Chapter – VI

Religious festivals and their impact in the society
The Manipuri Vaishnava festivals have much in common with those of the rest of India. Hinduism has deep impact on the lives of millions of Hindus and others living in the Indian sub-continent and South East Asia. The dates for Hindu festivals were invariably fixed in accordance with the position of various heavenly bodies at the time of events which led to them. Some festivals and fairs are held at intervals longer than a year, the time being regulated by the position of celestial bodies. Thus the great religious fairs (mela) take place at various holy centers in India such as Kurukshetra and Prayag (Allahabad), whenever there is an eclipse of the sun.

The Manipuri Vaishnava’s life is dominated by “Krishna Bhakti” with the ultimate aim to achieve the union with god. His devotion to Krishna is expressed through the worship of idol, the saying of morning and evening prayers, the habitual recital of the mala, the respect shown to the saints, the observances of custom and manners. Ancient cults are modified into the Vaishnavite environment of the Bengal Vaishnavism.

The word “Festival” is derived from the Latin word “Festivālis” which means a holy day. G.R. Sholapur opine that ‘a festival is a day or time of religious or other celebrations marked by feasting, ceremonies or other observances’. The cultural festivals of Manipur are mainly based

on the traditional rituals and philosophy of the land. Hindus have numerous festivals. Some of the religious festivals are celebrated throughout the country. While some of them have regional importance. The Meetei Hindu began observing Hindu festivals relating to Lord Krishna. (Krish—meaning to attract, na—indicates bliss. He himself is bliss, attracts the whole universe and leads it to bliss).³

A. Festival of Hindu Origin:

*Krishna Janma*

Krishna Janma is the celebration of the birth-day of Lord Krishna, the eight incarnation of Vishnu, observed by the Gaudiya vaishnava on the eighth day of the month Shravana (July/Aug.). This festival is celebrated to rejoice at the Lord's birth and is carried out more or less on a uniformed pattern under the direction of the royal priest in the temple of Shri Govindaji. The main items of celebration in Manipur are visiting the Govindaji temple and Hunamana Thakura at Mahabali. The Meetei Vaishnava devotees keep fasting for the whole day, listening to the recital of religious stories and performing puja till the time of the god is born. Devotional music and conch shell blowing comes heralding the birth of Krishna at midnight. An indoor game ‘Likon’* is played among the youths during night time and as a part of the festival.⁴ Nandatsava is observed on the next day of Krishna

³ Mukhopadhyay Durgadas – Religion, philosophy and literature of Bengal Vaisnavism, - P-3.
⁴ Kirti M – Rituals and observances round the 18th and 19th centuries, - P-262.
*Likon is a kind of indoor game, (ludo) played with the help of cowrie shells.
Janma in which a grand feast is organized in the temple of palace and of Aram Nityainanda temple of Lalambung Makhong.

**Radha Janma**

It is celebrated on the eighth day of *Langban* (Aug./Sep.). It is the birth day celebration of Radha, the consort of Lord Krishna and is performed in the similar way to Krishna Janma.

**Jhulon Yatra**

*Jhulon Yatra* is held from the eleventh to the fifteenth day of *Thawan* (July/Aug.). It is celebrated with great pomp in the Sri Govindaji temple. The images of Radha Krishna are placed in a (dal) swing and swung to and fro. The water displayed in the fountain is a part of the festival. Special sankritan female *pala* (singers) are held in every temple. This festival has spread to all other village temples, and it helps the Kings to universalize its celebration in all religious institutions alike.\(^5\)

**Kaang chingba (Rath Yatra)**

In Manipur, Rath Yatra festival is held for nine-days in the month of *Ingen* (June/July). In the festival the images of *Lord Krishna*, his brother *Balaram* and sister *Subhadra* are brought out. The procession is called *Padha Jatra* and is much reputed with the Hindus of Bengal and

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5) Sharma S.N. – The Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and the Satra Institutions of Assam, - P-134.
Orissa. Maharaja Gambhir Singh introduced the worship of the images of Lord Jagannath, Balbhadra and their sister Subhadra and introduced the similar car festival of Puri in Manipur in 1832. These three images are bathed on the Snana yatra, fifteen days before the actual Rath yatra festival is held.

On the actual day of Rath yatra, the images are carried out to Kairen-Kaijao* Rath from the temple through the various parts of the city. Aarti is offered to the chanting of bhajans and to the accompaniment of music, gongs, bells and conch and pung (Manipuri mridanga). While in procession the images are fanned with a yak-tail fan called chamor. The essential feature of Kaang is the daily recitation of Jayadeva’s Dasavatara stotra (ten incarnations of Vishnu) in the evening. The recitative verses begin with pralaya payo dhijale and end with mangalam ujjalam giti Jayadeva hare. These two stotras refer to Sri or Laksmi as represented in the Aisvarya aspect with Radha as the chief nayika. This style tallies well with the ancient Assamese tune of religious bargitas. This festival is performed in a grand manner in the Sri Govindaji temple accompanying the khubak eshei (female group song sung by clapping hands) and the rite is sanctioned the offering of bariti and khechri (cooked rice with pulses). The priests distributed the Prasad among the vaisnavas. The festival is celebrated in the royal temple on grand scale. The king and nobles used to go out on the first and last days of the Rath yatra celebration.

**Hari Swayan**

*Hari Swayan* is performed on the eleventh day of *Ingen* (June/July). In this ceremonial ritual the idol of the Lord Jagannath is laid in the water ceremoniously (It is based on vashnava tantras).

**Hari Uthana**

It is held on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight of *Kartika* (Oct./Nov.). *Hari Uthana* marks the ritual awakening of Lord Jagannath from sleep. It consists the ritual awakening of god and the performance of the Kirtan is a special feature.

**Holi (Yaosang)**

Holi is a spring festival of Hindus. The Holi is a popular festival celebrated during the ten days preceding the full moon of *Phalgun*. The name Holi is a corruption of the Sanskrit word *Holaka*, meaning 'half-ripe corn,' and seems to have originally been the Vasant-Utsav or spring festival, when ceremonies are performed in honour of the crops and to ward off disease from the field.* In Manipur, it is celebrated on the full moon day of *Lamda* (Feb./March). This is the greatest festival of Manipuri Vaishnavas and lasts for six days. The Meetei Hindus called this festival as *Yaosang*. *(Yao=sheep, sang=shed i.e sheep shed)**. The special features of Meetei Holi is that the boys collected bamboos and thatches and build a small bamboo hut or mandir called *yaosang* by the

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*Sanjay Prakash Sharma, Hinduism, RBSA Publishers, 2003, p-68.** It is clear that yaosang is the Wangol sang or the chabok sang (birth hut) of lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, people regarded the hut as mangba and they set on fire. It should also be better to called wangol sang.
road sides. At dusk the idol of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is brought and placed in by a Brahmin. Puja is held by performing Kirtan and the sacred texts are read out. The image is then removed. The devotees set the hut to fire. While the *yaosang* is burning, people shouts of "*Hari bola*" and "*He Hari*" are exchanged. The burnt embers are taken and used to mark on the foreheads of the devotees. These embers are placed in the door posts as an apostrophic charm. ⁸)

The Holi festival is observed in order to symbolize the pang of separation between Radha and Krishna and the manner in which Krishna sees Radha after burning the sheep-shed. This happens to be the day on which Sri Krishna was born as Lord Gouranga. ⁹)

This festival also symbolized the fore well of winter and the advent of the spring season. In Manipur the special characteristic feature of the festival is that children both girls and boys walk from house to house to collect money, collect rice and vegetables for the final feast. The virgins beg money from the male passer-bys and youths parading the streets with red powder, painting and besmearing the girls and followed the Holi customs of spraying coloured water. An ancient folk-dance *Thabal Chongba* (dancing by moonlight) is performed in the afternoon and after sunset. Both boys and girls take part and the dancers join hands in an

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⁸) Paratta S.N.-*The Religion of Manipur*, p-41. Compare the used of barti in Rath yatra.
⁹) ibid.-*Public festivals*, p-41.
ever-increasing circle as more and more participants join in.\textsuperscript{10} The males and females’ \textit{palas} performed Holi Kirtan at the Sri Govindaji temple with the accompaniment of dance and music.

Holi should be cerebrated as holy day. There should be worship of God, religious conferences and recital of Lord’s name. Holi means ‘Home’ which means ‘sacrifice’. The impurities of the mind, egoism, vanity, ignorance and lust which is the cause of all our miseries should be burnt in the fire of devotion. The call of Holi is to shine the inner spiritual with the fire of love.\textsuperscript{11}

The performance of holi continues till to the sixth day known as \textit{Halankar} day and held at the \textit{Bijoya Govinda} temple at \textit{Sagolband}. The king pays a visit to a mock fight between \textit{Sana palas} – the attendants of \textit{Sri Govindaji} and \textit{Vrajamais} – the attendants of Radha. The fight is the imitation of the quarrel between the Gopas and Gopis. The Vrajamais attack the Gopas with sticks and pursue them when the Gopas hurled taunting remarks at them. \textit{Halankar} is observed and performed in memory of a similar rite by the minister \textit{Ananta Sai Mantri} \textsuperscript{12} of \textit{Sagolband}.

\textsuperscript{10} Sharma Atombapu-Manipur Itihas,p-216-17.
\textsuperscript{11} Kar Sholapur G.R.-Religious rites and festivals of India,p-218.
\textsuperscript{12} Ananta sai was the 15\textsuperscript{th} son of king Garibniwaz and was the chief minister of king Jayasimha. He performed the ritual ceremonial bath ceremony of idol of Vijaya Govinda at a distant of three miles from the capital at a large tank called Mantripukhri.
Diwali

Diwali is one of the most important festivals of the Hindus. Diwali is also called Deepawali meaning to ‘a row of lights’ and is the greatest festival of illumination. It commemorates the marriage of Lakshmi, goddess of prosperity, love and beauty, with the divine Vishnu. The festival Diwali is performed in the month of Mera (Oct/Nov). It is preeminently a festival of rejoicing in Manipur. Puja is held within the house to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, of fruit, flowers, areca nut, betel, vermillion and sacred basil together with the usual dakshina laid out on plantain leaves. Houses are decorated with colored paper and flowers. Bathing, wearing clean clothes and marking of the fresh tilaka are the necessary features. Display of fire works and playing dice are held to determine the fortunes of the coming year.

Diwali festival commemorates the return of Lord Ram after his fourteen years’ exile. It is also connected with the released of Vishnu’s consort, goddess Lakshmi by the demon King Bali. It is intended to welcome goddess Lakshmi, the symbol of wealth and prosperity.\(^{14}\)

Govardhana puja.

After the Deepawali celebration, on the first of the Hiyangei

\(^{14}\) Kar Sholarpur,G.R.-Religious Rites and festivals of India,p-22
(Nov/Dec), the worship of Gorvahdana hill is performed among the Manipuri Vashnavas. Cow-dung figures of the hill and clay figures of cows are made and worshipped. A grand feast is arranged in the temple and in the evening devotees attended the Larik Taba function (listening to the reading of the sacred book). This festival reminds the extraordinary and miraculous power of Lord Krishna in saving the herdsman from heavy downpour. In the royal shri Govindaji temple the celebration is carried out as a cow is garlanded with a marigold flower garland, purify him and ritual ceremony is thus performed. People bow down to the cow and pray for the happy endings and prosperity.

**Gostha Astami**

*Gostha Astami* or cow tending ceremony of childhood Krishna is celebrated on the eight day of Hiyangei (Nov/Dec.) Sansenba, a dance drama in Manipuri is performed at the Royal temple in the day time. This is the festival of the dance of small cow-herd boys depicting an event in the childhood days of Sri Krishna cow tending plays in Vindravana. Many small boys took the role of sri Krishna and participated at the dance drama *sansenba*.
Sarasvati puja

*Sarasvati puja* was vastly celebrated especially in Manipur by the student community in those days. The images of Sarasvati are installed in small huts at the various places of learning like schools and colleges. The images of sarasvati are garlanded with flowers and carried in procession on palanquins (*dolai*). Songs in honour of the goddess of learning (sarasvati) are sung by the singers. The Brahmins conducted the puja ceremony and made the offering of flower, (spread out in the shape of star) rice, fruits and spices. The central item is an earthen pot, half filled with water containing betel nut, betel leaf and money. A larger pot is filled with rice and a hand of bananas is placed on it. The Brahmins distributed sweets, *puri* and *Khechri*. In that celebration of Goddess Sarasvati, the plays like dance dramas were much in commonly played during night time. It may be mentioned that the the sarasvati puja in Manipur had effected the rise and continuance of the theatre plays, sankritana party etc. in those days. The idol of Sarasvati is immersed the following day.\(^{16}\)

Sivarati

*Sivarati* falls in the month of *Magh* (Jan./Feb.) the vaishnava devotee observe a night’s vigil and fasting in honour of Lord Siva. Siva

\(^{16}\) parratta S.N. – opcit., P-38
is worshipped in the form of earthen images, stone wares or pieces of stone or painting. Siva in Manipur is worshipped on certain days of the year more especially on the Cheiraoba day.

The ritual celebration of Lord Siva included the listening to the recital of sacred lore of Trinath Pancali and the puranas relating to Siva. Musicians, singers and dancers entertained the public to the puja pavilion, by their songs and dances.\(^{17}\)

**Vasanta Panchami**

*Vasanta Panchami* falls in the month of *Magh* (Jan./Feb.). This is the festival heralding the advent of spring or vasant, tree, shrubs and plants are adorned with fresh leaves and flowers. In this ceremonial ritual Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, wisdom and fine arts is worshipped offering the newly bloom flowers and leaves (It does not fall on the same day of Sarasvati puja). Besides her other Hindu Gods like Ganesha, Vishnu, Siva and Sun gods are also worshipped. *Prabhat Pheries* are taken out in the morning.

**Ekadashi Varta**

*Ekadasi Vrata* is a very commonly observed fast on the eleventh day of the Lunar fortnight. Vaishnava householders devoted to religious

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\(^{17}\) Kirti M – opcit., P-285
life usually engaged in the observance of fast sanctioned by the texts. The Kings fast on the day when the Sun’s ray are obscured by rain or cloud. It was believed that fasting on important festivals days or on Rasa dance, on Gaura lila and on the death of the Brahman Diksa Guru is believed to bring great merit to the people.

**Hanuman Jayanti**

*Hanuman Jayanti* falls on the full moon day in the month of Chaitra (March/April). The celebration of Hanuman included the visiting of the Hanuman Thakur at Mahabali forest and Ramji temple. A huge procession is taken out by the devotees.

**Narasimha Jayanti**

*Narasimha Jayanti* falls on the 14th day of May every year. It is the celebration of the birth day of Narasimha, the fourth incarnation of Vishnu. *Narasimha* literally means “Half man and lion”. *Narasimha Jayanti* is celebrated in glory of the lord. Fasting is the special feature of the celebration. Devotees keeping fasting till the dawn. Devotees take bath accompanying vedic mantra at noon. Houses are clean and washed with cow dung. Devotees worshipped *Narasimha* to ward off the evils in their life and to regain health.

21. Meeteis are still practicing it.
**Ras leela**

Manipuri ras is a dance drama festival held on the theme of Krishna’s play with the milkmaid of Vindravana. The Ras Leela had its origin in the vision of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra (1777-1891) after the installation of the images of Sri Govindaji. The Ras leela depicts the story of Sri Krishna’s divine love sport with the gopis of vrindavana (as explained in the 10th chapter of Srimad Bhagavat containing the highest of divine Rasas). Manipuri Hindus are the the worshippers of the divine communion, Radha-Krishna. Seeing, hearing, performing and attending to ras leela by the followers of the Bhagavat cult are considered as acts of supreme virtue. There are four kinds of Manipuri ras.

i. **Vasanta ras**

ii. **Kunja ras**

iii. **Maha ras** and

iv. **Nata ras**.  

**Vasanta ras**

_Vasanta_ ras is played in the spring on the full moon of _Sajibu_ (April). It has its origin in _Brahma Purana_ and _Padma Purana_ besides the beautiful Sanskrit lyric _Geet Govinda_ of _Jaya Deva_. In tune with the exuberance of spring the Gopis play holi with Krishna. An element of

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23. Ahluwalia B.K. and Ahluwalia Sashi – Social change in Manipur, P 65
separation is also introduced when Krishna plays with the rival heroine (gopi) Chandavali—which causes profound anger in Radha to such an extent Krishna had to bow down to her begging her forgiveness. This theme has been elaborated upon with great imagination with Pandavali songs and appropriate dance movements and is performed at the Sri Govindaji temple.

**Kunja ras**

*Kunja ras* is played in autumn on the fullmoon of *Mera* (Sep/Oct). Kunja rasa depicts the daily play of Radha and Krishna in the kunja of leaves and flowers. The scene is based on the *Govinda Lilamrtam* and it contains a vivid description of vrindavana dance, *Bangi Pareng* only and it ends with the offering of *Kunja-arati*.

**Maha ras**

*Maha ras* is the most important of all the rasas. It is a beautiful dance drama based on the five chapters, ‘*Ras panchadyai*’ in the tenth Book of the *Bhagavat*. The glittering costume of the milkmaids and Krishna is a pleasing colour combination look very beautiful. Maha ras was considered to be too sacred for show before audiences of non-vaishnavas or for presentation on the stage.24

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*Nata ras*

*Nata ras* may be held and played at any time of the year. It is not based on any specific scripture and differs materially from that of in the *Bhagavat* or *Geet Govinda*. The head dress of the milkmaids is different and the songs are suitably modified. *Nata ras* is not played at the royal temple.

*Goura leela/Nimai Lila*

*Goura leela/Nimai Lila* festival is performed based on the episode in Chaitanya’s wild career in boyhood (life) and his companion *Nityananda*. Singing of the Kirtan, the conquest of *Jagai* and *Madhai*, the two wicked brothers in *Nadiya*, Nimai’s renunciation of the world and initiation in *Samnyasi* by *Kesava Bharati* and the touching scene of *Visnupriya*’s separation are dramatically represented Gaura leela is an act of devotion and spiritual benefit.  

*Sankranti*

*Sankranti* falls on the 13th or 14th of April. *Mekh Samkranti*, *Samvat-Saradi*, and *Vishnu Chaitraishu* is the Hindu “New Year’s Day”. It is also regarded as a new year for the Meetei Hindus. Worshiping of Ganesha, Vishnu and Planets are done. People bathed with sweet scented

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water and worn fresh new clothes. A flag is held high on the top of Mandir or high tree. The good and bad consequences of the coming New Year is read by the wind direction shown by the flag.

Ram Navami

Ram Navami, is held on the 9th day of Sajibu (April). It is regarded as the birth day of Bhagavati Maha Maya is done starting from the 1st day of Sajibu. Fasting the whole day is the special feature of this ceremony. Reading of the sacred Ram charit Manas is done (Lairik Taba). At the noon arati is offered with the accompaniment of devotional music.

Pasuram Jayenti/Kalen Tutiya

Pasuram Jayenti/Kalen Tutiya is held on the 3rd day of Kalen (June/July). It was regarded as the birth day of pasuramma, the sixth incarnation of Sri Vishnu. It is said that counting of Satya Yug starts from this very day.26 To ward off evils, pap punya and dosa devotees shave off their heads with the aim to herald good consequence in future life.

Chaturmas Varta.

Chaturmas Varta is held in between 11th day of Inga (May/June) till 11th day of Mera (Oct/Nov). Vishnu is worshipped offering Panch Amitra

26. Chandra Sekhar Singh Khullen _ Harao Kumei and Vrata Sing, P-17
(offering of 5 different kinds of sweets like fresh milk, dahi, sugar, ghee and honey). Worshipping of Tulsi, reciting of Gayatri mantra, reading and listening to the sacred texts of Puran Sastras is important feature of this Vrata. Brahmins are well served and entertained by giving gifts of clothes, gold, silver, giving lunch, giving cow as dakshina or a piece of gifts of clothes, gold, silver, giving lunch, giving cow as dakshina or a piece of land as dakshina, and offering purnapatra dakshina to make them good satisfaction. It is said that by doing so, the Vrata devotees regain a well fortune after life.  

\textbf{Vyasa Purnima / Guru Poornima}

\textit{Vyasa} or \textit{Guru Poornima} is observed on the full moon day in the month of Ashadh (June/July) in honour of Rishi Vyasa. On this day worshipping of Guru is a special feature. Gurus are entertained by offering a garland of flowers, flowers, fruits, clothes and giving dakshina. Saints, Sadhus and Gurus are remembered on this day.

\textbf{Nag Panchami}

\textit{Nag Panchami} is held on the fifth day of the bright moon in the month of Sravan (July/Aug.). On this day snake are worshipped by

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28. Chandra Sekhar Singh Khullen – Harao Kummei Amasung Vrata Sing, P-58
offering *Panch Amrita khir, lotus, dhup, Neibedhyan*. Images of five headed snakes are drawn by a wooden pan with the mixture of *haldi* powder, *chandan, chandi* and gold. It is said that cow-dung made snakes are worshipped by offering fresh milk, water, ghee, wheat, tingthou (soft top portion of green grass) zap, paddy, rice, mudky (*kabok akhingba*), *dahi* and earthern lamps.  

*Bamon Jayanti*

*Bamon/Brahmin* Jayanti is observed on the 12th day of *Langban*, in remembrance of the *Brahmin Avatara*, the fifth incarnation of Vishnu. On this day the gold idol of Brahmin Bagavan is worshipped.

*Mahalakshmi puja*

*Mahalakshmi puja* is observed on the 23rd of *Langban*. This puja is held by keeping the whole day fasting. It is said that Mahalakshmi is obtained in the house where puja is warmly performed. Lakshmi puja is done for obtaining health, wealth and prosperity.

*Tarpan*

*Tarpan* is a kind of performing *Pitrijagya*. It is believed that *Sradha* is happened to be observed everyday. In regard to this, just after he bath the elderly vaishnav devotees offered "*Ram Tarpan*" by offering

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three handful of water everyday. The literal meaning of Tarpan is to make “satisfaction”\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{Ningol Chakouba}\textsuperscript{*}

\textit{Ningol Chakouba} is performed on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} day of Hiyangei. It is performed in honour of “Piba Chakouba” of Poireiton by his sister Laisana.\textsuperscript{32} Ningol Cha-kouba is a social religious function held since the reign of Meidingo Chandrakriti. Married sisters attend the parental family feast and prayed for the welfare of their brothers. In return the sisters are paid with dakshina.

\textbf{Tulsi hongba}

\textit{Tulsi} (basil plant) is regarded as the holy plant by the Hindus. In order to get the bliss of one’s life from all sins, Hindu devotees offered water by sprinkling over it. They drink a drop of this water sprinkled on the tulsi plant by reciting eight different names of Tulsi Devi as Brinda, Vindabani, Biswapujita, Biswapabni, Puspasara, Nandini, Tulsi and Krishjajabni. It is believed that worshipping Tulsi every morning and evening reciting these eight names in more than obtaining \textit{Ameswadhi-jagya}.\textsuperscript{33} Tulsi is planted in every Meetei Hindu courtyard and is worship

\textsuperscript{31}Chandra Sekhar. Kh – opCit., P-99
\textsuperscript{*}Ningol = Sisters/women, chak-rice, Kouba= to come. Its literal meaning is that married sisters go to their parental house to attend the family feast called by their brothers.
\textsuperscript{32}Chandra Sekhar. Kh. –opcit., P-111-112
\textsuperscript{33}Chandra Sekhar. Kh. –opcit. P-117
by the women and every family member for their well beings.

B. Traditional Meetei festival:

The traditional Meetei festivals which are the living testimony of a well known and organized South-East Asian civilization within the geography Manipur are as-

Cheiraoba

Cheiraoba is an important Meetei festival which is celebrated on the first day of the month Sajubu (March/April) in order to herald a ‘New year’. The word Cheiraoba is considered to be taken from ‘Chahi’ (year) and Laoba (declare) which literally means ‘to announce the year by means of a stick’. Sajibu Cheiraoba is also known as Kurak Langtaiba (Kumgi Lakyel Taiba) festival which marks the joining of two years- the passing and the coming year. With the popularizing of the Hindu Vaishnava religion the respective heads of the four Panas of Khurai, Wangkhei, Khwai and Yaiskul who were supposed to make the announcement were replaced by one royal official who came to be known as Cheithaba. (Chei mean stick, thaba means counting). Cheithaba was

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35. Bhagyachandra L- A critical study of the Religious philosophy of the Meeteis before the advent of Vaishnavism in Manipur, P-92
36. Hodson T.C. – the Meitheis, P-104-5
help responsible for any calamity that might befall the King, the state, the people and to save the king and the nation from disaster. The year is named after the Cheithaba person as a mark of honour to him. The year is represented by the stick and the year is counted in terms of the stick.

During the Cheithaba ceremonial, the outgoing Cheithaba prayed for the prosperity of the king and the people. The incoming Cheithaba promised to bear all the King's sins, misfortunes and all the calamities threatening the people.

The symbolism of the sticks and its various meanings for the Manipuris as described by Higgins of the Cheithaba for the year 1926:

"Let all the evils such as war and battle, enmity and struggles, fall down at the advent of the new year in which the seasons of the ancient god Pakhangba, who is the head go gods, fallen from the sky at a happy place, and the god Chingshomba the white, who reigns in the north east, are invested with the ceremony of the Cheithaba, in which Cheithaba man performs it with a stick on his shoulder the stick which exempts the Cheithaba man from the burden of public work when he is seen to carry it on his
shoulder on the public road— the stick which can make one conquer great and small kingdoms in battle, the stick which is attached to the bamboo tube in the time of coronation at Kangla, the stick which is used be warlike young men in fight, the stick which was the hilt of the sword of the God Thangjing, the stick of which the head is known at the first and fills up the underground pit in the month of Sajibu, in the reigns of all Kings according to ancient custom.”

There are other religious ceremonies performed in relation to the Cheithaba festival.

i. Shing Shatpa – a ceremony held on the last day of Lamda.

Shinglek Shingthaba is taken to be of great importance. This is connected with the life and death of the human beings in that year. This ceremony is held on the eve of cheiraoba requesting the deities to spare the lives of those persons who would die during the coming year as counted by gods. It is called Shingshatpa* which means the withdrawal of lives from the divine counting. This ceremony is done at Heibokching,

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37. Quoted from Parrata S.N.- The Religion of Manipru, P-47. (Hinggins n.d, 50)
* (shing= stick and shatpa = take out or withdraw)
a small hill to the south of present Imphal, and offerings are made to please the deities. One cloth for *Lainingthou*, one cloth for *Laireemma*, one canopy, pieces of iron gold and fifteen bamboo tubes filled with puffed rice, fruits, flowers, an earthen pot of molasses and ten candles made of bee wax. After the appeasement rite the *maibas* remove the sticks those representing people whose lives have been reprived.\(^{38}\)

**ii. Saroi Khangba** (*Saroi* = the evil spirit and *Khangba* = propitiation) is performed on the day of *Cheiraoba*. This is the rite of propitiation and appeasements of the *Sarois*, the evil spirits and done by elderly ladies of the locality. The main feature of this ceremony is to protect the death and illness. Edible items of rice, vegetables and sweets are collected and made offered to the four tutelary deities *Koubru, Marjing, Wangpurel and Thangjing* in order to propitiate the *Sarois* who are hungry and demand food from human beings.

The preparation of the *Cheiraoba* included a thorough cleansing of the house, throwing away of the old utensils and well washed. The worship of Lord *Sanamahi* and *Leimarel* is performed by a rite performed at the gate of the house for long life and prosperity of the family members. Three portions of the rice are made offered –

one for the past *Cheithaba*, one for the present *Cheithaba* year and the other one of the coming year. This ceremony is really a prayer to the

\(^{38}\) Mashil Singlek Singshatpa Puya, Bhagyachandra. L – op cit., P-94-95
Supreme Lord who is all encompassing time.\textsuperscript{39}

iii. Kongba Leitong Phatpa (digging the hole at Kongba) and Sajibu Laikhun Phunba (closing up the hole in Sajibu)

On the seventh day after Cheiraoba another ceremony of prognostication is carried out by the palace Maibas (priests) at two Laiphams (place of gods) between the Iril River and Kongba village, east of Imphal city. The Laiphams (lai = God and pham = place) belong to the Angom Pokpa (the descendants of Agom clan) and the Ningthem Pokpa (the descendants of Ningthou clan). Kh. Chandra Shekhar records that Guru covered the evil misfortunes of twelve months inside nine layers and this is known as ‘Leithong phatpa’ at Kongba.\textsuperscript{40}

Thouniba is performed and the offering of thouniba consists of gold, silver and the raw fish ‘Sareng’ (Meetei fish used for ritual ceremony). The divination takes in the form of digging the earth at certain spot and examining it for signs. The contents of the earth, the insects and so on are wrapped in a cloth which is then carried by the maiba around his neck to the shrine of the Yunjao Lai in the palace. The insects are kept deposited in the earth for five days, later and when the signs are read and predictions concerning the king and affairs of the state for the coming year are made, is set loose in the stream of the ‘Heibok

\textsuperscript{39} Bhagyaachandra .L - op cit., - P 94 -95.
\textsuperscript{40} Chandrashekhar .Singh. Kh - Loyamba Singyen I (1975 : 66)
"Ching" river which signifies a sort of water funeral rite.\textsuperscript{42} Fourteen days from the \textit{Sajibu Leithong phatpa}, the ceremony of ‘\textit{Sajibu Leikhun phunba}’ is solemnized by filling earth again into the hole of \textit{Laiphams}.

Traditionally the festival \textit{Cheiraoba} concludes with a family feast, followed by climbing the \textit{Cheirao Ching} to the shrine of Siva on its summit by the people.

\textit{Mera Mentongba}

\textit{Mera Mentongba} is a festival held for five days commencing on the full moon day of \textit{Mera}. It is a festival in which people worship Lord \textit{Sanamahi} and \textit{Pakhangba} along with the seven \textit{Lainurahs} (divine girls), nine \textit{Laipungthous} (divine youths) and the \textit{Umanglas} (sylvan deities). \textit{Sanamahi} as the presiding deity represents the essence of the life of the universe which dwells in everything and being. Pakhangba as the outward ruling deity of the created universe. \textit{Sanamahi} is the \textit{Thawaiel} – The \textit{Thawai} of the \textit{Thawais} (The supreme life essence) and Pakhangba is the \textit{Mi} (the image of the Lord). Since the \textit{Thawai} and \textit{Mi} always go together, \textit{Sanamahi} and \textit{Pakhangba} are worshipped together in order to bring about a sense of completeness in the mind of the worshippers.

In this festival two main seats are prepared – one for \textit{Sanamahi} and

\textsuperscript{42} Samrendra chongtham-Kanglagi Ngamkhei, episode vi. He opine that funeral rite have four types as water funeral, wind funeral, earth funeral and fire funeral.
the other for Pakhangba. A plantain tree is placed in front of these two seats and by the side of it an ishaiful (a pot filled with water) is placed. Around the ishaifu seven seats of the seven Lai-Nurahs are placed. Again around this arrangement nine seats if divine youths are placed. The flag used in this festival is the Yek Salai flag of the Meeteis having different seven colours. Wax candle and smokes of Khoichu-Laikham (local herbs used as incense) are used in this ceremony.

The display of Sanamahi and Pakhangba surrounded by the seven Lai Nurahs in the inner circle and then the nine Laipungthous in the outer circle shows the multiplicity of the deities is on the circumference and not in the centre of the circle. Inwardly it is the worship of the one God – Tengbanba Mapu. It is this Supreme Being who is worshipped in Mera Men Tongba festival with a deep religious and philosophical insight into His two aspects – Sanamahi and Pakhangba.43

Lai Haraoba

The Lai Haraoba is the most authentically Meetei Traditional festival and performed in honour of most of the principal lai in the Meetei pantheon. The Haraoba rituals play an important part and in honour of the ancestral lai of each sagei, known as Lai Chaklon katpa. Literally Lai

43. Bhagyachandra L - op cit., P-99-100.
Haraoba means ‘pleasing the god’ and the essence of the ritual is to perform to call up the lai and to give him pleasure. E. Nilakanta Singh believes Meetei Lai Haraoba as ‘the merrymaking of the gods and goddesses’. The essence of the ritual is performed to gain the favour of the Lai and it is performed by the maibas and maibis as priests and priestesses. The Lai-haraoba has three types -

i. The Kanglei lai haraoba – it is celebrated in the core of Imphal valley around the Kangla where the main deity is Pakhangba, the Supreme ancestor of the royal (Ningthouja) salai.

ii. Moirang Lai haraoba – It is celebrated in Moirang emphasizing and portraying the story of Khamba and Thoibi, the divine lovers of Moirang, who were considered the devout worshippers of Lord Thangjing.

iii. Chakpa lai haraoba – carried out by the earliest settlers of the Meetei inhabitants. (Sekmai, Andro and Lois)

There are some stages in this celebration which are common to all these three types of haraoba (merry making of god and goddesses).

(i) Lai-Ikouba – summoning of the spirit of the Lai (God).

(ii) Laiphou – celebration of its birth and

(iii) Lairoi – last rites of bidding farewell for the year.

(iv) Sharoi – khangba (warding off of the evil spirits) is a compulsory ritual to prevent evil influences from affecting the celebration.

44. Paratta S.N – The public festival, - P-53.
45. Nilakanta, E – Meetei Lai Haraoba, - P-31
46. Brara Vijayalakshmi, N – Politics, Society and Cosmology in India’s North-East, - P 174-175.
In the Lai-ikhouba ceremony various preparations are made, this involves the dressing up of the Lai, Lai-phi-shetpa, Laihou jagoi, Khuyom Lakpa, phambal Langba and Chang thaba. The ritual of Laiphou starts with the distribution of flowers offered to the deities among the people. This task is assigned to a specially selected person Hanjaba and his assistant Hidang. His main task is to collect the best of flowers to offer to the deities. Thoughal jagoi (dance of beginning the day) is performed by the maibis to express the complete obedience and loyalty to God. Laiching is a kind of dance performed by the maibis enacting the effort required to draw the Lai towards her body through gestures, placing their palms below the naval in a triangular shape with the tips of their fingers reaching towards their genital organs, symbolizing the birth canal, the passage to the womb. The pena singer starts singing the Hoirou Haya which starts at a low tempo becoming very vigorous towards the end. The birth of Lai, the construction of the house, his marriage are all enacted in dance movements of the maibis, amidst the songs of pena singers and drum beating.47

This spectacular haraoba ceremony comes to an end with Lairoi where the god and the people bid farewell till the next year of haraoba. The main functionaries are the maibas, the maibis and the pena singers. People performed dance with the maibis.

47. Brara Vijayalakshmi .N - op cit., P -178-179
Ukrong Hongba

Ukrong Hongba is observed at the completion of every year. It is a ceremonial rite which is carried out in the memory of a deceased person. The ritual Ukrong Hongba are installing a tall tree, presenting manda dances and offering of food stuffs. ‘Ukrong’ (an old hollow tree) is compared to a human life and ‘Honba’ (to take place) signifies replacement of our old body, keeping the immortal soul aside (death). People sing the glory of the Almighty Lord and carry out the formal rite in order to assure a peaceful heavenly abode of the departed soul. Certain kind of deaths like suicide and mysterious deaths are not associated with the rite—Ukrong Hongba.  

“The rite Mongba is found to have been observed by Meeteileima Shorombi for the first time A.D. 1050. Afterwards, during the reign of King Charairongba (A.D. 1617-1709) it has become a customary rite as U-Hongba in place of Ukrong Hongba.” In A.D. 1759 King Bhagyachandra renamed the Kangla Ukrong Hongba rite as “Ningthem Kirtan”. The main body of the Vaishnavite ritual incorporates the same ritual of earlier Meetei ceremony.
**Chingkoi Iruppa**

It is a popular festival associated with the removal of sin through the ritual bathing in the Chingkoi rivulet flowing around the Nongmaiching Mountain to the eastern part of the Imphal valley. A holy dip into the Chingkoi rivulet was made a religious duty by the King Naortingkhong (A.D. 663-763) out of repentance in the memory of a Saloi girl, Pittanga, who died instantaneously in his palace out of shame. This Nongmai hill is taken to be the abode of the important Meetei deity Nongpok Ningthou (Meetei name of lord Siva) and his consort Panthoibi (Devi/Durga).51

The ceremonial rite of climbing holy highland by the Meeteis during Lamda after taking or dipping in the Chingkoi stream, has been a customary tradition of the Meeteis from ancient days.

**Emoinu Ahongbi**

Emoinu Ahongbi is observed on the twelfth day of Wakching(Dec./Jan.) in every Meetei family at the Phunga Lairu (hearth). Fire is lit in every house and offering of fruits, flowers, vegetables are made on two separate places- one meant for Lainingthou(king of house god) and other for the Phunga (hearth) Lairu
lairembi (goddess of hearth). Sprinkled of sacred water by Tairen and pungphai Mana (they are used for ritual purposes) and chanting of hymns in honour Lainingthou Lairrembi is held. The celebration of Emoinu Ahongbi is welcomed with a special arrangement of lighting.

Emoinu narrates the whole principle of her likes and dislikes regarding the conjugal life to Lainingthou in which she enlightens on what to do and not to do by the respective husbands and wives in Meetei households. Emoinu Ahongbi in stills the moral value to the married Meetei couples, guides friendly peaceful family life and good moral conduct.

C. Festival based on traditional customs, influenced considerably by the Hindu festivals.

Hiyang Kummei/ Heigru-Hidongba:

Hiyang Kummei is the famous boat race festival which takes place in the month of September on the moat which surrounds the three sides of the King's enclosure. All means are permitted to the competitors, including attempting to overthrow the other boat.

"The boats used in the races are two in number, of great length, and hollowed out of a single tree, the rowers' number about twenty men, each with a short paddle. Besides the rowers are several men attending to
the steering and urging on the crew. There are no rewards for the races, they being rowed merely for the things.\textsuperscript{53}

Dr. Parratta refers to another boat race which takes place in the month of \textit{Langban} on the canal of the \textit{Bijoy Govinda} area of Imphal.\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Heigru-Hidongba} is an ancient festival of Meeteis. Literally \textit{Heigru-Hidongba} means the \textit{Hidongba} (crew leader) wears a necklace of \textit{Heigru} (fruit amla) and sits on the boat, which in turn is known as \textit{Heigru-Hidongba}. \textit{Hiyang Tanaba} is a part of \textit{Heigru-Hidongba}.\textsuperscript{55}

R.K. Hereina observed that the festival \textit{Heigru-Hidongba} was compulsorily observed for some years during the regime of King \textit{ Irengba} but it was forgotten when the later kings cam in power. However, the long forgotten festival again revived during Maharaj Bhagyachandra, when his Uncle \textit{Nongpok Leirikhomba} or \textit{Ananta Sai}, took initiative in order to preserve the old \textit{Meetei Lairols}. The King requested his men to adore \textit{Bijoyanath Govinda}. It was shifter from the royal place to Bijoy Govinda on the 11\textsuperscript{th} day of \textit{Hiyangei} and the rite \textit{Heigru Hidongba} is observed along with the formal norms of \textit{Lairol} by opening the pages of the \textit{Puya}.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{53} Brown R. --Statical Account of Manipur, P-82.
\textsuperscript{54} Parratta. S.N. --Religion of Manipur, P-45
\textsuperscript{55} Madhav and Khelchandra --Hiyang Kummei (1980-15)
\textsuperscript{56} Hereina R.K. --Heigru-Hidongba, P.6-9
On the day of the boat race, two garlands of 108 heikrus and 108 rice particles is presented to Bijoy Govinda and then it will be garlanded on the Heigru of the two boats. Before the boat race the idols of Radha and Krishna are kept on the brows of a boat and will have to set out towards the North-east and two crew rowing the boats from the Higashnag will present offering to the God. Thereafter the boat race ceremony is observed.

The Kings and Lord Vishnu will present in at the festival of Heigru-Hidongba, the state affairs, the good and evil consequences of the year are decided according to the winner either by the boat wearing the garland of Heigru or that wears the garland of the rice particles. The Heigru-Hidongba takes place at Tubi erel, now called Moiraugleima thangapat.

The significance of observing the rite Lamyengba over the twined boat symbolized the creation of the earth by the Almighty Lord and our acknowledgement of His magnetic powers. The Changshaba, two Nourungbas, Naomangthaba and Hinaosaba represent a soul signifying of fire, water, wind, heaven and earth, while the formation of the world is manifested by the Tangmailappa as he executed the tasks entrusted by the
Almighty Lord. He decided the direction of the boat. Heigru Hidongba is not a mere festival. It has a mythological significance of the creation of the earth and beings.

**Durga Puja: (Devi Puja)**

The festival of Durga puja is especially celebrated in Bengal. In Manipur, it is celebrated from the fifth to the tenth day of the month Mera (Sep/Oct) each year. Manipur finds a prominent place in *Kalika purana* and *Kamakhya Tantra*. The puranic account of the mythology of the feud between Siva and Daksa and Vishnu cutting the dead body of Sati into 50 pieces which Siva was carrying on his shoulder is associated with this worship of *Sakti*. Hiyangthang is the place where the waist fell and the temple at this place enshrine the relic. Manipur was thenceforth came to known as *Mekali Desa*.

T.C. Hodson gives reference to this temple containing more information. He mentioned a hill known as Hiyangthang or *Vindu Parbat*, which possesses a the sacrilegious. In this temple, is a black stone which naturally is not allowed to see close at hand. This was the *Laipham* of the dread goddess. The object of worship in this temple is not image but a piece of the *plantin* logs covered with *phanek* (Manipuri female

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59. Hodson T.C. – The Meitheis, P-102
dress) which represents the waist of the deity. The special features of this temple is the description of the object of worship as her natural likeness, the widespread fame of the shrine of Heibok Mahadeva built not far from that of Sakti and use of a phanek by the women fit well with the mythology of the falling of the dismembered parts (the waist of Sati, in the shrine)\(^60\)

The image Kalika of Ningthem Pukhri Mapan (name of a pond) which is made of precious stones, having no hands and feet and looks like a female when seen from the back side, was moved from its original abode to the palace Durbar Hall on the 1\(^{st}\) day of Mera (Sep./Oct.) 1851 A.D. call Mera Chaoren Houba for Devi puja programmed. The worshipping ceremony was conducted by the Manipuri Brahmins of Aribam and Sagolsem.\(^61\)

In Manipur during the ten days since chaoren houba, married daughters are not allowed to visit their parental house. Puja pavilions are constructed with decoration. The Devi is represented as a tall deity with ten arms, each holding Its worship is now in the hands of Sairem family members. The Darbar resolution No.15 approves them weapons. On the evening of the first day, the puja begins at the appointed moment announced by the palace.

\(^{60}\) Kirti M. opcit., P-290.
\(^{61}\) Kirti M. opcit., P-290-290.
Story telling, text from the *Chandi* and playing of Music takes place and it signifies the home coming of *Durga*. Of the five days, the last three days are considered significant. The third day is called *Virastami* or *Vara* and it attracts a large number of devotees as *Hiyangthang* temple. On the fourth day or Bali, animal sacrifice specially of goats, buffaloes, pigeons are offered and carried out by the non-Manipuri members of the armed forces stationed held in Imphal. It formed a basic part of the *Durga* Puja worship. The gourd is ceremonially sliced open by the stroke of a sword, was originally an animal sacrifice.\(^6^2\)

In the night, the images are brought and immerses in the water of *Thangapat* ditch. The worship of *Kali,* the terror aspect of Devi is in vogue. The 14\(^{th}\) day of the dark half of the month of *Kartika*(Sep./Oct.) is sacred to her. *Durga* cult in its present form became very prominent in Manipur during the times of King Garib Niwaz (1717 A.D) and King Chandrakriti (1857A.D).

The Manipuris perform the worship of Devi in a very loose way. The ways of worship adopted by the *Vamamargis* and their philosophy are absent in Manipur. *Durga* in her character as the primitive deities like *Thumkhong Laisema*(goddess of Salt mine) and *Himchavi* (giantess /Vampire) delight in the blood of animals. Human

\(^6^2\) Parratta. S N. *Religion in Manipur*, P-43-44

\(^*\)Kali in Manipur word is Kalika, was begun in 1707 A.D. *Chetharol kumbaba*, P-59
sacrifice were widely current in these shrines.\textsuperscript{63} When the process of Hinduization had got well under way, the great goddess Panthoibi became identified with Kali.\textsuperscript{64} The final day of Durga Puja incorporates Kwakjatra

\textit{Ukai Kappa (Kwakjatra/kwak-Tanba):}

\textit{Ukai Kappa} (shooting of tree) is an indigenous festival of the Meeteis which comes once in a year. It is celebrated to prognosticate the fortunes and misfortunes that may befall in the year. The ritual \textit{Ukai Kappa} is held developing an idol in the form of a human being, the King representing himself shot an arrow aimed ay the idol, to prevent impending misfortunes and enemies falling on them. The possible consequences are read out after seeing the spot-mark. It is also observed by the ill men in the month of Phairen under the name of Lammit Kappa, Higaba Hakappa.

The head of the village shoots an arrow at the idol made of banana plant representing a human being. It is believed that is the arrow mark is spotted at the centre, it indicates good fortune. This ritual ceremony is usually performed on any good day of Phairan.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{63} Madhub. Th- Sankaradeva and his times. P.84-85
\textsuperscript{64} Parratta. S.N.- Religion in Manipur. P-142-145
\textsuperscript{65} Ashokumar L. Kwak Tanba, Matamgee Khongthang 48\textsuperscript{th} and 49\textsuperscript{th} issue (Ed) S.Nilbir, P-16
Cheitharol Kumbaba records that “since the regime of Meidingu Garib Niwaz, the ceremonial rite of Kwak-Tanba (chasing away of crow) and Ravan Kappa (to shot Ravan) have been traditionally observed by the Meeteis on the 10th day of Mera (Sep./Oct) along with the adoption of the Ramandi religion. In this rite the forthcoming results of good or bad consequences are usually conceived according to the direction of the crow flight and the marked arrow spot in the effigy of Ravan.

The celebration being with the formal work of Senapati-Boriba (selection of Senapati) in the Mandap of the Royal Palace. The marching of the King, the Senapati and the courtiers riding on the horseback and elephant accompanied with the nobles, the Pena players, the maibas, the maibis and the band men towards the Kwak sang* is known as Kwak-Jatra. Sword and spear bearer in traditional dress marched towards where the ceremony is scheduled to take place.

Ukai kappa is a Meetei customary festival which is usually celebrated to prognosticate the fortune and misfortunes that may befall in the year. Another mythical belief of this rite is that the king is made known with his rivals and his coming back with flying colours. 

* Kwak means crow, sang means a hut.
Baruni

Baruni is celebrated on the thirteenth day of the dark hark of phairen (Jan./Feb.). Baruni is devoted to the worshiping of Siva and is associated with the ritual taking of bath. Baruni in its present form is introduced by king Chandrakriti. The shrine of Siva was constructed on the order of this King by one Yumnam Keirungha.

The main features of the Baruni festival is the worship of the phallic aspect of Siva at the Nongmaijing hill summit. The mountain is climbed during the night by the northward route and descended the following day on the opposite side. The customary rite of bathing in the Ganges is fulfilled by dipping in the Chinggoi stream prior to climbing the mountain.

The sacredness of the Nongmaijing hill have a significant association with the divine couple Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi, A part of the process of Hinduisation the Siva shrine was built with the object of transferring worship from the Meetei lai to Siva and Durga or of identifying the two pairs of dieteis.68

Lai Keithel Kaba

The ceremonial rite of Lai Keithel Kaba is observed on the 20th day of the month Lamda (Feb./Mar.) at the Yathokpham (exit of Pakhangba within the area controlled by Khwai Nongjena Piba). R.K. Heereina
opined, *Lai Keithel Kaba* as ‘to observe the rite relating to marketing by female goddesses’. The importance of this festival is that the food stuffs sold by the eight female deities were brought and cooked. Then the cooked food is arranged into eight *chakluks* (shares of food) representing the eight *pibas* of the eight Meetei clans. This rite is performed in bringing a peaceful co-existence between the gods-community and human-group and among individuals. This festival manifests as how to exist in co-operating by forgetting the pride, variety and selfishness among themselves.

During the reign of King Bhagyachandra, his uncle *Nongpok Leiri Khomba* (Ananta Sai) began to celebrate the original rite of *Lai Keithel Kaba* at the holy ground of Bijoy Govinda temple by adding Holi and *Halankar* of Vaishnavism. *Lai Keithel Kaba* is no more seen. It is replaced by the Hindu *Halankar* festival. 69

C. Festivals relating to the Rites and Rituals of Meetei Vaishnava:

The rite and ritual pertaining the Meetei society were adopted and incorporated as “Meetei Hindu ritual”. The Hindu rituals over the Meetei beliefs retained its traditional faith. E.B. Tylor opines that “rite and ritual is a set or series of acts usually involving religion, with the sequences establish by tradition”. 70 Rites is a custom or practice of a formal kind whereas a ritual is pertaining or relating to and connected with rites. It is

69. Dhiren Koijam- Festival of Manipur – Manipur past and present Vot II, Ed. Sanajaoba. N., P-246-247
70. Taylor E.B. - Dictionary of Anthropology. P-460
prescribed order of performing religious or other devotional service.\textsuperscript{71} the religious rites amongst the Hindus derive their authority from the Vedas and other religious treatise from ancient times.

The Brahmins formed an important role in the performing of Meetei Hindus rites and rituals. The presence of Brahmins on ritual days of birth, marriage, deaths, feasts and laying of foundation stone are extremely crucial. It was even considered that on such ritual occasions "without the Brahmins presence all would not be well".\textsuperscript{72} The Brahmins settled in almost all the Mohallas of the valley with a temple and a mandap controlled the religious life of the people. The mandap in the Meetei Leikais became the centre of Vaishnava socio-cultural life.

**Rituals of Meetei House construction:**

The resident house for the Meetei Yumjao is the abode of the Lais(Gods). Every stage of the house construction is marked by the prescribed rituals, auspicious days and dates. There should be prescribed directions for the whole structure and the rooms. Jatra Hunba is the ceremony to lay the foundation pillar, Jatra, on the auspicious day. The construction of the house starts after the Jatra is erected.

The whole house consists of six parts. Maangol (verandha),

\textsuperscript{71} Kar Sholapur G.R.- opcit., P-13
\textsuperscript{72} Allen B.C.- Gazettes of NagaHills and Manipur, P-123
Nigolka on the left (room for women), Leimaren or Yumjao Lairembi ka (room for house holds goddess), Thoubunka (room for young children), Chakhumka (room for kitchen) and Laplelka on the right (room for the head of the family). The centre of the house is the place for phunga apokpa (the fire deity).

Tulasi plant (holy basil) is planted in front of the house, which is worshipped by Hindu Meetei women every morning and evening. Some meetei scholar opine the structure of the Meetei house with the womb of a woman where Phunga Apokpa is likened to the naval of the mother.\textsuperscript{73}

\textbf{Birth rituals:}

When a woman perceives labour pain, she is confined to chabok sang (room for child delivery). A Brahmin has to cleanse her twice once in third month and another in the fifth month. Swasthi puja is performed after the sixth day of the birth of the child. An earthen pot is placed on which the symbol of Lord Ganesha, the Swastika, is drawn. Swasthi puja means praying for the well being of the child. A Brahmin is called to perform the ritual. He chants prayers in Sanskrit seeking blessings from the various Hindu gods.\textsuperscript{74} Giving Dan (offering money) is the special feature of Swasti Puja.

\textsuperscript{73} Brara Vijalakshmi. N- Polics, Society and cosmology in India’s North East. P-157-158
\textsuperscript{74} Brara Vijalakshmi. N - opcit, P-159
Karnabhed ceremony is performed when the child reaches the age of two to three years. Accordingly, the child is shaved and is made to stand under a cotton cloth held by four people. Sacred water is poured from above the cloth, which filtered down on the child, as a mark of ritual bathing. The child's ear is pierced and a gold ear ring was inserted. The earring symbolized the stage in which the child is and is not supposed to be taken out till marriage.75

Marriage rituals:

A Meetei Hindu marriage is conducted in the courtyard. The ceremony starts with the reciting of mantras in Sanskrit by the Brahmin priest. While chanting mantras, he starts reciting both their genealogies. The bride goes around the groom seven times showering flowers on the groom with folded hands. Before the actual ceremony of the marriage, there are various stages which have to be completed.

These are Hainaba (initial proposal offered by the parents of the boy to the girl's family), Yathang Ithanaba (official announcement of the marriage), Waroipot puba (contract finalizing) and Heijingpot. Heijingpot is the most important ceremonies, held only a few days before marriage. An offering of fruits Heikru and Heining, Laiphanek and Laiphi is the special feature of it.

75. ibid., P-160
Mangani Chakouba is a ceremonial feast given by the girl’s family on the sixth day of her marriage. The girl is officially declared married among the relatives of the girl. Singing of Sankritan in the marriage ceremony is the major part.

Death ritual ceremonies:

The ritual ceremony of a Meetei Hindu Vaishnava includes Asti-Sancaya, Sradha ceremony, Thagi Utsav and annual utsav (phiroi).

Asti-Sancaya is performed on the sixth day after the death of a person. A Sankritan party dominates the scene. The Brahmin chants the relevant mantras and read out portions from the Bhagavat purana. The asthi (bone) and the ashes as collected are put in a silk cloth. It is to be taken to the Hindu holy places- Nabadweep, Vrindava, puri and Haridwar for immersion after the Shradha ceremony is completed.

Shardha ceremony is performed on the thirteenth day of the deceased person. In case of Sannyasi, the Shardha ceremony is performed on the fourteenth day.

Shardha ceremony requires many Brahmins. Mandap Mapu (president of the ceremony) is the chief priest. The whole Sagei is subject to dietary restrictions until the Shradha finished. Singing of Sankritan form the essential feature of the whole Shrahda ceremony.

Thagi Utsav is arranged on the day of the death every month. A feast is organized on the particular day. All the maibas are specially invited on all the twelve feasts. In the phiroy (annual ceremony of the death) ceremony a devotional Kirtan, offering of a Chatra (flag) and a brick tomb over the grave are the obligatory duties towards the death. Feeding the Brahmans, Vaishnavas and the guests in the fortnight of Langban (Aug./Sep) in also a part of the cult of the death. There is a regular flow of pilgrims from Manipur to Nadia, Puri and Vindravana. The Hindu Manipuris maintain their contact with these sacred Trithas.

There are minor festivals which are celebrated in particular localities with religious activities throughout the year. The birth and death anniversaries of Chaitanya, Nityananda, Gosvamis of Vindravana and the Narottan thakura are celebrated in due solemnity. The Meetei Vaisnavas also commemorate the birth and death anniversaries of the great Vaishnava of Manipur with a good of festivals and honour. The Hindu festivals have not been accepted into Manipur without modification. The comprehensive changes tend to maintain and revive the tradition, in respect of organization, socio-cultural institutions and traditional values Hindu festivals have been enriched and modified by indigenous elements, rites and customs co-operation among the members of the society is desirable.

Every individual is supposed to participate in social works, religious ceremonial. "The ceremonial behaviour is value of a cultured gentleman"\textsuperscript{78} the social and religious feasts organized by the Meetei Hindus at the village \textit{mandaps} and at their courtyard accord a good hospitality. The structure of the society changes. The ideal king and the noble priests enjoyed the guardian of the people. The Meetei Hindus are particular about their status and position in the society and in related ceremonies. The cultural activities regulated the proliferation of the vaishnava ideology among the Meeteis. The Meeteis Hindus abstained from liquor and other intoxicating drinks. Women are given equal status with men at every religious festivals and ceremonies.

From the above study we come to know that practicing Hindu religious festivals and observing Hindu religious ceremonies in a Hindu devotee has brought about special changes in the daily ritual of a vaishnava. The daily observance of an average vaishnava householder is much the same as the celibate life of a monk. An initiated vaishnava should be a performer of certain religious duties during a day which is divided of time into three main parts and was strictly followed by every Manipuree vaishnava. A vaishnava devotee wakes up before day break with the name of Krishna or Radha in his or her lips. Then he bows down to \textit{Sanamahi} and the tulsi plant. After attending to the calls of nature and

\textsuperscript{78} Shyamkishore. Observation on the value system of the traditional Meetei society- Manipur past and present Vol II. Ed. Sanajaoba .N. p-136-139
cleansing himself with earth and water, he cleanses the teeth using a small bamboo stick as a tooth brush and when the brushing was over, he splits it into two and utilizes it as a tongue cleaner. Some used salt and ash as tooth powder and right index finger as the brush. Then he goes to a near by tank or pond or river for his morning bath and he gets into the water with his night clothes. The head is rubbed with chinghi, boiled scented rice water used as shampoo. During his taking bathed he worshipped the sun and river Ganges. The initiated person arranges and untied his long tult hair (sikha). After the bath he comes back to the house with a pot containing water. He changes his clothes with fresh muga (silken) clothes and applied the sacred Gaudiya mark (tilaka) of sandal paste on his fore head and at various parts of his body. For old men, women and widows people they used black clay from Radha kunda as chandan. He does the achamana (sipping of water from the palm, makes offering of flower to the deity and the tulsi plant) and he reads verses from the Gita, Gopalsrasanam etc., then he takes his break fast.

The shaving of the beards, cutting of hair and nails are done on Monday and Wednesday only. There is an avoidance of shaving and cutting nails on one’s birth day for the devotees.