbs. Relaying music through loud speakers is another modern feature that is popular nowadays.

Songs of Nama pala and Chaitanya Sampradaya: They were nurtured in the royal court and at other places of Hindu worship. *Nam pala* and Chaitanya Sampradaya remain as necessary programmes of Sri Govindaji temple and palace *kirtan* even to this day. Normally Chaitanya Sampradaya is held after the Bangdes *pala* or *Nat* is held as programmes and as such no *raga* is necessary. By the time it becomes an independent *kirtan*, certain *ragas* are added to it. The devotional songs are *Man Shringkhala*, *Sanatan Sanga*, *Advaita Bhajan Haridas Nirjan*, *Vrindavan Jatra* and *Ramananda Sanga* according to the long standing custom. At least one Vaishnava song is invariably necessary for an *Astakal Kirtan* (Sri Krishna's round the clock sports). The subject for *dhop* singing varies alternately, that is, (i) one year for *astlakal* (song describing Krishna's sports) and (ii) next year for *Basak* (dance for females and males). The songs relate to the role of Radha and her maids. The Chaitanya Sampradaya *palas* are enjoined either to sing *Sanatan sanga* in case it happens to be a year of *astakal* or to sing *Man Shringkhala*. Its songs are completed by the succeeding group. *Dhop* is a kind of *Kirtan* style which is devoid of movement and *cholom*. Though the singers of Chaitanya Sampradaya begin and end their work by standing together, no movement is on the scene. On the question of the mode of singing it seems to be closer to Manoharshahi than to *Nata*. However, *Nata* and *dhop* are unanimous about the *talas* and themes of songs. With regard to *chandas* it is allied to *Nata* inspite of slight difference.

This style has a splendid record of service in the past. Highly honoured as the princes and the titleholders were, it

was their pleasant duty to participate in such style of singing. The present position is as contrary as light and darkness when we think of it some years ago.

Matamgi Isei (Light Music): It is better known as *Adhunik* or modern light songs. Songs of Manipuri language by a host of male and female artists on religious festivals during the time of Maharaja Churachand Singh has been a great experience to the listeners all over the country. Bengali and Hindi film songs have contributed to form a creative item in the programme of the higher classes before World War II. In the pre-World War period there was little scope for Radio, gramophone and other musical performances where Manipuri light music could be presented as mass media. The origin of modern light song as a fashion can be traced to the emergence of Manipuri theatre and *Jatra* in 1930s and 1940s. They require the treatment of separate songs as different from the traditional songs. Shri S. Gourahari Singh was a pioneer exponent of *adhunik* light songs who made classical music modern by his compositions. He received his musical training at Chittagong and continued his friendship with Gyan Ghosh of Bengal, a music composer. At first he remained pre-occupied with composition of dances, orchestral music in Manipuri *Ras*, folk plays etc., for his newly founded Institute, "Lalit Kala Bhavan". The writing and staging of dramas brought about a slight change in the style, spirit, mood of the times and content of Manipuri songs. It had attracted his attention for experimental kinds. He had to his credit more than 100 light song compositions; he did musical directions in many plays of Rupmahal Theatre and M.D.U. Imphal. However, he could not brook any violation of time honoured theory of rhythm, meaning of words, gestures, *swar sadhana*, *ragas* and other *sastric* principles. He was also against the adaptation of Western music to Manipuri songs on account of its devastating trends. Until his death in 1965, he served in Manipuri Dance College, Imphal, and worked with A.I.R. as an approved artist.

Light music has developed further in course of time under some pioneer exponents around the time of Second World War. The great war opened their eyes to other forces of the modern world they could not dream of. During the war things

like bicycle, band party, brass musical instruments, European dresses, modern weapons, etc. found their way to Manipur. The people struggled to march forward with the change of time along with these new ideas in the post-war period of recreation, rehabilitation and reorganisation.

Ngangbam Nimai Singh, whose melodious tune could be likened to that of Kundal Lal Saigal, was also a great name during this time. He was the son of Ng. Shyamkishore Singh who was the brother-in-law of Maharaja Churachand Singh, also a pioneer of clarinet and drama. In his childhood he lost his left arm by falling from a tree and suffered fracture in his left arm. He became a keen student of both vocal and instrumental music by virtue of his devotion and effort. After receiving further training from Pankaj Mullick at Calcutta, he started composing music for plays of M.D.U. Some of his compositions such as 'Jati Kaubi Sakhenbi', 'Nungeibi Takhellei' (addressed to flowers), as recorded in the gramophone are on the lips of every body. It is he who made the modern classical and immortal Chandrakala Devi, Pishakmacha Devi, Sushila and L. Gourachandra Singh (comedian of *Jatra*) who infused new life in the light songs. They are all trained in Bengali culture and Meitei Nata Kirtan. Chandrakala Devi introduced new melodious songs by blending *nata* with the prevailing trends in her gramophone records. Her songs describing the Communist movement under H. Irabot Singh need not be mentioned as they had become common knowledge by 1948-49. Shri L. Gourachandra (better known as Khutamacha for his comic role) was a byword for his disc songs by which he infused new fashion and ways of life in the minds of his countrymen, the Meiteis.

Period of Hindi film songs: After the Second World War, Hindi film songs entered Manipur along with Hindi films. Some of the songs like *Ab tere siba Kaun mera Krishna Kanheia*, *Chhor Gaya Balam*, *So ja re Soja*, *Aj ki rat piya*, among others are well-known. Everyone irrespective of age, sex and class is familiar with the tunes for they have invaded every home of the valley. Yaiskul Gambhini Devi, the noted *Nata* and *Rasa* exponent, recorded two Manipuri songs on the pattern of the last three songs. The latter years till today

have seen the flourishing of Hindi education, culture and life in Manipur. There are new needs of the changing patterns of life. Light songs figure prominently in one act plays, dramas, at opening of functions and in broadcast features.

A.I.R. Imphal: The opening of Manipuri programme in A.I.R. programmes of Gauhati (Assam) station and subsequent establishment of a full Radio Station in Imphal are responsible for the rapid growth and popularity of light music. The artists, composers and singers, who have been with music for many years of their life began their new career in the A.I.R. The most well-known and approved singers among them are L. Birendra Kumar Singh, Ravindra Sharma, N. Pahari Singh, Sanatombi Devi, Binodkumari Devi, Bimola Devi, Kamala Devi, W. Selungba, Keisham Jaminikanta Singh, Ch. Gopal Singh, etc. Some of them are the employees of A.I.R. Among the new groups mention can be made of L. Mema Devi, A. Bimola Devi and A. Shyam Singh.

By about 1972, Western music and instruments began to influence the minds of the young singers through Bombay film world. Since the development of film industry in Manipur we have a long list of writers, music directors, playback singers etc., who are extending their respective activities. It is to be noted in this context that the music directors of the plays or *Lilas* have a rich background of *shastric* principles. *Tabla* is not becoming a popular instrument. Modern music has become rich with bongo, kongo and guitar.

The well-known institutions for the promotion of modern light music are Sruti Sangam, Sangit Mandal, Chumthang, Rosy Club, Amarkala Mandir and Roop-Raga, Imphal. They run musical concerts, nights and conferences from time to time in collaboration with A.I.R. Apunba Manipur Ishei Kanglup, Imphal, publishes a quarterly journal of news of modern light music, film songs, Western instruments which seek to keep them abreast with the developments of light music in India and abroad. All India light music conferences are held in Imphal under the auspices of Cultural Training Institute, Imphal, for promoting these objects. Some of the artists and singers have also been participating in the International conferences and national conferences being held from time to time. We are on

the threshold of a formative period in the history of film. It is a period which opens out immense potentialities.

Hindustani (Kalawati or classical) Music : As in other parts of India, the Maharajas (particularly Sir Chandrakirti) used to patronise this variety by sending artists to U.P., Bengal and elsewhere. They were familiar with *Dhrupad*, *Khyal*, *Thumari*, *dhoppa* (*Beithak gan*) and the concerned instruments. Hindustani music formed a part of the entertainment programmes of the kings at their palaces on the occasion of *ekadasi Vratas* and *pujas*. After a short period of decline and during the reigns of Maharaja Churachand and Bodhchandra, cultivation of this line increased. Celebrated persons who dominated throughout the beginning and middle part of the 1920's are Revati Singh in *pakhawaj*, *tabla* and vocal music, Tolen and Jhulan Singh in *Dhrupad*, Gopimohan Chakravarti in all aspects of Hindustani music, and Maisnam Thambou Singh N. Kala, Kh. Amubi M. Modhumangol, Ch. Radhacharan, T. Angou, Sital Sarma, etc. The early *tabla/pakhawaj* players were M. Chaoba Singh and his student Th. Angou Singh. Late Maisnam Thambou Singh began his early training at the feet of Gopimohan Chakrabarti (a Bengali domiciled in Imphal) and received further training under Prof. Rachikamohan Goswami of Dhaka (now Bangla Desh). His travels and contacts with different teachers resulted in the scientific approach to music lessons, vocal and instrumental. With the help of Dwijamani Deva Sharma, another student of G. Chakrabarti, he started a music school at Imphal for some time. It was closed down for some reasons. M. Thambou was taken as a music teacher at Johnstone High School by the then Government. He continued in this capacity till his death.

The practice of giving stipends to Hindustani music students was arranged by the administration for some time. It was M. Thambou Singh's ambition to set up a music institution in Imphal. In course of time Manipur Sangit Mandir started taking place with the help of the students and lovers of Hindustani music. It was later called Manipur Sangit Mahavidyalaya with provision leading to Sangit Visarada. It is affiliated to Bhatk handa School of Lucknow. It is now under the control of Government of Manipur and has been renamed as Govern-

ment Music College and classes are held in some rooms of the present Tamphasana Higher Secondary School, Imphal. The number of students who have attended classes and passed the degree examinations from Lucknow is satisfactory. It has organised all India music conferences where recognised artists are invited from different centres of India. There is another non-Government institution, namely, the Cultural Training Institute, Babupara, Imphal, which holds a similar degree course for the deserving students. It also awards annually two awards to the deserving persons. It has the credit of hosting some light music conferences at the state level.

Other voluntary institutes have continued their activities in a small way. They have produced local talent who have become exponents of instrumental music. The teachers of the Government Music College are regularly provided with all the facilities whereas the rest have to stand on their own legs. Some books have been published on the theory, *tala* and *Kalawati* and music classes have started in some Government High Schools, Basic Training Institutes, Degree Colleges organised by Government. In the past, this system lacked touch with the masses. It is performed at the time of certain Hindu *pujas* such as *Trinath Panchali*, *Sani Panchali* and birthday celebrations. At present, A.I.R. programmes and concerts attract large and appreciative audiences from among the middle aged and the young, and from among the communities like the Muslims and the tribals with better means of communication and modern facilities. The contact between Manipuri artists and those of rest of India has become easier.

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4. M. Bira Singh, "Manipuri Natyakala" published in the *Speech* collection of M.S.P. Imphal, 1959.

5. Vide Supra, Chapter I in connection with Churachand Singh's reign
6. Vide the preface written by A. Shyamsundar in his drama *Mainu Pemcha*, Imphal, 1955.
7. Eye-witness account.
8. Late Gopendro Sarma, a senior M.C.S. The first Publicity Department of the Government of Manipur was mainly instrumental for the effective organisation and control of cultural activities at the State level.
9. Some follow the model of Hindi and English short plays while some are in Manipuri style.
10. *Sumang Lila*, a half-yearly journal published by All Manipur Jatra Association, Imphal, 1st Issue, 1976, pp. 13-16.
11. A. Shyamsundar Singh's article "Meitei Sumang Lila" published in a quarterly Manipuri Journal, Imphal, 1971, 14th Number, pp. 1-9.
12. *Kanana Kanono* (Who's Who) 1st Part, Imphal, 1977, published by All Manipur Shumang Lila Association, may be consulted for these points.
13. The kings of Manipur thought that the principality of Moirang would become independent and sometimes were carried away by their rich traditions and literature and thoughts. So the rulers of Manipur attempted to shake and weaken the prestige of Moirang.
14. The classification is based on the nature and type of Jatras.
15. Who's Who in Jatras, pp. 7, 30, etc. Information supplied by N. Ibobi Singh, a noted writer and Sahitya Akademi award winner for 1983-84.
16. The central arena of performance is called *Sanapham* which is also a holy place of Sankirtan. None of the groups dare to violate this convention.
17. Information obtained from the old actors such as G. Kaibi (S. Manao), N. Angouton, etc.
18. Prof. N. Tombi Singh, *Manipur and the Mainstream*, 1975, pp. 175-176.
19. Information supplied by Jogeswar Sharma, a veteran stage actor and Secretary of All Manipur Jatra Association.
20. Late Th. Kunjakishor Singh is one of the Jatra-actors who got the Sangit Natak Akademi award for his role of Nanda Sipa.
21. The author's paper, 'Observation on the ballads of Manipur' read and discussed at the International Seminar on Folk Culture held in Cuttack in December, 1978; N. Tombi Singh, *Manipur A Study*, Imphal, 1972, pp. 15-16.
22. Dr. M. Kirti Singh, *Religious Developments in Manipur in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, pp. 203-209
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24. Panditraj Atombapu Sarma and Guru M. Amubi Singh, *The Brief Description of the Manipuri Dance*, Imphal, 1958, pp. 12-13.

25. Prof. N. Tombi Singh, *Manipur and the Mainstream*, pp. 160-161.
26. The orthodox view of the purity of Sankirtan has now been abandoned.
27. Prof. N. Tombi Singh, *Manipur and the Mainstream*, pp. 112-114.
28. The themes were first composed by Borthakur Sarma, an ex-Minister, and sung by some girls in 1967-68. Smt. Sormahini Devi was the first lady to sing Basak songs in Hindi.
29. N. Tombi Singh, "Manipuri Dhop Kirtan: Origin and Development", a speech published in a quarterly journal called *Sahitya*. 32nd number, May, 1977, pp. 16-23.

MANIPURI PAINTING

Drawing and painting were patronised by the Manipuri kings. The temples mss and clothes are decorated by coloured paintings and designs. They had their own system and methods of preparing brilliant colours from the herbs, plants and chemicals. The *paphal* (snake form of the first king) design carved on paper/wood revealing Pakhangba form is the unique contribution of the Meiteis. The story goes that Pakhangba was attacked by his brother Sanamahi with revengeful motive when he got the throne of Manipur at the bidding of the Almighty. The supreme power intervened into the constrained affairs and Pakhangba could not come in and hid in this form which is vividly reflected in this sacred emblem.¹

King Chandrakirti's reign (1850-1886) stands as a landmark in the history of Manipuri culture for this period was the first opening of the *Karigar loisang*, an institution devoted to the promotion of painting and sculpture. Maharaja Chura-chand Singh encouraged painting. He maintained a room full of paintings drawn by all the Meitei artists. One of them is still hung in the dining room of the Governor of Manipur said to be displayed since the time of Mr. Simpson, I.C.S., the Political Agent of Manipur.

Notable artists who flourished between the latter part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century were N. Bhadra Singh (1861-1921) and R.K. Yumjao Singh (1869-1956) who left behind them a whole set of followers. N. Bhadra Singh received his early training in painting under Mangidam

Angangmacha Singh, who was a *Karigar* of Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh. He took to the career of the artist as a painter and traditional sculptor of gods and goddesses. He received favours from Maharaja Churachand Singh and the British Political Agent who sent him to Calcutta for higher training. He was full of admiration for Raja Ravi Varma and the European style of painting in his post-Calcutta period (1913-1927). He joined the king's court as a royal painter whose duty was to look after the needs of the court and the State in matters relating to drawing, modelling and carving. Even the British officers commissioned him to produce art plates on Khamba and Thoibi (epic of Moirang and on Second World War) some of which have been taken to British Museum and included in the famous book, "The Meitheis" by T.C. Hodson.² His major works on art as expression and art as service, include painting on paper and cloth and 52 fresco paintings on the walls of Cheirap court (now sessions court) and sculptures of Devi made of wood, mud and straw, etc. To him is attributed the royal insignia of his patron, Maharaja Churachand Singh. His creative genius absorbed new ideas gained from the European style, Raja Ravi Varma and even a little of Rajasthani style which was brought to Manipur. The more important of his works are the stories of Khamba and Thoibi (Meitei counterpart of Siva and Durga), deities of Hindu pantheon, scenes from the Bengal Vaishnava texts, portrait of a tribal chief with his consort. He produced oil paintings, scenery, impressions, etc., in addition to Manipur's traditions.

He excelled in the treatment of volumes and graded nuances of colour tones. But he did not make use of European colours and brushes on account of the prevailing circumstances. His works show some local peculiarities in social customs, dresses and socio-political conditions. For instance in the paintings of the epic of Khamba and Thoibi, we find the depiction of *Khokkhumba* (covering the head with the wrapper by married women), *Sai-kakpa* (side lock through cutting the edges by the maidens),³ use of precious *hooka* by the nobles, use of *tilaka* marks on the forehead and decoration of the women's ear by the bunch of flowers, different styles of dres-

sing for both sexes in connection with the scenes of *Lai Haraoba* of Moirang (festival of merry-making of gods) which give us a clue to the conditions in which he lived. A typical example of cultural amalgamation is the drawing of Hindu deities like Siva, Krishna using *Nathang* (an ear-ring which hung below another ear-ring) and Saraswati as wearing *Kyanglikphang* (local necklace) around the neck.⁴ Apart from these, we find in him a great artist who made paintings of animals. We have as yet to find out the influence of Mughal and Rajasthani schools on his work.

In his personal life he had a great weakness for gambling, dice and pigeon fighting on which he spent his earnings. In spite of his association with the king he lived a miserable and poor life.⁵ He was also going beyond the established conventions by artistic challenges in the use of colour and models and personal jokes.

The original paintings attributed to him are lying scattered in some families who keep them as a matter of cherishing sentimental feelings. His paintings in colour reproduction in a book (out of print) by T.C. Hodson has been untraceable through negligence. They are not in the second edition of the book.

Of late, he has been the subject of attention among the art circles. The year 1969 being the centenary year of his birth was observed with the exhibition of his works in the State Museum, memorial speeches and culminating in the publication of a small souvenir called "Manipuri Painting". Due recognition of his varied contributions to painting, sculpture and design during his lifetime as the artist of the palace was acknowledged by all concerned. Mutuwa Bahadur Singh, a young painter, collected some of original paintings with great effort and arranged an exhibition of them in Gandhi Memorial Hall in April, 1975, in the presence of Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, the well-known art critic. He produced a brochure and a litho print copy of his paintings for preservation in his private museum. He has made a serious study of his life and works in the fourth volume of his well-known series "A History of Manipuri Arts and Culture" which covers the period from

1861-1927. A small volume on him in Manipuri by Bhadra's grand-daughter has also been published.

Another artist of the same inclination who worked in a similar style and theme was R.K. Yumjao Singh. He had also earned distinction as a sculptor, painter, architect, drummer and singer but he was better known as a painter and sculptor. He was the son of a monochrome painter R.K. Goura Singh who was at the court of Maharaja Kulachandra Singh. To him goes the credit of introducing what has come to be known as painting for the walls of *Kang/Rath* (car), *Jhulon* and *Mandop* (hall of the Hindu temples). He painted on Manchester-made cloth with modern materials. Among his well-known pieces of paintings are Radha Krishna, Khamba Thoibi, Ananta Sajya, Sakhis (Braja *gopis*), Zila Darbar (official meeting of Maharaja Chandrakirti on the yacht on the bank of Barak river). Most of them have been lost during the Second World War.⁶ Some of the old paintings were thrown into the river or tank by the people when they thought that they would incur the wrath of gods if they were defiled by the touch of their feet. His paintings numbered nearly 5000, out of which 500 were oil paintings. He had his own style with the use of lines and perspectives. His works speak more of the cerebrum than of the heart.⁷

He also executed a large number of bronze images such as of Radha Krishna, Gopal Deva, Chaitanya, Jagannath, etc., which are still worshipped in the temples in and around Imphal and other places such as Moirang, Thanga and Ngaikhong. Ngangbi Maharani (Queen of Maharaja Chura-chand) encouraged him and she liked his works. Yumjao Sana Memorial medal is being awarded to the best painter or sculptor by M.S.P. out of the donations made by his son.

The two painters have promoted a number of artists such as Maggsidam Kalachand, Lonrembam Kamdevo, Huirem Tol Singh, Hidangmayum Hemchandra Sarma, etc., who by their works could serve as a connecting link between the old and Western styles. They were not so much concerned with the common masses as with those of the religious motifs and the king's court.

Another distinctive feature is that court painters joined the

Kheda operation of Maharaja Churachand Singh and worked with the troops in painting the elephants of the same size.⁸

After the Second World War great names of the older generation who are responsible for the great strides in this field are M.K. Priyobarta Singh, Shyamsunder, H. Shyamo Sarma, R.K. Chandrajit (son of R.K. Yumjao Singh), Goure, etc. M.K. Priyobarta Singh was a younger brother of Maharaja Bodhachandra of Manipur, an arts Graduate and captain of the army. He received his training at J.J. School of Art, Bombay, and absorbed Western technique during his stay in England. Though he was the Darbar member in charge of fine arts and chief minister, he has such a knowledge of painting as few possess and he has a hand in all policies and programmes of state in the field of fine arts. His early painting is related to peaceful landscapes around local surroundings. His later works reflect the struggle of people against the challenges thrown by realities of life. He boosted the art of painting in the style of Naturalism, English landscape, European Realism of the 19th century, French Realist, Gusta Kurbe and Onor Domin. He is continuing as a social realist in this field. Mention can be made of his self-portraits, Kangla, Govindaji temple, funeral procession and birth of Bangladesh and life of the common man.

H. Shymo Singh (1917—) has acquired his knowledge from his grand-father, H. Liklal Khomba Singh, Bhabani Saha of Calcutta (1836-1939) and later in pottery and ceramics. He is considered to have evolved a style of Western impressionism and sensuous use of colour and form and matter. Originally in the service of the state as Deputy Director in charge of design he has been responsible for art design of emblems of the state. He produced drawing books for school boys and girls.

Shyamo Sarma (1917-1979) : Being of artistic bent of mind he sat at the feet of M. Kalachand Singh, disciple of N. Bhadra Singh and painter of Maharaja Bodhachandra Singh. We may divide his works into two : (i) Hindu pantheon in poster colours and (ii) works in the Western idiom after the establishment of the school of art. Life in Manipur has faced the bitter experience of Second World War, its effects, etc. His

series of paintings depicting Mother Manipur in a Romanticist vein reflects the social disharmony in Manipuri society. It is a personified Mother with a broken heart. His mother and child series are expressionistic and bespeak of his cherished desire to have a child. He popularised visual art conched in Western anatomy, perspective and volume.

One of his notable achievements is the establishment of Imphal Art School in 1947 against many odds and problems. The college situated near the Imphal War Cemetery has catered to the needs of the aspirants and produced several young artists of note. Another memorial to him is the annual painting competition for children organised jointly by Imphal Art College and Arts Society in his memory.⁹

H. Goura Singh is another painter of portraits, naturalistic land-scapes, village life, etc., and makes transitional Realism as practised nowadays. The state recognised his merit. R.K. Chandrajit, the second son of R.K. Yumjao Singh, showed his mastery over realistic depiction of Manipur's historic events, naturalistic scenes and anatomy properties. He shows the influence of cinematography, stage lightning dramatic scenes and commercial art designs. His paintings are innumerable in addition to applied and commercial productions which present the close co-existence between traditional substance and Western Realism. Some of his works have been kept in great cities of India. Major Dayamay is yet another painter who has dealt with the brutalities of war, woes and miseries of women and various aspects of tribal life. Being a military officer in his impressionable years, he was moved by the most bizarre human predicament.

The works of our artists have been appreciated by the hill tribes who have utilised their works in portraying Biblical and Christian conceptions and illustrations of tribal music. As a post-war development we can mention a number of princesses, women, etc., who have taken recourse to painting as a favourite pastime. M.K. Binodini Devi, the youngest daughter of Sir Churachand Singh (a great short-story writer and a film script writer too) and Rani Khider Devi, wife of late Maharaja Bodhachandra are some names of this period. Smt. M.K. Binodini Devi completed regular training from Kala Bhavan,

Santiniketan and adopted its style in some of her drawings. Rani Khider Devi took to painting at the instance of her brother-in-law, M.K. Priyabarta. She has produced some works of local realism which have enabled her to receive an award in the state competition.

Rise of the new generation during the period 1950 and 1970 has produced young enthusiastic painters. It is but natural that modern or contemporary style of painting has had a marked influence on them as it has on the other schools of India. The outstanding names who are working towards the modern style are Prof. Th. Tombi Singh, Pharindra Singh, Brajamani Sarma, R.K. Sanatomba (son of R.K. Yumjao and the youngest brother of R.K.C.S.), H. Ibomcha, Th. Rajo Singh, R.K. Saraj Kumar, etc. Possibly some names like Amujao Kamei, Kaiho Mao, along with the young tribal students of the Colleges are from the non-Meitei groups. Most of the Meitei/Manipuri artists are holders of University degrees. Thanks to their voluntary efforts and grants, we are at present having good works of art from Calcutta, Bombay, and Baroda-returned painters on such art lines as Cubism, Expressionism, Abstraction, fine realism, and symbolism. Through the efforts of Prof. Th. Tombi Singh and his artist colleagues, an art exhibition of artists was held in Imphal in 1968 and it continued upto 1973 in his capacity as the general secretary of the forum. But there has been a declining trend on account of lack of patronage, lack of appreciation and public apathy. He has a number of art exhibitions to his credit in Ahmedabad (1982), Baroda (1977) besides participating in a number of All India exhibitions. Since 1972 the state level exhibition of the paintings of selected artists has been annually held under the auspices of Manipur State Kala Akademi with provision for three awards for the best exhibits and purchase of two or three works every year.

It is to be noted that some artists like M. Bahadur, Tena Singh have successfully turned to folk art and themes. In the year 1982, we find the publication of following sketches; (i) Story of Sati Khongnang in the form of sketches and illustrations from Mangi Devi and (ii) the story of Khamba and Thoibi (Kangleirol Classics) in English illustrated by Sanatomba

Singh, Designer of Publicity Department and (iii) Prince Hira-chandra (Dakuningthou during 1819-1825). The result is a great variety in painting style. Interest is, on the whole, increasing all over Manipur and more and more studies and voluntary associations are being opened. In addition to Imphal Art College established by Shyamo Sarma, we have (a) Manipur Art College Naga Mapal (b) Fine Arts School Society, Uripok, Imphal. Manipur Art College significantly contributed towards the popularity of Manipuri paintings in Japan by organising an Indo-Japanese Children Art Exhibition in 1976.

Another voluntary organisation, namely, Arts Society, Manipur was established in 1980 by the painters and art lovers of Greater Imphal for which the ministers and other bodies contributed some amount. The artists centre established by A. Achouba Singh in 1979 organises annual school childrens' art competitions and exhibitions. By doing so small boys are given special training in this field.¹⁰ Arts Society organises seminars, art exhibitions and issues souvenirs annually on contemporary art in Manipur. The art schools and centres came into existence in Imphal for which the painters have been engaged as teachers. They are in the employ of government departments such as Design section of Industry Department, Information and Public Relations Department and Regional Medical College, Lamphelpat. Designing of the covers of the books, magazines and journals is the order of the day in Manipur and the painters give new designs for improving the quality of the publications, thus we see an outburst of their activities in visual arts. It is the pleasant duty of the government and the public to help them and extend them the facilities of patronage in all ways. The public should exercise a healthy influence in this aspect.

REFERENCES

1. Brochure containing State Awards for Master Craftsmen, 1983, p. 10.
2. The first edition contains paintings, drawn by Bhadra Singh but the subsequent editions miss them.

3. For details vide M. Bahadur, Director of Mutua Museum, *Manipuri Artki Wari Shingbun*, Imphal, 1977, pp. 3-14, 30-40.
4. Op. cit.
5. M. Bahadur, op. cit., pp. 1-2.
6. Information obtained from his sons, R.K.C.S. and R.K. Sanatomba Singh, well known painter-brothers; Souvenir 2nd Seminar on Contemporary Art, 1982, pp. 20-25.
7. Prof. N. Tombi Singh's article "Contemporary Painting in Manipur," published in Lalit Kala Issue 29, 1980, The journal is edited by R.L. Bartholomew and published by Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.
8. Mutua Bahadur, op. cit., Volume V. (unpublished), pp. 5-8.
9. The memorial competition under the joint auspices of Imphal Arts Society, Imphal College, etc., is an annual feature.
10. The author has copies of them. The Secretaries of Art Associations, i.e., Prof. Th. Tombi Singh, A Achouba Singh, etc., have helped him in this respect.

MANIPURI ARCHITECTURE

Manipur has been styled as a kingdom without much of historical relics and monuments. As per the belief of the people, there can't be secular buildings as the public are not allowed to have brick buildings. Obsessed by the action that private and secular residences must not be compared in grandeur or excellence with the temples of god, the kings used to destroy the buildings by letting the elephants fall upon them. Added to this was the attitude of the ancient monarchs who did not care to leave behind them material palaces and rich treasures through which they could be remembered by the posterity. There have been powerful monarchs but they were not rich enough to build monuments on account of other worldly attitude and socio-economic structure of Manipuri society. Most of the buildings, made of bamboo and straws, were of combustible materials. But they had their style of house building and skilful craftsmanship in the sacred palatial building (Yumjao).

We had about 10 temples before the great war of 1891. The Buddhist Burmese motifs are discernible in the ornamentation of the Kyangs or early temples. In the later period, the Hindu style and decorative style have been introduced by the architects and artists from British India. The ruins of the ancient capital of Kangla and temple of General Thangal are the instances in point in showing the combination of Hindu and Chinese styles. The Maharaja's palace on the eastern

bank of Imphal river and Sri Govindaji's golden temple (1894) are note-worthy.

Building activity has been remarkable in and around the city since 1960. The notable ones include Gandhi Memorial Hall, Imphal Tourist Lodge, R. Medical College, Lamphelpat, new Secretariat building and a series of Government quarters, P.W.D. Office, Dance College and cinema halls in Khwairamband bazar and Lamphelpat, Shaheed Minar in Sir Tikendrajit Park, Gurudwara, Jain temple, I.N.A. Memorial Hall in Moirang, etc. Gandhi Memorial Hall shows an attempt at evolving an organised relation between the Rath (car) shape of the old and the up-to-date styles. It is a case of combination of contacts. Tourist lodge is built on modern Indian style. The series of Government quarters and churches at Lamphelpat and Imphal show a trend towards the Western style. One sees the Muslim, Sikh and Jaina architectural styles in the concerned buildings in the main bazar. The I.N.A Memorial Hall has the statue of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, a replica of the monolith erected by Netaji at Singapore, in 1945.¹ The groves or mounds which were supposed to be the abode of *lai* (deity) remained as isolated patches of wooded land in the midst of open area with the passage of time. After the Second World War, black temples of the *umanglais* were built throughout the valley where the local committees took charge of them from a particular family. Many Hindu temples were also built in plain villages and hills of the valley, of which the Siva temple at the top of Nongmaiching hill, as we see in connection with Maharaja Bodhachandra's reign is prominent. Cemeteries and tombs raised over the graves of the forefathers are considered to be of great religious merit to the relatives. But they have fallen into neglect and can now be seen in various stages of dilapidation. The Roman Catholics are the first to introduce their architectural style in church buildings at their centres. Other churches in the hill villages are constructed like Hindu temples by the Meitei workers with little knowledge of the church design. Thus one will see in Manipur buildings of various styles and varieties.

Sculpture : Judged by the examples of sculptural works such as *Kangla Sa* (animal of the sun, personification of divine

power symbolising the luck of the state. It is built of masonry to resemble stone installed in front of the gate of the capital), art objects of handicrafts and handloom products (artistry in house roof, leaf plates and cups, ornamental products and other objects of the hill areas) as well as the traditions that have come down to us. Sculpture must have reached a distinctive place. Drawing, painting and sculpture usually co-exist and are inseparable. It is a deep rooted belief that any error in painting/carving will give him an handicapped child. Carving is connected with a deep knowledge of philosophy and psychology. The artists have accepted the current view of the open environment. The images are made after the human forms showing the intimate relation between human being and god. Sex symbol of a deity is the soul in their belief.

The representation of *Umanglais* (sylvan deities) and Hindu gods in human forms is mostly found in the 17th century. That carving or sculptural work was popular with the people which was established by the worship of idols in individual houses, groves and Hindu temples. Icons of Hindu pantheon and Buddhism in stone, bronze and clay assignable during period from the 15th to the 19th centuries which have been acquired from different places in the valley and hill areas are now deposited in State Museum, Mutua Museum and Department of Archaeology.² They are displayed and have been studied by us. Hindu deities such as Rama, Hari, Nrisimha, Buddha in different poses were carved in accordance with the description of local dress, ornaments and style to be found in the synoptic and formative periods. Idols of wood and Sivalinga commemorate the reign of Maharaja Churachand Singh and Maharaja Bodhachandra in the Manipur temples and Nabadwip.

Making of idols in clay, bronze and wood was compulsory under the rulers of Manipur. A particular family took to the work of specialising in these artistic products in the past. During the time of Maharaja Churachand Singh, one Leikhom Sana (pet name meaning clay Raj Kumar) made idols from ivory and wax. The Maharaja presented to the Viceroy of India folk products made of ivory such as Khamba, Thoibi (the hero and heroine of the epic) scene

showing the royal dance.³ The idols, puppets, *tal shamu* (elephant made of flour) prepared by Manipuri women can be compared with the products of British India. Among the Manipuri artists in the royal court of Tripura (beyond the state of Manipur) R.K. Buddhimanta alias Angou Sana was famous for his watch, fan, cane industry, ivory matstick of betel nut, which impressed the British who invited him to Rangoon at the suggestion of his brother Baba Sana and W.L. Leonard (the proprietor of watch company). He was a well-known *silpa-cum-artist* and was attached as the superintendent of *Silpa Ashram* Agartala in the Tripura State (Maharaja Virachandra of Tripura)⁴.

Artistry in colour of suitable objects caught the eyes of the great people and they became popular in Congress *swadeshi mela* and British exhibitions although the work has declined much since the abolition of the monarchy. The products of today are mainly confined to types of doll making of wooden, earthen paper and cloth products at the time of exhibitions. They depict artists such as drum player, fiddle player, Khamba and Thoibi in dance, Radha-Krishna Jugol Milan, swordman, spearman, etc. The tribal clothes and weapons have a symmetrical and artistic design. Among the Meiteis, the long shield used by as spearman (called *chung*) is painted in fearful figures. The war sword had floral designs over the handle made of copper and of different colours, and such is the case with *pena* (tiddle) and *pung* (drum).⁵

There began the insecurity and lack of patronage consequent on the merger of Manipur with India in 1949.

Under the new set-up sculptural work has been taken over by the state and placed under the care of the Director of Industries. The Directorate has organised annual exhibitions and instituted a scheme for award to master craftsmen in 1979-80 according to which master craftsmen have been recognised for special honour with cash awards, seals and certificates.

The artists have completed advance courses in bronze and wood crafts and embroidery works with the aid of the Directorate. They have produced famous creations which can match with any producer of their kind outside Manipur.

INSTITUTIONS UNDER MAHARAJAS AND AFTER

While discussing about the development of Manipuri culture there has been a tendency to give the special credit to the royal court and *Loisangs* (departments of the Maharajas) which encouraged them with their patronage and appreciation. This is wholly correct as the political and voluntary organisations were not required according to the custom of the land under the regime of the Maharajas. The temples of Royal deities (Vaishnavite), especially of Sri Govindaji, were the centres of the kingdom, where from time to time flourished a surprisingly large number of saint rulers, poets, Gurus, *Maichous* and dancers. The so-called Meitei culture which thrived in Manipur valley has been closely interwoven with the indigenous religious beliefs and traditions. Kangla, the ancient capital (upto 1891), was the important centre of Manipuri culture with many institutions. It is also to be realised that every village/place of Manipur was made sacred by the *lilas* of the ruling dieties (pre-Hindu), and they echoed with the incantations, prayers, dance styles of the great Ojhas.⁶ The total number of *Loisangs* affiliated to the palace exceeded one thousand, and were managed by committees of different nature comprising qualified persons with a *selungba* (chief) of the Maharaja. The workers were required to observe strict discipline in respect of attendance (10 days out of every 40), and behaviour. Maintenance of these old *Loisangs* was made through the patronage of the Maharajas, queens, princes and ministers and individual offerings. Money was not used as unit of transaction. Crops, rent free lands and local spun clothes were popular among them upto the reign of Maharaja Churachand Singh. Some acres of land and bodyguards were placed at the disposal of the more important *Loisangs*.⁶

Vaishnavite institutions are the product of Gaudiya Vaishnavism under the saintly king Bhagyachandra. The most influential *Loisang* is the Brahman Sabha whose genealogy can be traced to Maharaja Jayasinga and was the authority to say the last word in socio-religious issues connected with Hinduism. Besides the acts of propagating Hindu manners

and ideas through their work, the Sabha was also responsible for maintaining a period of contact with holy cities such as Banaras, Nabadwip, Vrindavan and Puri and the chalking out of a middle path between the Vedic and Vaishnava rites in a peculiar way. The Sabha became in course of time more than a royal body performing the work. It became an agent for exploitation of the common people and misused powers in the name of religion. We have already discussed that the socio-religious thought during the time of Maharaja Churachand is the history of reaction to their policies and had to be stopped with the help of the laws and Gandhiji's philosophy. The Sabha, which was considered sacred and authoritative in the Thirties and Forties, was considered harmful after the *Mangba Sengba* scandal and the Congress ideologies. The Brahmans who have been associated with its functions became part and parcel of the king's power of conscience. The Brahmans with academic attitude and attainments could not join the Sabha as the criteria of its selection was the king's whim rather than religion and spiritual welfare of the masses. This tradition is a marked feature whose effect is negligible in the present society. The other significant *Loisangs* affiliated to the Brahman Sabha are *pala Loisang* for the aspect of Vaishnava music, *Jagoisabi Loisang* for the dance forms, *Laikeirungba* in charge of custody of Sri Govindaji, *Selungba* in charge of offering to the diety, *Laishangba* in charge of ornaments and ceremonial robes *Duhon Loisang* for supplying water and the torch, *Bhandrari Loisang* for fuel and washing, *Kitna Loisang* for preparing ghee, incense and charcoal, *Tanyeisang* for actual timing of devotional works, *Panji Loisang* for astrology, *Mandir sevok* for flower service, etc. The *Pala Loisang* had several branches and offshoots as it was required to send concerned participants from them to such deities as Ramji Prabhu, Hanuman Thakur, Kalika Devi, Advaita Prabhu for *seva* during the Hindu festivals.

The pre-Vaishnavite *Loisangs* comprising many groups and consisting of primitive departments appears to have taken shape before the coming Hinduism. The notable department is *Pandit Loisang* which concentrates its activities in the compilation of

chronicle in ancient script treatment of marriage from the point of view of ancient ancestry. It is assisted by other *Loisings* such as *Lairikyengba Loisang* in reading, writing copying the scriptures, *Maiba Loisang* in dance, divination, *Pena Loisang* in the playing of *pena* for ceremonial and religious occasions. The kings kept *Haomacha Loisang* for tribal welfare, *Pangal Loisang* for the Muslims and animal husbandry and cattle development works.⁷

There are hundreds of other institutions throughout the length and breadth of the country, some of which include the military, judicial, administrative and diplomatic affairs. Some of them were demolished by the invading Burmese, British and in some cases by the fanaticism of the king and also by fire.

The different institutions are among the many cells that contributed to the stability of monarchy, vitality of the kingdom, etc., and have enriched the culture in their own ways in the history of Manipur. It cannot be denied that one group tries to assert its head over another. Account of conflicts on some issues are found among them. But the effect on their worth was negligible. They worked side by side without mutual jealousies.

The very complete system of institutions as an official system which existed before the merger of Manipur with Indian union in 1949 can be made use of for all purposes in the modern context. We have created posts with new English names, the duties of which are very much like those performed by the officials of these institutes under the Maharaja; some of whom are still in existence and continue to be called by the ancient titles, while performing no official duties except in some religious cases.

We have mentioned the primary roles of different cultural institutions in the fields of dance, music, painting, and physical culture, etc., in proper places. They have lost their effectiveness for want of resources in the shape of honest and trained men and the required extent of people's response. The activities of some literary and religious organisations, however, have so far been confined to one-sided pursuits and improper use of funds in the interest of some, the basic purposes remaining largely unfulfilled, inspite of annual resolutions. The gap between resolutions and achievements seems very wide in the

case of some literary organisations like Manipur Sahitya Parisad, Cultural Forum and Manipur State Kala Akademi.

The section on the approved and registered voluntary institutions will be incomplete without mentioning some more such as the Manipur Astrological Society, Conference on Cultural Integration, Meitei Maiba Association, Meitei Mayek Organising Committee, Manipur Ayurvedic Sammelan, Atombapu Research Centre, Manipur Research Society, Gita Mandal, etc. The Manipur Astrological Society offers its service in the promotion of Meitei system of astrology and astronomy in the context of Indian (specially Bengal system) astrology. It also favours the astrological and modern astronomical fraternities on account of its publication of annual Chandra-bad Panijka issues from 1956, to 1978, Meitei calendars, papers, articles and ancient treatises. It was founded by late Th. Suro Singh, the Chandrasiddhanta, the Panji Sanglakpa (Head astrologer of Sri Govindaji Temple Board). On the role of its supporters appear such scholar-astrologers as late S. Tomchou, late Kashiram Sarma, late Nimaichand, late P. Tomba, M. Nilbir Singh, Mayurdhwaja, the present head astrologer and the writer. Atombapu Research Centre emanated from the institutes founded by late Panditraj Atombapu Sarma during his lifetime. His printing press has contributed very significantly toward the achievement of some objectives like bringing out Sanskrit books in Manipuri language, publication of magazines, newspapers and leaflets on current problems. Most of the works of Panditraj Atombapu Sarma published from his Churachand press have been found to be very useful links between Hinduism and primitive Meitei culture although we don't find much of scientific and literary merit under its programme of astrological studies. The Research Institute is now regularly publishing the annual Panjika namely *Bhgyavati Panchanja* in Manipuri. In addition, experts in culture, Indology and allied subjects are invited to the institute to deliver Atombapu Memorial lectures though not regularly. The establishment of Manipur Cultural Integration organisation in 1968 was a recognition of the value of relations between the hills and plains. Centuries of research in the integration initiated by the Maichous (scholars) of *Pandit*

Loisang (King's Department) and later continued by the successive workers of Manipur had blossomed into an institution called Conference on Cultural Integration. After a two-day conference at M.D.U. Hall on January 27, 28, 1968, it was founded by the elite of all sections with a view to promote the common cultural heritage and civilisation and collect data on linguistic, social affinities between the plains men and hill men and suggest remedial measures for minimising any enmity and isolated movements thereby increasing the contact during these years. Its activities have considerably grown to include not only the field investigational work but also persuasions or moves of Indian Government in connection with Manipur's boundary problems with Burma, problems of India's defence and economic resources.⁸

The field work covers wide areas of the hills of Manipur. In the past few years, the members of the conference have developed close contact through tours with the diminishing tribal groups on the hill areas and provided them with suitable aids. It has been able to achieve something having published five books on the regional and cultural integration of this part of India on different aspects some of which cover arts, crafts, music and dances. A half yearly publication in English and Manipuri since 1968 is also published. The conference maintains close relationship with the Government and other associations of Manipur. At any given point of time its membership is not large. Some of the hill chiefs who took keen interest in its ideals are not alive now. Among those still with us is M.K. Priyobarta, first Chief Minister of Manipur and adviser to the Governor (1981), the permanent president of the society, who guided the activities of the conference since its inception. The rest of them have joined different political parties. Pan Manipur Youth League and Kanglei League are devoted to the discovery of scattered Meitei population in Asian countries, question of territorial integrity, expansion of Manipur by bringing in Kabow valley, anti-corruption drive, etc. It is anti-Congress and anti-C.P.I. on political plane. It is akin to those of D.M.K. and Shiv Sena. Its activities include the publication of a monthly

journal 'Lamyonba' in Manipuri and 'Resistance in' English and publication of books and book-lets. Manipur Pauranic Parishad, Bhakti Shastriya Samaj, Govinda Sampradaya Bhakti Anuvadak Sabha are different registered organisations which are keen to promote Manipuri Hinduism which is closely interwoven with the life and culture of the people. The diffusion of sacred Hindu Vaishnava texts takes many forms. It may be recited by one man and interpreted in Manipuri by another man as in the case of *Lairik Haiba* and *Thiba*. Or it may be told in Manipuri, so that it may be enjoyed at religious festivals. It may be sung as a ballad or shown in drama forms. Whatever form it takes, it has always captivated the people. The story tellers, reciters and interpreters make the audience weep at one time, at a different time, makes them laugh and at still another time they are plunged into Hindu philosophy and ethics. They are the powerful media favouring mass education and success of Hinduism in Manipur.

Pauranic Parishad makes a powerful impact upon the people through the publication of monumental books such as the *Mahabharata* story as told by the Meitei story tellers and indigenous faiths look at them. The contents are easily adopted to local versions and compositions. Bhakti Shastriya Samaj and Govinda Sampradaya Bhakti Anuvadak Sabha has been imparting training in reciting and explaining in Bengali and Manipuri for over 15 years. Most of the Bengali devotional texts have now been published in Manipur to reach many more people. It teaches the principle of *Swara*, *Raga* and *Ragini* to students and the areas in which they can be used for devotional purposes. They faced some inconvenience in matters of fund.

Gita Mandal is the first Hindu Association of progressive minded people to popularise the thought of the *Gita* and other Hindu ideas among the Meiteis on modern lines. It has its own room on the upper floor of the building in Paona Bazar, Imphal. It takes initiative and makes the leaflets on the *Gita* available to the people.

It did a wonderful job in 1975 and 1981 in organising the Vaishnava conference at Kalimai Mandap and Manipur Rajya

Hindu Sammelan at Imphal pologround for three days (in collaboration with Manipur Branch of Viswa Hindi Parichat).

We can talk of the Imphal branches of Swami Sivanandaji's Divine Life Society, Gyan Mandir, Aurobindo Society, Vivekananda and Viswa Hindu Parishad, Ramakrishna Mission Belur, Sarvodaya Mandal, Arya Samaj, etc., which are devoted to the popularisation of Yoga, Vedanta, Neo-Vedanta and contemporary teachings of the great souls through lectures of the visiting swamis, social workers, seminars, etc. There is continuing concern for interrelated research and discipline in so far as the promotion of Hindu culture is concerned. They have succeeded in countering the activities of some revivalist groups to some extent.

The *Sanas* alias Rajkumars also established Rajkumar Association which incorporated their safeguards as a united body and deliberate on matters of common interest to them. The Brahmins, *Yek/Salais* (clans) and certain institutes discuss questions touching their rights and privileges under the changing political circumstances. Such associations possess the fine records on the genealogical and heraldic works of their own groups. The pedigree of the princes, Brahmins and the *Pibas* of each clan can be traced and their rights to put on their respective armorial bearings can be ascertained through them. But they were allowed to be perished as there was not any useful function to be done with them. They became merely the formal gathering of the concerned groups, where they met annually to fill themselves with their princely order. It became the pleasant time of enjoyment for them as the shows and festivals invariably synchronised with their sessions. Such organisations perished without leaving any trace of existence in the religious and cultural festivals of Manipur.

Organisations have been formed by Meitei residents in different cities of the world and India with the object of preserving Manipuri culture and instilling in the people of the world the greatness of Manipuri heritage and the culture. There are a large number of endowments, trusts, prizes, etc., which are specifically earmarked for Manipuri culture in these areas.⁹ *Sagol Kangjei* (Polo) symbolised the richness of

Manipuri culture which was very popular with the Meiteis in Burma, Bangla Desh, Tripura and British India during the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. It was a royal game associated with customs, traditions and beliefs of the people under the ruling kings. At present All Manipur Polo Club (AMPC) is the highest body in the affairs of polo which organises tournaments of the affiliated clubs annually under the old *pana* (division) and modern styles; similarly a series of promotional measures have been undertaken for the development of local games under the auspices of some organisations and the Directorate of Physical Culture.

After forty years, Manipur still suffers from the consequence of Second World War. The cultural scene is full of activity and promise. It was on January 21, 1972, that a Statehood was bestowed according to the people's wish. The Government of Manipur has established an Institution called Manipur State Kala Akademi in order to foster the regional system and patterns of Manipur arts. It is a composite regional version of three national akademis at New Delhi, i.e., Sangeet Natak Akademi, Sahitya and Lalit Kala Akademi. It is an autonomous body managed by a general council of 22 members with the nominee of Government of Manipur as the Chairman. A representative of the Department of Culture, Government of Manipur, and the Secretary of Sangeet Natak Akademi are in the Council. It has five sub-committees for specific purposes. It is entrusted with the task of giving publication subsidy and grants to cultural institutions which number about 200 in the valley and hill areas of Manipur. A fuller judgement of its performances and management, however, must still await. We can show that everywhere numerous talents and institutions are keen to overcome their worries, to produce good works and to offer a Manipuri contribution to the intellectual mastering of our existence without the Akademi.

The Government of Manipur has expanded the Social Welfare Department by adding the Arts and Culture Unit taking it from the Education Department in 1980-81. It has opened an art's gallery and Office of Archive. It has discovered 102 antiquities by surveying the caves of Tharon in West District

and Khangkhul, Hungdung caves in East District through its Archaeology Department.

The Government has adopted Manipuri language as its Court and State language. The Education Department has opened classes for Meitei script up to the High School Leaving Certificate Examination Standard. Text-books are prepared in this script at this level. The ancient emblems and seals have got proper places.¹⁰

As for the general public is concerned it is noteworthy that they take keen interest in all aspects of Manipur culture; many books on various popular and technical themes and in all forms are being published. Different types of magazines and journals in Manipuri are doing their best. The number is more than 500. The readers are increasing. The ministers and officials are coming forward to help the people. Various cultural troupes are sent to big cities to encourage artists and project Manipuri cultural heritage. Local talents and scholars are participating in the national and international seminars/congresses with their research papers and scholastic talks.

Manipuri culture is rich and dynamic with its history of 2000 years. Dedicated scholars and writers have enriched its different aspects. The future is very prospective, bright and prosperous.

In the fields of education and technology, Manipur is remarkable in the 20th century. The growth of modern education has gone apace with the attainment of statehood in 1972. The establishment of Manipur University, Regional Medical College, Government Polytechnic and Agricultural College are landmarks in the realm of technical education.

The societies formed before 1970 were conceived on the broadest lines; those that grew after this often have a different character. A glance at aims and objects and programmes of every society shows the number and varieties of such institutions.

The specialists in different subjects assemble from time to time and form societies/associations with a view to promote their researches in their subjects. Imphal is taking lead in informing people about the themes by seminars, discussions and lectures though the experts, teachers and students. Out of

the development in professional and particular branches grew Librarians Association, Science Teachers Forum, Science Clubs and Manipur Science Association followed by the Manipur Horticultural Society, Manipur Zoological Association, Botanical Society, Anthropological Society, Bar Association, Civil Service Holders' Association and Medical Association.¹¹

There has been a definite resurgence of tribal clubs and associations of different groups in the hill areas in the last 30 years. They show a concern for cultural and ethnic realities. They also deal with the Christian ideals in tribal societies.

SRI GOVINDAJI TEMPLE AND IMPORTANT UMANGLAIS SHRINES

The sacred idol of Sri Govindaji (as Jagannath is the deity of Orissa, Triupati of Andhra Pradesh, Vithoba of Maharashtra) is the natural deity of the Manipuri Hindus. He belongs to them through the rulers who assumed the direct administration of the temple along with other instructions. He is the chief deity in whose favour land, life of the devotees, cattle, ornaments, elephants and horses were dedicated during the regime of the Maharajas. Consequent on the abolition of privileges and privy purses of the rulers in the State there ensued much insecurity and uncertainty on the question of the temple's land, the property and ownership of the royal deity. Quite natural to modern aspiration the deity and its properties belong to the State both from the point of view of defecto and de jure. He is more than a family deity as assumed by the royal family. The deity and the institutions have not really lost their original roles of contemporary relevance. It has only lost its effectiveness in pronouncing the last word in the event of any controversy about *Ras Lila*, etc. Many Gurus of dance, song and *Pung* come here and give their performance in order to get their creed stamped with the authority of the highest temple as necessary prelude towards their acceptance. The spiritual and moral authority of the temple on the culture and tradition of the Manipuri Vaishnavas are as valid and vital today as they were in the 18th century, perhaps

more today than ever before in the context of many forces. It is gratifying to note that the government does come to the rescue in entrusting the management affairs of Sri Govindaji and the *Loisangs* to a high powered body under the Govindaji Temple Act, 1976. The transition from the hands of the rulers to the democratic setup is not smooth in the days of legal disputes and bargains in order to save the situation as it was, and to ensure all round progress it is necessary on the part of the royal family to co-operate with the general public at some cost.

The Govindaji Temple Amendment Act in 1976 has been so enacted as to control the Meitei traditional customs and laws codified by the Government of India in 1949. Its jurisdiction covers the worship of important Hindu gods (Kamakhya Devi, Hanuman Thakur, Ramji Prabhu, etc.,) and primitive Meitei deities to which the followers of Apokpa Marup and Manipur State Meiteis Marup challenged vigorously through demonstrations, petitions and legal proceedings.¹²

The primitive deities of the Meities were officially recognised and some of the ruling royal deities received rent free lands for their maintenance and are as much honoured as the Hindu gods. They are served by the *Maibas* and *Maibis* (high priests and priestesses,) and with the Hindu culture gradually coming the appointed agents came to terms with the old culture. The temple of the Govindaji and other ruling deities formed a part of the palace complex, now the old compound of the 4th Assam Rifles Battalion. The present complex was constructed after 1891 under the policy of the British Authority; the old palace compound known as *Kangla* is principally the seat of *Tantrism* and of *Pakhangba* cult (the divine ancestor) of the royal family and their devotees. With *Pakhangba* worship evolved the sanctity of *Nungjeng Pukhri* and several temples were built in and near the palace as premier centres of ancient rituals and last strongholds of independence against the mightiest British. It remained second to none in Manipur and left its permanent impress on earth, literature and archeology. It has retained the

status of foremost place of pilgrimages in the mind of the Meiteis till today.¹³

The British kept the fighting forces in the ancient palace. There have been demands from all to shift the headquarters of Assam Rifles Battalion to a suitable area. The Government is committed to ensuring an early vacation of this area by the Assam Rifles and the restoration of the Kangla to its original historical glory. The people are allowed to worship the shrines of different deities by the army authorities since 1972. But the actual shifting is as yet to take place.

Among the changes made by the Government, we may note the management of the Lainingthou Sanamahi Temple Bill of 1966 and its amendment Bill of 1977, as per the public pressure leading to the death of two students for taking away the idol of God Sanamahi from the hand of the Brahman Sebayeit.¹⁴

The idol of Sanamahi was removed by the Government from the Brahman Sebayeit to the original temple situated inside Manipur Rifles Compound on October 12, 1977. The managements are entrusted to a Board consisting of experts in local laws and believers of Sanamahi Apokpa cult.¹⁵ The annual festivals such as *Sanamahi Chenghonogba* and *Mera Chaorenhouba*, which are sacred to this deity, are controlled by the Secretary who reports directly to the State Government. The Act of 1976 and Bill of 1977 of Lainingthou Sanamahi has not been so aimed as to conserve traditional customs and law which are not yet modified in a legal sense. They have been kept under the perview of Sri Govindaji Temple Amendment Act, 1976. The position of the ruling pre-Hindu deities is being neglected to the core.

This, no doubt, has an adverse impact on every member of Apokpa Marup and different branches of revivalist groups, not to speak, of their philosophy. We have well known disputes between the successors of the ex-rulers and the local people over the issue of the temple management of well-known deities of the Meiteis. The followers of Meitei National Front have attempted several times to rename Hindu names of deities and temples after old Meiteis names and the supersede the existing authorities by new ones.¹⁶ Because of funds being

offered by the devotees the management and maintenance are upto date and efficient.

It has also been found that there are a number of temples managed by the owners with the help of voluntary local committees. No supervisory control is exercised by Sri Govindaji Temple over them. The Vaishnava temples of Vijay-Govinda Gopinatha in Ningthoukhong and Aram Nityainanda in Imphal are efficiently organised by the Sebayeit without any help from the State.

The achievement of Manipuri genius is their promotion of culture through institutions. None perhaps is more central and more characteristic than Manipuri culture specially the dance, whose essence is the realisation of God and the reflection of the God in humanity.

RELEVANCE OF MANIPURI CULTURE

What is the function of Manipuri thought in the modern world? What will happen to it in the modern context is a question that awaits answer? Some people believed that Manipuri culture and identity would be dead in the near future. We have shown already that Manipuri thought has stressed the synthesis of two trends: Positive as well as mystic. A *Maiba* or *Maibi* and a Guru are both of this world and other world and Meitei religion is both. Man's craving for the world beyond will be met by a philosophy of the future—a philosophy which is therefore to be of this world and of other world. In this context Meitei philosophy may have something to contribute to the philosophy of the world.¹⁷

Pre-Vaishnavite tradition is basically affirmative and in substance of this world. The present world is regarded as the locus value; next world having little value for human beings. The intimacy between the creator and man is well-symbolised by such words as *Ibudhou* (Great grand-father) and *Ibendhou* (Great grand-mother) when they address the god as their forefather (*Adigotra*/progenitor) and foremother. That god is never transcendent is a feature which is exhibited in their ethnic religion. Into this situation come currents of mystical and of other world or pessimistic concepts from Hinduism in the

form of Bengal Vaishnavism and Buddhism from Burma, etc., on account of Manipur's contact with Hindu India and Buddhist Burma.¹⁸

The Meities began to think that root cause of their present unrest was their contact with the *Mayangs*, the outsider from the rest of India in matters of trade, commerce, religious belief and the designation of the Meiteis as caste Hindus in the Constitution of India. The policy of reservations for the scheduled castes and tribes in key posts began to play havoc to the Meiteis. Their reaction was to disclaim Hinduism itself. A new slogan—"Back to Sanamahi" the god they worshipped before accepting Hindu Vaishnavism 250 years ago by the policy of king Pamheiba was heard in the valley.¹⁹ Closely connected with the revivalist anti-Hindu trend is the popularisation of folk belief. Belief in harmful deities has long occupied an important place. Rituals to avert catastrophe and conciliation of nature with human beings through several methods live on even today. Charm songs, spells and magic, rituals are still believed to ensure the well being of the entire community. Furthermore the participants are required to follow the tradition. Data indicate that as recently as 1983, divination, prayers and magic are believed in by well over 60 per cent of the people. Rain forcing ceremonies, fortune telling, divination and following auspicious timings before any undertaking elicited 70 per cent response of affirmative answer from all Meiteis. As an example of the contemporary significance of their belief we may refer to the community *puya* by late Th. Madhop Pandit on the occasion of Chinese aggression against India in 1962 in which we refer to the victory giving grace of Pakhangba whose worship was practised in Kangla under the king. Folk dances and music are a part of the functions and Republic Day programme of the State. The folk character of religious practices such as do's and don'ts are receiving priority. A woman during the menstrual period or a person with a recent birth or death in a family or *phu* (group) of the same clan is expected to refrain from observing any religious festival and worship of any god or goddess. All religious activities are resumed during the auspicious times.²⁰

Chup Saba still injects into the mind of a Meitei an obligation to meditate the sun-god to ward off all hindrances or catastrophes faced by a person in his family or near relatives again in future. The first fruit of any crop is presented or assigned to Lord Sanamahi on the Manipuri new year's day.

However, in consequence of urbanisation, rapid social changes, the dress, food habits, handloom economy and modern outlook, the traditions are frequently honoured more in the breach than in observance. The people including *Maibas*, *Maibis* (priests and priestesses) and the *Manipuri Bamons* (Brahman priests for Hindu rites) are content themselves with service when they conduct the concerned rites and rituals. Some of the charms and spells lost their significance in everyday life as the soothsayers disappeared from our society. In urban situations, witch craft, magical practices, folk system of curing diseases tend to disappear from the lives of those who live in modern style. However, we can say that it is not modern scientific society and its accompanying lifestyles which inhibit religious activities and beliefs, for here we find that religious attitudes are maintained in modern urban industrial environments of Imphal and other cities of Manipur.

Amid such changing trends and ordeals through which Manipur is passing we believe that religion and culture of State on account of its inherent vitality, can withstand the onslaughts from any quarter and survive in its pristine purity. It will be endowed with a new lease of life and infused with new vigour after the successful ordeals. Manipur has its own inner dynamism to incarnate herself in her culture and society with all its potentialities. The intellectual powers and spiritual insight of the people are capable of sociological and cultural investigations.²¹

The one point on which there has been complete unanimity is that Manipur has already earned a name for her music and dances as also for its polo. The ceaseless efforts of great personalities and the spiritual institutions will be true to her ancient culture and tradition and reflect the prospective position by giving a call to ensure the purity of its religion and culture against the unhealthy influence. The dances and other fine arts like music, astrology and martial arts will make

the most ennobling and uplifting contribution to the abundance of world culture and civilisation.²² Manipur deserves to be a pioneer in integration and unification of human hearts. To quote Dr. C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, "Culture necessarily involves tilling the mental and the spiritual soil. The soil is composed of several components. And therefore, in considering the kind, the quality, the particular genius, of any culture, you must really consider the quality and the vitality of the separate component organisms which constitute the soil of that culture". Historical records testify to the glory of Manipur in creative arts and culture. Manipur will retain its distinctive place on the cultural map of the world as well as in the thought of the people even in the age when nuclear weapons will have destroyed the world.²³

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5. Eye-witness account. Souvenir of All-Manipur Handicrafts and Handlooms Exhibition, 1979, pp. 25-26.
6. T.C. Hudson, *The Meiteis*, section on political organisation. The author's paper on 'Social and Cultural institutions of ancient Manipur' presented at the of A.I.G.C. held in Jaipur in 1982.
7. The author has studied some of mss written in ancient Meitei script about these institutions. They are in the possession of Pandits of Manipur.
8. The author is intimately associated with its activities from the very year of its establishment. He has written articles for its journal and attended the seminars and meetings as an invitee.
9. Funds were passed on to the University of Manipur, Manipur Sahitya Parisad and some registered organisations by their relatives to conduct lectures in memory of the departed souls.
10. *Kangal Sa* is recognised as the State seal of the Government of Manipur.
11. Each organisation is collaborating with Manipur University and State Departments of the government in sponsoring seminars and helping nation's academic bodies and councils during these year.

12. From the memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister by the representatives in 1978.
13. Vide the files connected with Kangla, the capital of Manipur.
14. During the time of late Y. Shaiza, Chief Minister of Manipur, this event took place. He is remembered for his broad minded policy.
15. The Committee of the Sanamahi Thougai has revolutionised the traditional belief by performing *Laiharaoba* festival in honour of Sanamahi who is traditionally worshipped as a household deity.
16. Important lawyers and legal-minded people used to participate in the conventions in connection with the codification of purely Meitei Customary Laws.
17. Vide Dr. R.S. Srivastava's article in *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, Delhi, 1965, pp. 384-5.
18. For details vide author's paper "The Mysticism in Manipuri Thought" presented at the 47th Session of I.P.C. held at Punjab University in Chandigarh from November 30 to December 3, 1982.
19. Close analysis of the present social picture of Manipur by the scholars reveals that their emotional attitude had this background.
20. The author has developed this point in his article "Ariba Manipuri Dharma" published in the journal of Manipur Sahitya Parishad, issue No. 30, Vol. IX 1976.
21. The model which Aurobindo adopted in his book, *Foundations of Indian Culture* revealed to the author the possibilities of the same idea. It is also supported by the inherent maturity and strength of resistances built up in course of Manipur's history and culture.
22. Polo was practically forgotten except among the Meiteis of Manipur who preserved it. In 1869, Major General Sherar, a British army officer, took the game from Manipur to England where it was first played in 1870. Since then its popularity has increased among army personnel. It provides useful training in horsemanship. Similarly the influence of Manipuri system of astrology and astronomy in Burma has been very great. Indian astrology travelled to Burma and South East Asia through Manipuri astrologers settled in Burma.
23. The sayings of our *maichous* (great pandits) and the Vaishnava philosophy of love have significance for our time. With regard to the present problems we can draw inspiration from the holy *puranas* and be guided by their tenets in our life and work. This point is brought out by all concerned in writings, speeches and discussions.

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MAP OF MANIPUR

REFERENCES

MOUNTAIN PEAKS ▲
RIVERS ———
IMPORTANT PLACES ●
HILLS OF VALLEY [Symbol]

NORTH



NAGA HILLS

MT. EASO

KAWBRU

MT. SHIROI

CHING UI KHOVA

MT. KACHO PHONG

HUINING

CACHAR

RIVER BARAK

RIVER LETA
RIVER LAMATAK
RIVER LAMATOL

RIVER IRANG

RIVER BARAK

IROISEMBA
VIJAYGOVINDA
TEMPLE
LANGTHABAI
HIYANGTHANG

KANGLA
GOVINDAJI TEMPLE
MAHASALI TEMPLE

THUI R.

ANDRO

KACHING

KAINA

R. THOUBAL

THOUBAL

MOKCHIN

VISNUPUR

KHONGJOM

MOIRANG

ITHING

THANGA

KARANG

LOKTAK

KACHING

PALLEL

WAIKHONG

SUGNU

RIVER KHUGA

RIVER CHAKPI

KHUIAIOK

BURMA

LUSHAI HILLS

CHIN HILLS

9 3 1/2°

9 4°

SCALE 1" = 10 1/2 MILES



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MAP OF MANIPUR

IMPORTANT TRIBES OF
MANIPUR

NORTH



25°

25°

25 1/2°

25 1/2°

24°

LUSHAI HILLS

CHIN HILLS

SCALE 1" = 10 1/2 MILES

NAGA HILLS

THE MACS

THE MARAMS

THE THANGALS

THE PURUMS

THE SEKMAIS

THE KHURKHULS

THE PHAYENGs

THE MUSLIMS

THE MEITEIS

THE LEIMARAMS

THE CHOCHES

THE CHIRUS

THE ANCROS

THE TANGKHULS

THE CHASAAD KUKIS

THE MEILLOMIS

THE LAPVOMIS

THE PHOZANES

CACHAR

THE ZEMIS

THE LIANGMEIS (KACHA NAGAS)

THE KUONGMEIS (KABUI)

THE ZOUS

THE PAITES

THE HMARS

THE NEW KUKI TRIBES

THE KUKI CHIN TRIBES

THE VAIPHES

THE MIZOS

THE PAITES

THE SIMTES

THE ANALAS

THE LANGANGS

THE CHOCHES

THE CHIRUS

THE VISNUPRIYAS

THE KOKIRENGS

THE THANGAS

THE HMARS

THE MARINGS

THE PAITES

THE MOYONS

THE MONSANGS

THE GANGTES

THE VAIPHES

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THE HMARS

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