Chapter – 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction to Meiteiron

Manipur, since early times has been the meeting ground of many different ethnic groups who came and contributed to the growth of the civilization in this hilly state in India’s North-Eastern frontier. Manipur being a gateway of India to South East-Asia was influenced by her geographical location and ecology in the development and shaping of her history and culture. Manipur’s population has three major ethnic groups: the Meiteis of the valley, the Nagas and Kuki of the surrounding hills.

G.A.Grierson (1973) in his monumental linguistics survey of India has grouped the Meiteiron in the kuki-chin subfamily of the Tibeto-Burman language in the Sino-Tibetan family. Meiteiron is the official language of Manipur. It is the main language of communication among all different types of people inhabiting in Manipur. Meiteiron has been recognized as the Manipuri language by the Indian union and has been included in the list of scheduled
languages; it was included in the 8th scheduled by the 71st amendment of the constitution in 1992. This is the only Tibeto-Burman language in the Indian subcontinent included in the 8th scheduled of the Indian constitution. Its glossonym is Meiteilon/Meiteiron, which etymologically means, the language of the Meitei. But for some time now, it has been known as Manipuri. Commonly the text is written in the Bengali Script. The original script, called Meitei-Mayek, has been out of used for a long time but the process of revival is going on in recently times. The script and language is taught in the schools and colleges at this time in Manipur and it has been implemented with an aim to replace the Bengali script completely within few years.

According to R.A Shafer (1955, 1965), Meiteiron belongs to the Meitei branch of kukish section under Burmic division. Paul K.Benedict (1972) classified it as being included in Kuki Naga (kukish section). Meiteiron is the lingua-franca among the 29 dialects of the state. Meiteiron spoken in the valley districts are regarded as standard and it is also spoken in the nine (9) districts of Manipur. Meiteiron has been internationally recognized since 1762 A.D (in the treaty between Gourashyam, the king of Mackly and East India Company), in Rennel’s map (1762) and in Walter Helmiton’s report on Manipur, (1820) (B.Kulachandra). Its official status is also noted by Grierson (1904). During British
Paramountcy it remained as the official language. Its official status was not affected by Manipur’s annexation to British Empire (1891) and to Indian Union (1949). It is the court language right from the days of Kuchu (since the time of Pakhangba’s in 33 A.D.) till present day law courts. In fact Meiteiron has proven to be a large integrating factor among all ethnic groups in Manipur who use it to communicate among themselves.

The Language has been recognized by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, as the language of AIR (All India Radio), Imphal with coverage of 78% of their programme in this language. Meiteiron is the medium of instruction in the high and higher secondary school of Manipur. It has been recognized by CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education), Board of Secondary Education Assam, Guwahati University, Dibrugarh University, Calcutta University, and Delhi University (1978). There is a provision for offering Meiteiron as a second language as well as an alternative subject. Manipur University offers M.A., M.Phil programme in Meiteiron. Sahitya Academy of India recognizes Meiteiron as one of the major Indian languages since 1970. All the proceedings of inter–Tribal meeting and missionary organizations are made in Meiteiron (village authorities in hill area: Act 1956).

1.2. Speech community
The term speech community is widely used by sociolinguistics to refer to a community based on language. **Speech community** is a concept in sociolinguistics that describes a more or less discrete group of people who use language in a unique and mutually accepted way among themselves. Speech communities can be members of a profession with a specialized jargon, distinct social groups like high school students or hip hop fans (see also African American Vernacular English), or even tight-knit groups like families and friends. In addition, online and other mediated communities, such as many internet forums, often constitute speech communities. Members of speech communities will often develop slang or jargon to serve the group's special purposes and priorities. When a group of people speak the same language, and who share norms about the appropriate use of the language, they are said to be in the same speech community. Bloomfield’s concept of speech community is a group of people who interact by means of speech’.

All the so called higher activities of man spring from the close adjustment among individuals which we call society, and this adjustment intern, is based upon language; the speech community, therefore is the most important kinds of social group. John Lyons (1970) gives the simples definition of speech community thus; “**speech community: all the people who use a language or dialect**”.
According to this definition, speech communities overlap and need not have any social or cultural unity. But according to Charles Hockett’s (1958) definition: each language defines a speech community: the whole set of people who communicate with each other, either directly or indirectly via the common language. Here with the definition, the criterion of the communication within the community is added, it shows that two communities both speaking the same language but having no contact with each other at all, would count as different speech communities. ‘Language is both an individual procession and a social possession’ (Wardhaugh 1998). We all assume that certain individuals speak in much the same way (whether it is at the level of language or the level of dialect or some other sort of variety). But the social group also tends to speak in the same way and form what we called ‘speech communities’. As John Gumperz (1962) has given: we will define (linguistic community) as a social group which may be either monolingual or multilingual, held together by frequency of social interaction patterns and set off from the surrounding area by weakness in the lines of communication.

Later, Gumperz (1968) express that there should be some specific linguistic difference between the member of the speech community and those outside it, he writes thus,
“The speech community: any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction by means of a shared body of verbal and set off from similar aggregate by significant differences in language use”. A speech community is ‘held together by frequency of social interaction patterns and set off from the surrounding areas by weaknesses in the lines of communication’.

Gumperz’s 1982 revision expresses ideas shared with those of Hymes and Labov:

“A speech community is defined in functionalist terms as a system of organized diversity held together by common norms and aspirations......Members of such community typically vary with respect to certain beliefs and other aspects of behavior. Such variation, which seems irregular when observed at the level of the individual, nonetheless shows systematic regularities at the statistical level of social facts”
This definition sympathetically assimilates Lavovs’ work into a broader social framework. On the other hand a different definition is given by Willian Labov (1972), here he gave more emphasis on shared attitudes and knowledge rather than on shared linguistic behavior.

“The speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms; these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluation behavior, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage”

Willam Labov’s speech community conception has been enormously influential. It emerges in the course of a well defined program of research on language structure and change, rather than in the context of sociolinguistic theorizing. Labov’s definition was to posit both shared norms and linguistic uniformity (as structured variation), in that order, as criteria for identifying a speech community. He breaks cleanly with classical definitions that endowed a group of speakers with social coherence, warning sociolinguists to avoid any error which would arise in assuming that a group of people who speak alike is a fundamental unit of
social behavior, on the grounds that “asking about the language characteristics of a social group......... seems more fundamental and more closely tied to the genesis of linguistic differentiation” (1966). Romaine (1994) opined that "A speech community is a group of people who do not necessarily share the same language, but share a set of norms and rules for the use of language. The boundaries between speech communities are essentially social rather than linguistic... A speech community is not necessarily co-extensive with a language community."

The principal concepts of speech community have received reactions and modification of two broad types: variation on a theme, intended to refine (usually broaden) a speech community model; and general rejection of their applicability, on various grounds. An important trend among the later is the rise of radical subjective approaches, influenced by the work of Robert Le page 1985, especially his ‘acts of identity’ model. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) are interested in understanding how “individual ........ can be considered members of linguistics communities”. Saville-Troike (1996) stresses the importance for individuals ‘to identify themselves with various others to constitute a speech community at the same time as one may belong to various other groups’ which may be quite independent of each other (e.g a Sydney resident of Italian descent who speaks Calabrian with family members and English in work situations or either
Calabrian/Italian or Italian/English in social interaction). Duranti (1997) recommends abandoning the speech community as "an already constituted object of inquiry", and instead taking it as "a point of view of analysis". He defines it as "the product of the communicative activities engaged in by a given group of people".

Moreover the word ‘community’ implies more than the existence of some common property; after all, nobody would talk of the ‘community of all the people whose name begins with for example the letter ‘H’. To qualify as a ‘community’ a set of people presumably needs to be distinguished from the rest of the world by more than one property, and some of these properties have to be important from the point of view of the member’s social lives. An individual who speak the same language, dialect or variety will also tend to bond together and therefore will experience a sense of ‘community’ or ‘solidarity’ just as the lack of a similar language, dialect or variety will result in exclusion from certain communities. Speech communities might also form when certain professional groups get together and speak using the register or jargon of their fields of employment. In this way the term speech communities might incorporate community of practice which is “an aggregate of people who come together around some enterprise” (Eckert 2000 after Lave & Wenger 1998). Thus the common denominator of a speech community may be a language (English versus Italian),
a dialect (Standard English versus Aboriginal English), a variety (Standard versus non standard Australian English) or a register (spoken by doctors or engineers).

1.3. CULTURE

Culture is described as ‘the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievements regarded collectively, and the customs, institutions and achievements of a particular nation, people or group’ (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 2002). Of the British poet, Thomas Eliot noted that culture is an original way of thinking, perception and conduct inherent in either individuals or social groups. A spiritual approach to culture had been subscribed by German sociologist R. Demoll: ‘Culture is a striving for development and perfection of all spiritual abilities; it is the loftiest cult of soul; it is the service to god in us. This collective cultural relationship between members of any given nation and community reflects their unique social norms, cognition and value system and uses ‘a peculiar language as its means of expression’ (Newmark, 1988). The hypothesis of Linguistic Determinism by linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956) further yields that language determines how an individual thinks as it is attached to one’s cultural values. The hypothesis maintains that ‘language itself shapes a man’s basic ideas’ (Myers, 2005). This supports Kennedy’s (2001) argument that ‘by spreading your language, you spread with it your culture and your beliefs and increases your
influence among the users’. Culture is whatever a person knows in order to function in a particular society. Of society’s culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believed in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its member, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves.’ Culture taken in its wide ethnographic sense is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by men as a member of society. The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind is so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action (Tylor,1871). Thus the term culture refers to the learned, socially acquired traditions of thought and behavior found in human society. Most anthropologists today would accept a broad conception of culture as a shared way of life that includes values, beliefs and norms transmitted within a particular society from generation to generation. Since society was said to be the patterns of relationships among people within a specific territory, and culture was viewed as the byproducts of those relationships.

According to Schneider 1976, Culture is defined as a system of symbols and meaning, a historically transmitted body of definition, premises, statements, postulates and perception about the nature of the universe and human’s place in it. The unique
capacity for culture in the human species depends on learning. We do not inherit our culture through our genes in the way we inherit our physical characteristics. Instead we obtained our culture through the process of enculturation. Enculturation is the process of social interaction through which people learn and acquire culture. Culture consists of the shared practices and understanding within a society. To some degree culture is based on shared meanings that are to some extent ‘public’ and thus beyond the mind of any individuals (Geertz, 1973). Culture exists before the birth of an individual into the society, and it will continue (in some forms) beyond the death of any particular individual. Culture has been called- the way of life for the entire society. As such it includes manners, dress, language, rituals, norms of behavior such as law and morality. Culture is what brings us together as human being, as social creatures. Culture is nevertheless the most important and most frequently mention concept because it embodies what it means to be human. There is general agreement that culture is learned; that it allows man to adopt himself to his natural and social setting; that it is greatly variable; that it is manifested in institution; thought pattern and material object. Culture is the man-made part of the environment. Culture includes all the elements in man’s mature endowment that he has acquired from his group by conscious learning or by a conditioning process - techniques of various kinds, social and other institution, beliefs
and patterned modes of conduct. Culture is a set of rules or standard shared by members of a society, which when acted upon by the members produce behavior that falls within a range of variation the member consider proper and acceptable. According to Cohn (1988) Culture plays a vital role in development and conversation of traditional society. Culture brings us together as human being, as social creature. The study of human society involves the study of culture.

According to Muller-Layer: Culture can be defined as “an aggregate means of achievement and progress”. Culture is the common denominator that makes the action of individual intelligent to other member of their society. It enables them to predict how others are not likely to behave in a given circumstance, and it tells them how to react accordingly. Anthropologists customarily imagine a culture as a well structured system made up of distinctive parts that function together as an organized whole. Culture is not material phenomena it does not consists of things, people, behaviors or emotions. It is rather and organization of these kind. It is the form of things that people have in mind their models of perceiving, relating and otherwise interpreting them. Culture is the ‘know-how’ that a person must possess to get through the task of daily living; only for a few does
it required a knowledge of some, or much, music, literature, and the arts.

1.3.1. CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

During the 1960s, linguists under the leadership of Noam Chomsky, began to distinguish between linguistic competence and linguistic performance. The former purview of “theoretical linguistic”, has to do with grammar and syntax; the later has to do with the actual speech in its utilitarian contexts. Performance, or “speech”, has been disdained by the theoretical linguists as the messy side of language, because it is determined by the seemingly limitless possibilities of personal and contextual situations. Nevertheless, investigation of speech spawned a number of research sub specialties both within linguistic and at the disciplinary borders between linguistics and folklore, anthropology and literature: discourse analysis, sociolinguistic, ethnography of speaking, text linguistic and several other, all engaged in recording language used in a multitude of different contexts from the worlds cultures, trying to discern a paradigm with which to discover the regularities of speech acts and thus to understand not only what is being said, but how it is spoken and, more important, side of language was also the more “human” in the sense that humans are more essentially social being and language does not exist apart from particular contextualized social interaction. Language is the
verbal expressions of culture. It is commonly accepted that language is a part of culture, and that it plays a very important role in it.

As such it is clearly known about the major language. English by expanding its borders of use has imposed its culture sometimes causing local culture and language to be undervalued and marginalized. This certainly is the case where English is used more often than local languages, where the education uses English literature rather than local educational literature in English and where local writers and artists write in English rather than in their mother tongues because they feel that it is the only way to get their art noticed. Only where a language is ‘rated as high in status by its users, and yet also regarded as a language of solidarity to be used between minority group members’ (Holmes, 1992) it is likely to survive and thus maintain its culture despite the domination or co-existence of the English language. This is further re-emphasized by Hofman (1977) who maintains that ‘Language makes a people and people without pride in its language is dispossessed in its national pride. Preserving one’s language is preserving one’s culture.’

Some social scientists considered that without language, culture would not be possible. Languages simultaneously reflect culture and is influenced and shaped by it. In the broadest senses, it
is also the symbolic representation of a people, since it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds, as well as their approach to life and their way of living and thinking. Brown (1994) described the two as follows: ‘A Language is a part of a culture and culture is a part of a language, they are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture’. ‘In a word, culture and language are inseparable’. Some people says that language is the mirror of culture, in the sense that people can see a culture through its language.

A Linguist Nada (1998) holds the view that ‘Language and culture are two symbolic systems. Everything we say in language has meaning, designative or associative, denotative or connotative. Every language form we used has meaning, carries meaning that are not in the same sense because it is associated with culture and culture is more extensive than language. A culture’s language contains everything its speaker can think about and every way they have of thinking about things. For example, the Latin language has no words for female friend of a man (the feminine form of amicus is amice, which means mistress, not friend) because the Roman culture could not imagine a male and a female being equal, which they considered necessary for friendship. It is through language that people in every society are able to share our experience, concern and beliefs, over past and in the present and to
communicate these to the next generation. Language make communication of infinite meaning possible by employing a few sounds and gestures that, when put together according to certain rules, results in meaning that are intelligible to all speakers. Languages are spoken by people, who are members of societies, which have their own distinctive cultures. Social variable, such as class, gender and status of the speaker, will influence people’s use of language. Moreover, people communicate what is meaningful to them, and what is or is not meaningful is defined by their particular culture. The human capacity for culture is based on our linguistics and cognitive ability to symbolize. Culture is transmitted from generation to generation through symbolic learning and language. One long standing claim concerning the relation between language and culture is that the structure of a language determines the way in which speakers of that language view the world. The second claim is that the culture of the people finds reflection in the language they employ: because they value certain things and do them in a certain ways, they come to use their language in ways that reflect what they value and what they do. In this view, cultural requirements do not determine the structure of a language – the claim is never that strong – they certainly influence how a language is used and perhaps determine why specific bits and pieces are the way they are. As the linguists Sapir-Whorf hypothesis assumes that a close relationship exists between
language and culture and that language defines experiences for us. Human have filtering devices. Sapir (1929) acknowledged the close relationship between language and culture, maintaining that they were inextricably related so that you could not understand or appreciate the one without the knowledge of the other as he had clearly summarizes his view in the following passage:

*Human beings do not live in the objective world alone or alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means for solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habit of the group. We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.*

In this view, language, in effect, provides with a special pair of glass that heighten certain perception and dim others, determining what we perceive as reality. Language consists of whatever one
has to know in order to communicate with its speaker as adequately as they do with each other and in a manner they will accept as corresponding to their own. In this sense, a society’s language is an aspect of its culture. Language is the only one aspect of culture. Like culture it can be understood by looking either differences or at human similarities. All cultures, in spite of their great differences from each other in particular features, show a general resemblance in what might be called “ground plan of culture.”

Chomsky wrote that “language was the mirror of the mind,” and the best way to understand fundamental human structure was to understand language. The relation between language and culture is deeply rooted. Language is used to maintain and convey culture and cultural ties. Different ideas stem from differing language use within one’s culture and the whole intertwining of these relationships start at one’s birth. A unique capacity for culture in the human species depends on learning. We do not inherit our culture through our genes in the way we inherit our physical characteristic. Instead we obtained our culture through the process of enculturation. Enculturation is the process of social interaction through which people learn and acquire their culture. Most Anthropologists today would accept a board conception of
culture as a shared way of life that includes values, beliefs and norms transmitted within a particular society from generation to generation. Boas: always stressed the equal worth of all culture and languages, and argued that there was no such thing as primitive language, but all language was capable of expressing the same content albeit by widely differing meaning. Language must be studied in its correct social perspective, as the most flexible and potentially subtle kind of human communicative behavior; it is capable of communicating message of different kind and of different degrees of detail more successfully than any set of behavioral convention. Language is the only medium through which human interpret, express and transmit culture. Language allows individuals within and across generation to replicate activities and maintain social change. And as people invent new patterns of social activities, they invent corresponding rules to fit the new practices. These rules are stored in the brain and passed on through language. Language is always found within a social and cultural context and studying language use can provide clues about structural and super structural patterns within culture. According to Leslie A. White, anthropologists

“The important symbolic aspect of culture is language – the substitution of words for objects.”
Through language human are able to transmit culture from one generation to another. In particular language makes it possible to learn from cumulative, shared experience without it, one could not inform others about events to which the others were not a party’.

Language can influence culture in a variety of ways. It can influence the way a community perceives the world and can create community through the use of varying language and dialect in different areas. It can both influence the way a society interacts with the world, and create a cultural identities can be created by the language that is used and entire societies may defined themselves based on language and dialect they speak. The lexicon of the language holds as if it were a mirror of the rest of the culture. Language is one trait of culture that is subject to cultural diffusion; not only can one language borrow words from others but, within certain limits. Language contact can affect deeper structural levels of phonological and grammatical system. We must begin with the assumption that human culture is driven by functional requirement for culture. It does not describe or refer to anything directly, but rather it represents various aspect of reality. Language is fundamental to the organization of a society or a group as it is to the expression of its culture, for language is
primarily social. Language is the central media in the process of socialization whereby people are constituted as an individual and a social subject.

The most important aspect of culture is language- using words to represents objects and ideas. Without our capacity for complex language, human culture as we know it could not exist. Languages are shared by people who belong to societies that have their own distinctive culture. Social variables, such as age, gender and economic status may influence how people use language. The relationship between language and culture is an exceedingly complicated one. In the first place, language can be said to be a result of culture: the language which is spoken by one population is a reflection of the total culture of the population. But one can also say that language is a part of culture. It is one of those things which make up a culture. Language can also be said to be a condition of culture. We learn much of a culture when we learn the system of meaning for which its linguistics forms stands. Language can be said to be a condition of culture because the material out of which language is built is of the same type as the material out of which culture is built: logical relation, opposition, correlation, and the like. Language, from this point of view, may appear as laying a kind of foundation for the more complex structure which corresponds to the different aspect of culture.
1.3.2. CULTURE AND RELIGION

Any culture is a combination of religious beliefs and traditional practice. Culture is a complex phenomenon, a sum total of behavior and beliefs of a society. As Admen (1987) states that, “A language reflects and reinforces the value and belief system that form such a large part of the subjective reality shared by members of the same culture”. Religion and other belief systems are often integral to a culture. Religion influenced ethics and morality in everyday life. Religion impacts culture by questioning, reasoning and providing alternatives solutions to the popular ways our society function. Religion is in most societies, a powerful emblem of cultural identity, as well as a blueprint for ethical conduct. Religion appears to be a cultural universal, although specific beliefs and practices vary significantly from one society to another. For example, some religions are based on the worship of an all-knowing, all-powerful supreme being, whereas others have many deities, and some have no deities at all. Human learn their religious traditions through the process of enculturation. Religious convictions are therefore shaped by the historical and social situation in which a person lives.

Greets, therefore sees religion as essentially a cultural system that gives meaning and direction to human existence. For him, religious beliefs provide meaning by way of offering
anomalous want and experiences and for the incongruent between things as they are and they ought to be, thus according to him, religion contributes to integration and stability by way of providing meaning. (Sublakhnta Behera, 2001).

Hantrais (1989) puts forth the idea that culture is the beliefs and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language is the vehicle of expression.

To be born into culture is to inherit a religion; to change religion is to change culture, to change lifestyle and identity, to be adopted by the culture whose religion one adopts. Culture is a complex phenomenon, it is the sum total of behavior and belief of a society. Therefore, everyone’s views are dependent on culture which has influenced them, as well as being described using the language which has been shaped by culture. The understanding of a culture and its people can be enhanced by the knowledge of their language. A common socio-cultural background facilitates the social cohesion and language. Through the transmission of culture, we learn how to subsist, how to socialize, how to govern our society, and what god to worship. Culture is the historical accumulation of symbolic knowledge that is shared by a society. Culture exists before the birth of an individual into the society, and it will continue beyond the death of any particular individual. Since religious beliefs usually relates to the existence, nature and
worship of a deity or deities and involvement in the universe and human life. The term ‘religion’ refers to both the personal practices related to communal faith and to group rituals and communication stemming from shared conviction. Whenever there is religion or spirituality there is ceremony or ritual, as varied as the many expressions they encompass. Oftentimes, in practices, we forget the intent of a language behind the rituals. Ceremony and rituals gives us pathways through which we can give better picture of our culture and speech community through manifestation of the language use in the ceremonies and rituals. There are rituals to mourn the dead, to celebrate rites of passages, to anoint the new born, to celebrate marriage etc and how far its beliefs and practices are manifested in a speech community.

Culture plays a vital role in development and conservation of traditional society (Cohn, 1988). Clearly, the diversity of religions in the world has been a fact throughout the entire history of all the world's major living religious traditions.

1.4. **Religious Beliefs and Practices**

Religion plays one of an important role in the formation of a society. This leads to the development of human race through
moral realization. Thus, religion appears to be an essential ingredient of society. Religious belief usually relates to the existence, nature and worship of a deity or deities and divine involvement in the universe and human life. Alternatively, it may also relate to values and practices transmitted by a spiritual leader. Unlike other belief systems, which may be passed on orally, religious belief tends to be codified in literate societies (religion in non-literate societies is still largely passed on orally). In some religions, like the Brahmanic religion, it is held that most of the core beliefs have been divinely revealed. Religious belief can also involved causes, principles or activities believed with zeal or conscientious devotion concerning points or matters of ethics or conscience, not necessarily limited to organized religions.

Religious practice may vary from one culture to another but the basic beliefs are indisputably to be similar. Religion involves beliefs, rituals and emotion that often contribute to social coherence especially simpler societies. Religious beliefs may be justified in myths and expressed in a variety of rituals such as sacrifices, rites of passage and ritual of propitiation. According to Max Mullar religion is in capable of definition; it is the meeting point between the ancient and the modern, the young and the old, the civilized and the uncivilized. Religion is almost coeval with human creation. In the beginning man worship objects of wonder that were within his reach; than such objects as could only be
partly seen or handled; later still, such object as could only be seen, but not be reached. Thus came in order, small stones, rivers and mountains and lastly the sun and the moon. The worship of several objects was based on the belief of a divine force inherent in them. Religion has function as a source of solidarity throughout history. Machiawelli called religion ‘the most necessary and assured support of any civil society’. It is looked upon as one of the most important means of social control which binds society and which helps its member to inculcate the norms and values necessary to be accepted as a worthy member of society. According to Emile Durkheim ‘all known religious beliefs and practices, whether simple or complex, present one common

characteristic they presuppose a classification of things, real and ideal of which man think into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words profane and sacred.

The word religion comes from the Latin 're-ligare' [literally to 'tie again', 're-tie', 'bind'] which originally designated "a power outside man obligating him to certain behavior under pain of threatened awesome retribution, a kind of taboo, or the feeling in man vis-à-vis such powers." Equivalent terms in other cultures derive from very different ideas. In Sanskrit, dharma (often
nowadays used to translate "religion") refers to duties, including
etiquette, morality, ritual, caste obligations, and law; in Buddhism it evolved to refer to the Buddha's teachings. The Arabic din was similar, referring to "usages, accustoms, standard behavior," even "conformity, propriety, obedience "Classical meaning religion". Anthropologists are of the opinion that religion, in the sense of a belief in spirits or higher powers of some kind, is a universal phenomenon. Through different religions have been preached, propagated, but religion has never been an issue of conflict among the people belonging to different religious communities.

A religion is a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a supernatural agency or agencies, usually involving
devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs. Aspects of religion include narratives, symbolisms, beliefs, and practices that are supposed to give meaning to the practitioner's experiences of life. Whether the meaning centers on a deity or deities, or an ultimate truth, religion is commonly identified by the practitioner's prayer, ritual, meditation, music and art, among other things, and is often interwoven with society and politics. It may focus on specific supernatural, metaphysical, and moral claims about reality (the cosmos and human nature) which may yield a set of religious
laws, ethics, and a particular lifestyle. Religion also encompasses ancestral or cultural traditions, writings, history, and mythology, as well as personal faith and religious experience.

The term "religion" refers to both the personal practices related to communal faith and to group rituals and communication stemming from shared conviction. "Religion" is sometimes used interchangeably with "faith" or "belief system," but it is more socially defined than personal convictions, and it entails specific behaviors, respectively.

Religion is often described as a communal system for the coherence of belief focusing on a system of thought, unseen being, person, or object, that is considered to be supernatural, sacred, divine, or of the highest truth. Moral codes, practices, values, institutions, tradition, rituals, and scriptures are often traditionally associated with the core belief, and these may have some overlap with concepts in secular philosophy. Religion is also often described as a "way of life" or a life stance.

1.5. Meitei Community and its Religion

Manipuri religion propounds the universal concept of equality of mankind that all human are made on the image of God. Although common Manipuri thought is identified with Hinduism. The
fact is that Hinduism practiced in Manipur consequently became a peculiarly Manipuri Hinduism in form, adopting the olden culture and by modifying it. Early Manipuris were devotees of Supreme Almighty God *Lainingthou Sanamahi* following the *Laining-Lichat* ‘beliefs and practices’ of Godly ancestors. The religious life of the people, even when they have come much under the influence of Hinduism, retains many characteristics inherited from their prehistoric ancestors. The essentials of this religion remain recognizable to the present day.

Nowadays it is clearly found that there are two main types of Manipuris-

(i) Manipuri Hindus: Manipuris adopting Hinduism, worshipping Hindu deities along with the traditional Gods like *Sanamahi*, *Pakhangba* and *Leimaren*.

(ii) Indigenous Manipuris: Manipuris devoted to Supreme Almighty God *Lainingthou* following the *Laining-Lichat* ‘beliefs and practices’ of forefathers.

Meitei community is a heterogeneous community consisting of Meitei with its seven exogamous clans, Meitei Brahmins, Manipuri-Muslims/Meitei-pangals. The reign of king Kyamba in the 15th century, was an important landmark in the history of Hinduism in Manipur. During this period, of king Kyamba in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was a landmark in the history of Hinduism in Manipur. During this period the king entrusted the
Brahmins (migrated from other parts of India) to worship the idol of Lord Vishnu the supreme God of Hindus. The royal chronicles record that the idol of lord Vishnu was presented to the king by the Pong king. Despite the beginning of Vishnu worship by Brahmins, perhaps patronized by the king himself, there is no evidence to show that the king was converted to Hinduism. He was the follower of the traditional Meitei religion (Gangumei 1991). However Kings with the assertion of the Brahmins also controlled the religious life of the Meiteis after the acceptance of Hinduism (1714 A.D.) during Garibaniwajs’ reign (1707-1748 A.D.). Hinduism came to Manipur without any infiltration to the old Meitei Culture and faith of the ancient time. We can see the two different faiths, the Hindu faith and the Meitei faith mingling and existing together. Thus, the Gouriya Hinduism which was accepted by many people in other parts of the eastern India did not reach to this land.

By the middle of the 18th century Neo-Hinduism with great force came and spread in this land during the reign of Garibniwaz (1709-1748). The king was initiated by Shantidas Gossai from Sylhet along with his subjects in Ramandi sect (the worshippers of Lord Ram). At the time of king Jai singh popularly known as Rajshri Bhagyachandra, the king and his subject became ardent followers of Gouriya Vaisnsvism. Since then the worship of
Radha-Krishna began to dominate the Meitei religious life. The zenith of Hindu Vishnavite glory was attained during the reign of Bhagyachandra (1759-1798), the grandson of Garbniwaz. He carved the image of shri shri Govinda, shri shri Nitainanda, Bijoy Govinda, Nityainanda (Imphal), Shri Shri Bijoy Govinda (Imphal), Shri Shri Abdeitya (Lamangdong), Shri Shri Gopinath (Ningthoukhong), Bangshibodon (Khangabok), Shri Shri Krishnachandra (Kakching), etc. were inaugurated and the Vaisnav cult and culture have been the main religious practices of the Meiteis. The philosophy of the Bhagavad Geeta is strictly followed and the Bhakti marga is the only darshan on which the religious practices are based. The Mahabharta and the Ramayana are always sung and narrated in almost all religious ceremonies. They are performed and played in grand styles and introduced the classical dance form known as ‘Rasa’. He established Brahmasabha the highest authority on religious affairs and Wayen Lairik, a book containing the rules and regulation to be followed by an orthodox Meitei Hindu was also composed.

The period from the reign of king Garibaniwaz to that of Churachand was the period of Hinduisation. In this period traditional Gods and Goddesses were identified with those of Hindu pantheon. For instance Soraren was identified with Indra, panthoibi with durga, nongpok ningthou with shiva. During
Churachands reign Brahmasabha took up a number of oppressive measures in the name of Hindu orthodoxy. Poor people suffered from the inhuman act of the Brahmasabha. But many of the Meitei Hindus observed the rules of Hinduism superficially as a fashion. Most of them view Sanamahi the traditional God as part of their livelihood. The religion they followed was a blending of Meitei element and Hinduism (Brown, 1873). At present Hinduism is the official religion of the state.

1.6. Method of data Collection

The study is based on data collected from two important sources primary and secondary. The primary sources of data are collected from religious ceremonies related with the birth, marriage, death and ancestor worship practices of the Meitei community. The secondary source of data was based on information collected from relevant literary texts, audio-visual recordings of religious ceremonies like birth, marriage death and newspaper as well as printed invitation cards of the above ceremonies of both the Hindu faith and the Meitei faith. Conversation and discussion with the scholars was also one of the important sources of data.

The data are collected by participating and observing every ritual of the religious ceremonies of birth, marriage and death. While
observing the above rituals extensive notes are made. And the information collected is then verified by detail conversation with Brahmin, local priest (maiba) or a scholar well conversant in the field.

Since the study is of religious beliefs and practices in Meitei speech community, due importance is paid on the language use in the religious practices. The dominance of indigenous words in an indigenous ceremony and the influence of loanwords in the religious practices formed the primary focus of the study. Any other information are always verified with the religious authority of the two faiths- the Hindu faiths and the Meitei faiths. But still certain difficulty arises, while collecting data from the brahmin and the scholars of indigenous religion, because no one could expressed their view with authority.

The first chapter gives the indigenous flavor of the pure Meiteiron. The ancestor worship, one of the oldest way of traditional beliefs and practices of Meiteis highlights the uses of pure Meiteron without any influence from any other language family. While the second chapter primarily focused on the influence of loanwords and its impact on the Meiteiron or the language used on the religious practices. We try, as part of our study to find out the influence of Hinduism in the Meitei culture and the impact of the contact of the two cultures and its effect on the language of the Meitei community.
Interestingly, the impact of Hinduism was clearly found in the language use by the Meiteis as demonstrated by many compound words like *keina-katpa, mandop-khanba, prasadi-khunba* etc.

While analyzing the forth chapter on religious revivalism and its influence in the Meiteiron, in order to find the indigenous equivalent words in place of loan-words, early written literature specially based on religious ritual and ceremonies have been used as the secondary sources of information. For the religious ceremonies like birth, marriage and death self participation, observation and information collected note at every stage of the rituals is the best way of accurate method of collecting data.

### 1.7. Organization of Chapters

The thesis consists of five chapters dealing with the different aspect of “Religious Beliefs and Practices in Meitei speech community”.

The first chapter gives the introductive idea of Meitei language, its religion, general idea of speech community, and different aspect of the relation between cultures and languages and religious beliefs and practices.

The second chapter is “Ancestor Worship in Meiteiron” it deals with the religious practices before the advent of Hinduism. Ancestor worship in Meitei community includes worship of local deities, umang lais and household deities. In this chapter we discuss only the
household deities namely Sanamahi, clan ancestors and phunga apokpa. Since Meitei ancestor worship embodies the indigenous elements in terms of language, ways of beliefs and practices. Meitei ancestor worship clearly gives the pure identity of the Meitei in their ways of life and beliefs in god, which is not affected or influenced by any other religious beliefs and practices.

The third chapter is “The Impact of Hindu Faith on Meiteiron” it focuses on the religious beliefs and practices after the advent of Hinduism in the rites of passage- like birth, marriage and death ceremony. This chapter examines the borrowed religious terms (mostly from Bengali, Hindi and Sanskrit) that entered into Meiteiron. As the pioneers of Hinduism were Bengali speakers (Jhaljit, 1965), it is quite natural that loanwords have also been incorporated with the acceptance of Hinduism by the Meiteiron speakers. So, most of the loanwords takes the Bengali pronunciation, though their roots are traced to the mother language Sanskrit. It is natural for Meiteiron to adopt words from other language due to their contact with each other. Thus a particular focus is given on the phenomenon of the borrowing of the religious terms.

The forth chapter is “Linguistic Purism through Religious Revivalism” it deals with the religious movement in Manipur- the
changes it brought in the practices and language in the rites of passage, names etc. In this chapter we will discuss how Manipuri has been impacted primarily in the realm of vocabulary through religious revivalism. To enlarge its vocabulary Manipuri depends on its resources and linguistic purism. Sometimes it coins new words from native elements. The removal of Indo-Aryan origin words was part of a larger vocabulary maintenance, where all Indo-Aryan words are being targeted for eradication and replacement by pure Manipuri words. In the process they try to exploit or revive the extinct pure Manipuri words or to create new words based on the existing form or to translate the borrowed items to sound like Manipuri.

The final fifth chapter gives the Conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER- 2
ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN MEITEIRON

2.1. Background

The chapter deals with the practice of ancestor worship in Meitei speech community. Ancestor worship of Meitei speech