Chapter II

CULTURAL HISTORY OF MANIPUR

The historical evidence in regard to the nomenclature of Manipur dates as far back as the Mahabharata myth. Although the modern scholarship about the origin of the name of Manipur has attempted to disprove the Mahabharata myth yet majority of historians maintain that it is the same Manipur which has been invariably and exclusively mentioned in the Mahabharata. Perhaps, the earlier historians were aware of this fact that attempts were being made to prove that it is not the Manipur of Mahabharata.

"But it is mere nonsense to think that this golden land was recently given the name of Manipur in or about the 18th century. If one reads the Ramayana and Mahabharata thoroughly well he must admit that Vyas Dev called the said vast area Manipur."  

Manipur occupies its place in the remote north eastern corner of the geographical map of India. It is very difficult to ascertain the ancient boundaries of Manipur as the historians differ on this issue. Geographical evidences prove that Manipur lies between the latitudes 23.83° and 25.68°N and the longitudes 93.03°E and 94.78°E. Manipur has a rectangular shape surrounded by its lofty hills from all round and a green valley in the centre. Manipur occupies an area of 8000 sq. miles of which the valley covers 700 sq. miles.

The boundaries of Manipur inside the Indian territory skirt the States of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Assam. It also

1. K. Gopal Singh, 'Kangkipak Manipur Matte', 1972 (This is not the Manipur of Mahabharata), p. 2
entails the international boundary with Burma on the eastern side with the Kabo valley as the point of demarcation between Manipur and Burma. The high hills surrounding Manipur from all sides and adjoining it with the neighbouring States of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Assam join hands with the massive Himalayas in Arunachal Pradesh with slight discontinuation in the Brahmaputra valley. These hill ranges lying to the east of Meghalaya and the Assam plateau run mostly from the north east to the south west and make a convex towards India from Indo-Burma border. The same organic factors which influenced the Himalayan growth are also the determining factors behind the massive growth of these hills. The only significant depression between the conglomeration of hill ranges and the plateau is the valley of Manipur casting a spell of fascination to the onlooker with its ever green bounty of lustrous scenery. The size of the valley is 50 kms in length and 30 kms in width. Considered as a whole the valley appears to have been the bed of some old lake, a remnant of which still survives in the south east corner of this basin and which is known as the Loktak spreading as far as 12 kms long and 8 kms wide. The hill ranges on either side of the valley run practically to an equal height, a little over 2500 metres and have flat rolling tops. The hill range on eastern side of the valley is called Patkai, on its western side is Palail and towards the south east it is known as Arakan Yoma. The highest peak of Manipur is Tenip with a height of 9829 feet, standing in the north district.

The rivers spreading in the valley owe their origin to the hills on the northern and north eastern sides. The most significant among the rivers is the Imphal which flows through the capital town of the State. It also joins the Burmese river Chindwin. The other
important rivers are the Iril, the Thobal, the Nambol river. Another important hill river is the Mao-Maram area in the north district of Manipur. It flows via the Bhutan range to Cachar and joins the old bed of the Brahmaputra.

Rainfall is the major source of water in Manipur. The monsoon becomes active here from June to September, resulting into heavy rainfall. The volume of rainfall differs from place to place. The average rainfall in Imphal is recorded to be 1,413 mm. The other places having heavy rainfall are Tamenglong with an average record of 4,017 mm and Ukhrul with 1,799 mm. Among three seasons in the valley, summer is the most pleasant. The average temperature at Imphal is 33.76° maximum and 6.12° minimum. At Ukhrul the maximum average temperature recorded up to 1975 is 33.30 whereas the lowest average is 1.80. The temperature of the valley is higher than that at the elevation of 2,600 feet. This high temperature might be due to the reflection of heat from the faces of the lofty surrounding mountains overlooking the valley. "Manipur contains within its borders of variety of climates from tropical to the great cold than that of England." But the valley is really enjoyable. On the basis of the temperature table shown it can be ascertained that Manipur is a land of diverse climate. Since it has got damp climate the hills and plains are green with rich forests. Hodson, T.C. (1908) aptly observes: "For the lover of spirit the valley is a veritable Paradise. In the cold weather the numerous lakes and Jheels are

3. Statistical Handbook of Manipur, 1975
4. Ibid., p. 1
covered with wild ducks, teal, geese, snipe and in the hills woodcock rare pheasants are to be found. Prior to 1891, when a general census was carried out with a view to assessing the total population of the State, authentic historical findings as to the population are lacking. Though an attempt to materialize the census schemes was launched as early as 1881, yet it did not cover the entire area under its operation. Another effort to collect census figures was made in 1891 very carefully but the relevant papers containing the findings were destroyed in a revolt.

The 1901 census papers record a population of 284,465 in the entire State. The census records further show that out of the total population, the number in the valley was 180,960 and the number of the tribals, i.e., people inhabiting the hills, was 107,505.

The following table shows the rate of increase of the population from 1901 to 1971. The table shows an upward growth in the rate of population substantially.

The sources of census data collected from 1901, and even before that period, clearly show that that the population in the valley is larger than that in the hills. In 1901 the total population of Manipur was 284,465 whereas the 1971 census recorded it as 1,072,753. Since the State's territorial area comprises the hills and the plains, there are two distinct races of people inhabiting in the valley and in the hills. The people living in the valley are known as the Meithei and those dwelling on the hills are

### Table 2.1

Population of Manipur Sexwise and Growth of Population decadewise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Growth of percentage of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>284465</td>
<td>139632</td>
<td>144833</td>
<td>Base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>346222</td>
<td>170666</td>
<td>175556</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>384016</td>
<td>188119</td>
<td>195897</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>445606</td>
<td>215815</td>
<td>229791</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>512069</td>
<td>249183</td>
<td>262886</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>577635</td>
<td>283685</td>
<td>293950</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>780037</td>
<td>387058</td>
<td>392979</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1072753</td>
<td>541675</td>
<td>531078</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Handbook of Manipur (1975)

### Table 2.2

Hill-Valley Population of Manipur According to Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1971</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill</td>
<td>131975</td>
<td>133395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley</td>
<td>255083</td>
<td>259584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>387058</td>
<td>392979</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Handbook of Manipur (1975)
called Nagas or the Naga tribes.

The Meitheis are also known as Hindu Vaishnavas. Vaishnavism came to Manipur from other parts of India around 15th century. "Hinduism is of comparatively recent origin, though the records of the Brahmin families in Manipur claim in some cases that the founder of the family settled in the valley at so remote a date as the middle of the 15th century." The origin of the Meitheis has historically been proved to belong to the Mongolites.

Although the general facial characteristics of the Manipuris are of the Mongolian type, there is a great diversity of features among them, some of them showing a regularity approaching the Aryan type. Among both men and women the stature varies, differing about as much as is found among Europeans. Some of them are very good looking and fair. It is uncommon to meet with girls with brownish black hair, brown eyes, fair complexions, straight or pointed nose and rosy cheeks. The Manipuris are decidedly a muscular race, some of them particularly so, they are generally sparing in habit of body, and fat people are rare. They have good chest and well formed limbs. The men wear their hair, which is coarse and black, long and combed black from the forehead, which is occasionally shaved; the hair is gathered into a coil behind. Moustaches are uncommon, so much so that a man with a moustache invariably is nicknamed 'Khol-haoba', although a man with a thick straight moustache may be seen. They have no beards, or very rudimentary ones. Boys' heads are generally shaved, leaving only a straggling quantity of hair at the back. The hair of the females is born in three different ways,

according to the age — when young, up to the age of about 10, the front part of the head is shaved, the back part from about the level of the ears round the head, being allowed to grow loose behind. The next fashion is that for unmarried girls, and is very peculiar: the hair behind, from about the middle of each ear round, is allowed to grow long, is combed back and tied in a knot or left loose. In front of this, the hair is combed forwards, and cut equally so as to reach over the forehead an inch or so above the eyebrow. In front of and over each ear is a lock of hair about two inches broad, and reaching down to the angle of the jaw. In married women the hair is allowed to grow long, and combed back from the forehead. 8

Dr Brown's account of the physical and facial appearances of the Meitheis is correct to certain extent, although a little old man characteristics stated above have undergone noticeable changes. The Meithei young men and women do not lag behind in keeping themselves in perfect harmony with the rest of India in so far as fashion and attire are concerned. Even a good number of persons with unusually long and thick moustaches can easily be sighted in the streets when one is walking in the evening. Growing fashionable beards is also popular here. In matters of hair style also changes have naturally occurred since then, and keeping loose hair a bobbed hair style have become more common now than what Dr Brown observed ninety years ago.

My purpose in quoting Dr Brown is to show that the cultural interaction between the rest of India and Manipur has yielded various

8. Brown, R., Statistical Account of Manipur, 1873
desirable results in matters of dress, fashion and general habits of both the sexes to a certain extent.

The Meitheis have seven clans (salais) although there are some who do not belong to any of the seven classes. These classes are the Ningthoujas, the Angom, the Khumal, the Moirang, the Luwan, the Sarang Leisangthem and the Khoba Ngamba. The Ningthoujas and the Angoms claim their pedigree from the sun and the moon respectively. Since the Manipuri society is patriarchal, all of the above mentioned classes had their separate places of habitation. The existence of the Angoms, the Svang Leisangthens and the Khaba Ngambas is said to have been extent over ever prior to the beginning of the Christian period. "In 33 A.D. we find the seven clans firmly established in well defined separate regions of the valley."

I have already given a slightly touching reference to the religious conversion of the Meitheis people into Vaishnavism from their original religion of near Nature worship around mid-15th century. I consider it relevant to discuss at some length how far this conversion has contributed to the cultural and educational vitality of the Meitheis.

During the reign of Chalamamba, some Brahmins came from Kannauj in Uttar Pradesh and settled in the valley. They derived their names 'Kanouj Mayum' - after their place of original abode with the Manipuri addition of Mayum. According to the 'Ramon Khunthok', these Brahmins owe their origin to the Tiwaris of Uttar Pradesh and worship their family deity Saligram. From among the

other Brahmins coming down to Manipur the Lebuk-tongbam are the most distinct, who came here during the reign of Munsyambia. This group of Brahmins, it is stated, came from the Shantipur in West Bengal and settled in the paddy fields as is suggested by their name. The Gurumayums, another Manipuri family, arrived here from Krishna Nagar in West Bengal during the reign of the king Mungayamba. Their family surname is said to have been Mishra. King Bhagya Chandra appointed one of the Gurumayums as his spiritual teacher.

Hinduism came to be established in the State of Manipur as a religion, beginning from the royal families and later followed by the public in general after the king and his brethren during the reign of Pamheiba who decreed it the only religion to be followed in Manipur. The king's decree, at first, could not be acceptable to the people who believed in their traditional gods and deities, and forces of opposition gathered momentum from the royal families under the influence of the Maibas - the erstwhile religious priests of the older religion. However, the forces of opposition were crushed and finally subsided and people had to accept Hinduism for fear of banishment and execution. Notwithstanding, the extreme severity in peoples adopting a new religion, that is Hinduism, the voices of dissent could not be suppressed altogether and the older form of religion, although officially banished, was still practised secretly by the people and has reappeared adding new dimensions to the historically sustained culture of Manipur.

The survival and sustenance of religion and culture is an historical process which incurs the risk of not only extinction but also of the disappearance of the records of antiquity. Although the
original culture and religion of the Meitheis have fully emerged now through many stages of the ordeals of survival, yet the valuable ancient records and manuscripts of literature, arts, science, religion, and so on were destroyed under the hectoring influences of the Vaishnava priests by the kings on the charges that those manuscripts materials were heathen and obnoxious.

The ancient Meitheis believed in four distinct "spiritual beings who have crystallized out from the amorphous mass of animistic Deities." The first being "Lam Lai gods of the countryside who shade into nature and control the rains, a prime necessity of an agricultural community." The other gods are - the Umang Lai representing the forces of control over the forest and jungles; the Imang Lai - the domestic deities controlling the lives - the births and deaths of individuals; the last one being "Tribal Ancestors", the ritual of whose worship is strange compound of magic and Nature worship. Beyond these Divine beings who possess in some sort a majesty of orderly decent behaviour, there are spirits of the mountain passes, spirits of the lakes and rivers, Vampires, and all the horrid legion of witch craft." It is difficult to estimate the precise effect of Hinduism on the civilization of the people, for to the outward observer they seem to have adopted only the festivals, the outward ritual, the caste marks, and the exclusiveness of Hinduism, while unmindful of its spirit, and inward essentials. Colonel McCulloch remarked nearly fifty years ago that, "in fact

11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
their observances are only for appearance 'sake' not the prompting of the heart, and his criticism seems as true now as when it was written.  

The precise effect of Hinduism on the Meithei, however, was vicarious. People among the Meithei, following Hinduism even very sincerely, could penetrate into the subtle spirit of the religion in so far as it aims at the spiritual advancement of the human psyche towards the attainment of the final perfection wherein the human soul is said to coalesce after passing through certain devotional penances. Hinduism for a Meithei meant a religious alternative towards achieving higher goals.

But if we look to the other side of the picture, i.e., their original religion, we find them quite sincere in their traditional way. From whatever information is available to us from the chronicles, we can have a fairly good idea regarding the functions and the names of a few popular deities of the Meithei. Among the deities, the most popular is Panthoibi who, according to the myth, is the wife of Khaba and has control over death and birth. As an anecdote has it, Senamahi and Pakhanba were two princes of a certain Meithei king and both were aspiring for the royal throne. The king ordered them both to take a round of the globe and the one who came first would be crowned. As such, Pakhanba arrived first and was consequently crowned. The frustrated Senamahi thereupon was commanded by the king to be worshipped by the people for his grand sacrifice. Pakhanba, however, would be worshipped by the members of

the royal families. But if some prince in future would apprehend the forfeiture of his rightful claim of the throne, he might worship Senamahi for the fulfilment of his ambition. 14 Another very important deity is the Pahanba who has been so long worshipped by the members of the royal family. Laierema is another very vital deity, who has magical powers at his command. This deity, if the worship is neglected by the devotees, is full of wrath and tends to be vindictive. The chronicles record an anecdote related with Lairema, "There was a great fuss about Liremba Hooidompokpi. A sepoy reported to the Maharajah that, since Khuraijam established his God, Hooidompokpi a considerable number of men died. The number of widows increased. The Maharaja ordered Losang Ninsnghou and Nongthomba to cause enquiry into this. It turned out that there were two Liremas of the deity named Noongshaba we know that he is associated with a stone, and is probably as his name would show (nong stone, and 'Shaba' maker, lit-maker of stone), the Deity of creations of the rocks and stones." 15

Among the other important deities are Yumthai Lai, who can be interpreted as the establisher of the houses; the Deity Taibong Khombi - known as the maker of the earth; and these Deities too, were attended to by the Brahmins. It is surprising to notice that Pamheiba, on the one hand demolished such Deities as Taibong Khaiba (a divider of the earth) and Waihaiba - the clan goddesses, on the other, he employed the Brahmin priests to attend to the deities, Panthoibi and Sanamahi. Besides these deities as enumerated above,

15. Ibid., p. 98
there are a fairly large number of minor deities who have been worshipped by the Meitheis from the ancient times. Senamahi and Pakhamba, the two great deities of the Meitheis are still attended to by the Brahmin priests and recently an attempt was, by a law suit of the people, made to bring back the statue of Senamahi which is still lying in the possession of a Brahmin priest. Therefore it becomes very easy to believe that the Meitheis of Manipur have a very subtle religious belief since the Vishnu and the ancient local deity worship are interpreted in such a way that one of the two is able to retain its original separate identity. In this regard the so-called synthesis achieved on account of the conglomeration of these two religions, according to Shri N. Tombi Singh (1972), is 'complementary'. He argues that "by believing in their traditional gods, they also believed in the traditional supreme power and by doing so they believed in supreme being who eternally reigns to lead and help the mankind to attain the highest virtues and glories mundane as well as extra mundane ... Except the difference in language and places of occurrence, one may fail to trace any basic difference between the Hindu faith and the traditional Meithel faith." 16 The Manipur Sahitya Parishad's account of this synthesis is that: Vaishnavism came to the valley of Manipur, only to stay to fulfill and to be reborn, synthesising the old with the new and expressing a composite cultural heritage. A vital touch of liberalism has also been brought to bear upon this process. The impact of Vaishnavism on the evolution and development of Manipuri literature is also significant. The result of the amalgamation of these two religions emerging into

a move of secular form produced ever lasting effects on the customs and traditions of the people, which are now indispensable parts of Manipuri culture. The study of the Manipuri culture can only be complete if these customs and traditions are properly discussed.

Meitheis also worship the Puranic gods. The most important document is the copper plate of king Khongtekoha. It was discovered by late W. Yumjao Singh. It is dated 721 Shakabda (799 A.D.). It tells about the religious beliefs of Manipuris. The names of gods are mentioned as Hari, Siva, Devi, Ganesh and Visha Karma. Prof. J. Roy, an eminent historian of Manipur, mentions four categories of gods, "1. Lamlai - God of the countryside, controlling the rain, the principal necessity of an agricultural community. 2. Umanglai - God of forest. 3. Imunglai - the household deity. 4. Ancestor of each tribe. Besides, there are spirits of the mountain passes, spirits of the lakes, rivers, vampires." Prof. Roy mentions the name of other popular deity as "Panthoibi." In this respect, Prof. N. Tombi Singh gives the greater detail of gods. He says "The principal deities are Koubru, reigning in the north west, Leiyarkpa, reigning in the west, Thanging in the south west, Wambren in the south, Marjing in the east and Chingkheiningthou in the north east." These deities defend the frontiers of Manipur. Whenever the prayer is offered, these deities are remembered and adequate homage is paid. Even the king was not an exception in this respect of paying homage to the deities. There is a place of worship in every house named

17. Manipur Sahitya Academy (1970), Glimpses of Manipuri Language, Literature and Culture
18. Roy, J., History of Manipur (1958)
19. Singh, N. Tombi, Manipur : A Study (1972)
Sanamah. Pakhamba and Senamah were brothers discussed above.
There is a story prevalent in the valley about them. Their
intelligence was tested by their father Guru Sidaba and mother
Laimaren Sidabi. Guru Sidaba asked his sons to go round the universe
and the person who will return earlier, shall not only be superior
in intelligence but shall also succeed the throne. Pakhamba was
small but intelligent while Senamah was strong and stout. Senamah
immediately went round the world. Pakhamba took seven round of the
throne and thus claimed the right on the throne. He was also granted
that right as we have discussed before.

Normally the marriage amongst the members of the clan is
socially prohibited. It is said that Guru Sidaba gave a curse, a
'shap', to such persons marrying within the clan "of the man who
shall marry within the clan, his 8th generation shall disappear from
the universe." If any one dared to do so, it was not seen with
respect in the society. The people conducted research on it,
Khelchandra (1968) says, "Out of 8 families in which marriage was
done within the clan it was found that the 8th generation has
disappeared" and thus it was found a correct myth.

The first custom which takes place immediately after the
6th day of birth of a child, is called 'Shasthi' in Manipur while in
other parts of country it is called 'Chhati'. On this day in
Manipur the child is taught to eat something. This kind of solid or
liquid should contain seven tastes. It is believed if there is lack
of any taste, out of seven the body may suffer from disease. In

21. Ibid., p. 25
Homeopathy system it is said that there are five salts needed in the body and if there is scarcity of any one of them, one may suffer from disease. I think 'Shasthi' system is very much based on that process. Thus to make his experience in different tastes, the child is made to observe the sixth day for experiencing the different tastes. In Manipuri language this ceremony is also called as "Epanthaba". It means to sow the seed which makes blood in the body.

Another custom is "Lemren Sidbi". It has been prevalent since the period of Maharaja Pakhambha. The story goes that the mother of Pakhambaji decorated him with different ornaments. It was the time of his third birthday and he was decorated with different ornaments on different parts of the body but in his ear there was no ornament. This place was filled by making holes in the ears. This ornament is called 'Chom'. Since then it has become a process for three years child to go under this process. In Manipuri language this process is called 'Nahutaopa' and in other parts of India this process is called as 'Kanchhadan'. It is to be completed before the completion of the third year. There are certainly changes in the method and the ornament but this process remains the same. This practice established a common link between the culture prevailing here and rest of India.

The women are always a valuable index of Manipuri culture. Whether a woman is married or not could be recognised by the way of the dress she put on in the past. Even to this day a Miss will tie 'Fanek' (sari) on her waist and shall cut her hair like the moon of the second day of the white fortnight (Dooj). This is the indication of celibacy. Srimati or Mrs will have a different way of
putting on the dress. She will tie Fanek above the waist and she will not cut her hair but rather tie them back. Though now this custom has nearly disappeared, yet we can see it in the rural area even today. The Miss is regarded as a bloom flower. During her menses she is not exposed to the sun. She is not allowed to cook and to come in contact with other family members. On the sixth day after bath she is allowed to resume her work. This system is very commonly found in our country. The stress is laid on purification of the body after a natural call. This process is called as 'Mapan Thokpa' while you go for urination. For going to toilet they say 'Manba'. This is a very old practice in the Manipuri society.

At the time of taking lunch there is a custom of keeping the things at right like sauce (Iromba), solid vegetable (Insang) and water (Ishing). The liquid vegetables are kept east of plate (Thali) and at the left.

The woman in the Manipuri society has a routine bound life. Early morning she gets up and takes the name of the god 'Hari'. She ties her loose hair and sings to bring her to normalcy. She keeps that foot on earth based on functioning of nostrils. She cleans the compound of her house. In Manipuri society stress is very much laid on cleanliness of body, compound and dress. In other words the principle of Mahatma Gandhi is followed in spirit. She washes her face and cleans her teeth and prepares for the worship of the sun. She collects flowers, fruit, clay lamp, clean pot and Dhoop. Afterwards, she starts her work according to her profession. In the afternoon she again prepares for her worship and cleans the house. The worship of the sun is a must and the requirements are kept at
one place. She worships the sun again in evening, and then she resumes her work. This routine bound life of the Manipuri woman has been there since an unknown period. And if a comparison is made with the life of an orthodox family of other parts of India, it will be found that there is not much difference in the routine.

Festivals

'Qwaka-Yatra'

"This is one of the most important traditional festivals of Manipur, a very old one. It started in the period of Shri Ramchandra ji and the subsequent kings incorporated it into the life of the state." On this occasion a goddess named 'Laikhutlongbi' is worshipped. It appears to have some similarity with the Pitra paksha as observed in other parts of the country. Nearly two days in advance at a fixed time a Brahmin places eatables for the crows. A day before the end of this function the king worships elephants and horses and is led by the military to its cantonments. The king then drives away the crows. By observing the number of the crows, the king can know the sorrow and happiness of his kingdom. He shoots arrows at the effigy of Ravana, and the happiness and sorrow can be determined after an arrow has hit at a particular place. In 118 A.D. the king worshipped a goddess named 'Lailitionlibi Devi'. The name of the king was 'knoiba'. This goddess is described in 'Laikhurewbi Kontharon', a religious Meithei book. Laikutloniibi means a goddess having more than two hands. In Manipuri language Kwak Jatra means

to drive away crows. As discussed earlier, a place with a camp is first determined for this purpose. Here the king accompanied by the other state dignitaries arrives on the elephant. The elephant is decorated with the state symbol. After the ceremony of crows is over, the burning of the Ravana effigy is performed. The function is concluded after the flashing of swords and lances at the Singh Dwark of the camp. The antiquity of this function is difficult to determine.

By mere observation we can conclude that it is a preparation for war, but by minute observation we can say it is a method of running the administration of the State on the one hand and the preparation for war against an impending external threat on the other. Besides, it also exhibits skill in duel. The victorious man is duly rewarded with a post in the administration and with prizes, and titles are bestowed him. This also adds efficient and skillful warriors to the Manipur army. There are two important programmes to be carried out in this occasion, first to provide recreation to the public through the demonstration of arms. In other words, it raises the military moral, and helps them to gain familiarity with arms. Secondly, at a protected place a big pot is worshipped. After the worship is over, the king sees his face in this big pot (Gout) along with his royal priests. If the king fails to see his shadow in the pot or the pitcher, it is believed that he will expire shortly within a year. I cannot say whether it is a belief or superstition. In the Manipuri language this pitcher is called 'Ishaifu'. On the basis of known facts, we can say that it symbolises three things, arms, pitcher and well being of the king.
The crow is regarded as the symbol of evil, because of its eating habits and deceitful nature. The voice of the crow is also not pleasing. Thus no one likes to hear its cawing. Similarly a bad man is a nuisance to the society. "When such a man is abused in Manipuri language, two proverbs are used "Kwak Kumua mapi mapa naide." The second proverb indicates the eating habit of the crow, the crow will eat anything and thus it is said, "Kwak Kumna Chakcha Kammi." The crow has no control over its tongue and thus when a child is very fond of eating anything, normally the proverb is used for him. The crow indicates evil habits. On this festive occasion the king along with the public by implication tries to drive away the evils of human heart.

Yaosang is celebrated on the full moonday of Phalgun (February-March) for 6 days. The entire theme of this festival around the worship of Krishna. Thabal Chengba, a kind of Manipuri folk dance, is associated with this festival. Boys and girls in every locality organise this dance which lasts for nearly a week. The boys and girls and old women collect money from neighbouring houses and the money collected is spent on a number of big parties and feasts. No doubt, Yaosang is very similar to Holi in northern India. It is of equal importance with the Durga puja, Dewali and Bihu which are celebrated in Assam and elsewhere. In modern language the festival of Yaosang is called 'Dol jatra'. It is called the last festival of the year, which surpasses in its enthusiasm and colourfulness all other festivals of the year. The Doljatra is

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23. Sharma, S. Gopendra, op.cit., p. 9
24. Ibid.
considered as the best festivals because of the season and also the richness of its cultural and religious contents. The occasion is specially fascinating as it assimilates in itself the Meithei tradition and the Hindu Dol Jatra and also coincides with the birth day of Caitanya Maha Prabhu.

It is a day of praying and fasting. No colour is played on this day. In the open places small temples of thatches are constructed and decorated. In the evening, the image of Chaitanya Maha Prabhu is taken to these temples and after due worship, it is set on fire with wild enthusiasm in the presence of men and women of all ages.

During this festival young girls stand in groups on street corners to demand, almost as a right, donations from any male member of the society passing on the road. This practice continues upto the fourth day of the festival. It is a problem for persons to walk during this period without money. The free movement of vehicle is also not possible because the girls cleverly block the road. The collection of this fund is used to meet the expenses for the cultural functions organised during this period. The most popular dance of 'Thabal Chongba' is performed during this period. It means dancing in the moonlight. The Holi parties are formed in organised groups of singers, well assisted by big band of drummers and instrumentalists, to sing the theme of lord Krishna's Holi leela in the midst of Gopis of Brindaban. The music is Basant Rag which is presented in beautiful chorus. On the second day the parties assemble in the temple of Govind ji and demonstrate the dances within a stipulated time. Playing of the colour on a mass scale starts from
The second day and continues till the fourth day. This Thabal Chongba is not without a social significance. It is the remnant of a tradition which had its origin in pre-historic days. During those days, this dance was invariably accompanied with traditional music, sung by well-trained artists. The Dholak was sufficient to beat the time and to give necessary tempo to the dancers; men and women, boys and girls dance hand in hand, on the musical tune and drum beats. Now-a-days expensive bands are engaged to replace the simple Dholaks. In this dance a lot of stamina and talent is required. This is really a beautiful dance which gives maximum freedom to the people of a free society. Taboos and the social considerations do not interfere here. It breeds understanding among the young hearts.25

CHAIRAoba festival is observed by the whole community and every family participates in it. They climb at the top of the hill in their locality. They believe that the first day of the year must begin by climbing the hill. They go there to worship their gods who are installed for the day, with ample improvised atmosphere for such religious activities. The people abhor utilizing such a day for merely material pursuits for the king and his court. The whole day is spent in worship, and traditional rituals are offered for the welfare of the king and the kingdom (subjects). The trends during the year are forecast by the leading traditional signs, seen on this day. This is done in the belief that future events would be apprehended. In old days people had no idea of the calendar and the knowledge of astronomy was beyond the reach of common man. For

the family it is an occasion to overhaul the family affairs. Most of the people are found busy in their household problems. The roads wear a crowded look as people pass in large numbers through them. It is quite an unusual human movement. At noon we see every house offering food to the wild spirit and as such they offer some amount of food to the deity on the gate when they sit for their lunch. This is done with the conviction that there will be no more harm to the social and the individual life if deities are pleased. On this day, it is seen that the young boys and girls are busy, cleaning the roadside near the gate where the deity is to be worshipped. The spot may differ from house to house depending on the individual choice. The juniors worship the elders of the family. In joint families, especially when it is a large family, the process becomes tiresome, and it is late when they sit for lunch. The elders of the families also offer sweets to the deities according to their number with equal share distribution. In every house some excess food is prepared for unexpected guests but in fact nobody comes.

Chiraoba comes off on the last day of the Chaitra and it means the announcing or heralding of the new year by a stick. There are two aspects of this celebration - social and domestic. Under the domestic aspect the people offer vegetables and other articles to the gods. They prepare costly meals for the family and the gods, and offer their collective prayer to the gods. After the prayer, they enjoy meals together. The social aspect of the festival begins after meals and a large number of men, women and children climb the hill nearby the villages till dusk.
Rath Jatra* is locally known as 'Kang Chingba' (Chariot pilgrimage). It is a very popular festival of Manipur. It is said to have started during the period of Maharaja Gambhir Singh reign (1825-1834 A.D.). The festival is celebrated by the worship of Lord Jagannath, the supreme deity, and is observed for nine days. The celebration commences on second day of the new moon of Ingen (June-July) and concludes on the 10th day. It is performed at the central place and also in other localities. In a procession the images of Shri Jagannath, Balbhadra and Sushri Subhandraj ji are taken out on chariots (Ratha) through the main roads of the town. The slowly moving chariots are halted at different gates where people stand waiting to offer Arati to the images of gods. This festival is celebrated almost in the same manner like that of the Puri Rath Jatra in Orissa. It differs from the Puri Rath Jatra in the sense that it is more liberal here in Manipur. Every small and big temple is allowed to participate in this festival. They all take out a Rath (chariot), small or big, with the help of the villagers who maintain the temple. Imphal has a larger number of temples than those in the rural areas. The preparation for the festival is done by professional groups who divide their localities. The jurisdiction of the professionals covers the whole valley whereas the non-professionals confine their performances only to a limited number of the temples where they receive training. The important and the biggest Rath is taken out from the temple of the Govindji and it is drawn by a large number of people. The Rath is quite bulky and looks majestic. In ancient times, it was difficult to pull the Rath due to non-availability of metalled road but now the case is different. The wooden wheels have been replaced by the iron ones.

*Sing, Y. Bhagya, Leithak Leikhol, Imphal, 1965
and the roads are metalled. "The tall and big size has been reduced
and adjusted according to convenience of movement. As a result a
long procession of small Raths is to be seen on this occasion along
the roads of the valley. As a matter of tradition the Rath is taken
out at the main gate of the palace. This activity is performed ahead
of the other Raths. The reason behind this is that it may enable the
far off people coming from the villages to perform the function after
the conclusion of the palace function. This tradition still
prevails." Rath Jatra is finally concluded in Jhulon Jatra. This
begins with fasting for ekadasi and comes to a close on Purnima.
During the period, the temples are decorated and Jhulas are installed
in the temples where the images of Radha and Krishna are kept in
jhulas. The Jhulas are then kept on swinging by the priests. This
festival is celebrated like the Jhulon festival of Mathura. Ras
Lilas are also held to commemorate the memory of Lord Krishna and
Radha in Govind ji temple at Rajbari.

Heikru Hitongba is a major festival of Meitheis, which has
been observed since the pre-Hindu period. Heikru Hitongba means
literally a boat race. This festival was revived by Maharaja Bhagva
Chandra, who was a champion of Manipuri Vaishnavism, in the year
1779 A.D. Some people call it by the name of 'Hiyang Tannaba' which
also means boat race. It is celebrated every year on the 11th day
of langban (September) in the afternoon. Normally, the Government
of Manipur declares on this day a half holiday. It really offers a
fascinating sight with boat racing on the water. Generally the venue

27. Interview with Sri Khelchandra Singh, 1975
for the boat race is a pond of a considerably large size containing enough water and such ponds are in abundance here. For the last few years this occasion with its entire splendour is celebrated in Kangla Park which is a long pond or canal type pond on the Burma Road in the capital. Earlier it was held in a pond near Govindji temple at Rajbari. In this race two rows of boats are set opposite one another with stately decorations for the competition. The winner boat rowers are rewarded. The symbolical significance of the Heikru Hitongba is associated with another traditional belief that Heikru (Awala) a fruit is supposed to be ripe for eating from this day. This occasion coincides with a similar occasion celebrated in U.P. in Jhansi area when a boat race is held in Laxmi tank there in the same month of September. During the days of kingship in Manipur this occasion enjoyed a royal importance. The king with a train of Durbar members used to attend the boat race at the Bijoy Govinda pond on the Sagolbund road.

Baruni, which falls on the 13th day of Phalgun, is one of the biggest festivals of the State. Thousands of people participate in it. This festival was introduced in Manipur nearly a century ago by the king Chandrakirti Singh. The entire Meithei population worships Lord Shiva on the Baruni day. After having offered ablutions to Lord Shiva during the day, the people climb the top of the hill better known as Baruni. The journey takes the whole night as the hill is quite high. While climbing the hill, one gets naturally fatigued but the religious spirit behind the climbing does not impair further advances. It is a very tiresome journey. The hill top is called Nongmaijing where lord Shiva in his Phallic aspect is enshrined. As people reach the top, they offer their
sincere prayers to Lord Shiva in a temple with flowers and other accessories. People believe that, since Lord Siva is the almighty creator of this universe and quite charitable to human prayers, he can be quickly pleased and he can grant the worshippers prosperity and happiness.

Nigol Chakkaoba is a domestic festival of the Meitheis which resembles very closely the 'Bhatri Duj' festival celebrated in eastern U.P., Bihar and Bengal. The term 'Nigol' sister and 'Chakkaoba' means to unite for eating. This is a very expensive festival of the Meitheis since all the sisters of the family are invited for dinner. The dinner consist of fish preparations of many kinds; vegetables and pulses are also cooked variously. Pickles are also prepared for the whole family. After the sisters' dinner, the brothers offer them cloths, ornaments and other articles out of their love for their sisters. The brothers then take a pledge to protect their sisters when the latter are in difficulty. With some variations, the festival resembles 'Rakhi festivals' celebrated in the rest of India.

Lai Haraoba is a group of sylvan gods and goddesses, and their worship among the Meitheis is carried on with great group prayer and show. There is,almost in every family, a temple of these deities. A beautiful palanquin is made with beautiful decorations of white tissue paper. On the day of worship, men, women and children wear white dresses. The procession starts from the temple towards the roads and a declaration for the purpose is made by people mounted on horses. The road is clear for the procession. The procession then comes to a field with men and women dancing
round the Deity palanquin in a circular form for a long time, generally in evening. Again the palanquin of the deity is carried by four persons almost in the same manner as it was brought. The Lai Haraoba at Moirang is famous for its cultural activities.

**Ras Leela**: If one happens to visit Mathura and Brindaban during the months of July and August, he will find Ras Leela going on at many places. A love, free from sexual thirst and, in true sense the divine love which is the offspring of great accomplishment (sadhna). Lord Krishna was a great yogi, he was well versed in this accomplishment. He gave the message of love to the world through Ras Leela. Ras of epitome of Manipur is a classical dance. It is woven around the celestial and eternal love of Radha and Krishna and reveals the sublime and transcendental love of Krishna and Radha and Gopis devotion to the lord. The true artistic tradition and the taste of the Meitheis of Manipur can be seen through their attachment to lord Krishna and his beloved Radha. In fact all the artistic accomplishments of these people are woven in the texture of the Ras Leela - a play of finer feelings and emotions of divine love through very delicate and minute movements and gestures of the body. The Ras Leela in Manipur has its origin in the Mahabharata legend when Lord Krishna, the magic flute player, charmed the 'Gopis' (young ladies) of the holy land of Braja by the Magic of his flute. Wherever the super human music of the flute swept, the gopis were drawn automatically towards its player, i.e., lord Krishna. The flute music of Lord Krishna is said to be a symbol of metaphysical love, elevating the soul higher and higher.
"Ras leela in Manipur is famous for its artistic taste and values. The dancers, through various movements of the body, display great delicacy of art." It is performed in an enclave in the premises of the Govindji temple particularly designed for the purpose.

Diwali, Durgapuja, Janmasthami are celebrated as usual with rest of the country.

Saraswati puja: The people of Manipur are fond of learning and knowledge. Saraswati is the goddess of learning or knowledge. The puja is observed on the fifth day of the new moon in the 'manipuri month of 'Phairen' (January and February) as the greatest festival of the student community. Thousands of students can be seen bringing images of Saraswati in their native style to the schools and the colleges. They sing songs in praise of Saraswati. Boys and girls have great aesthetic sense and that can be observed from the festivals. On the morning of the day, boys and girls of the respective schools and colleges go in procession carrying the idol of Saraswati in a palanquin bedecked with flowers, garlands, bouquets and paper cuttings and singing devotional songs about Binapani Saraswati. After the procession, the students return to their respective institutions and perform puja and offer their prayers. The next day or even after that, sports, Jatrawali (a dramatic performance) and other cultural activities are organised. On the next morning the image is taken in procession and is immersed in a tank or river with a touch of pathos.

28. Singh, N. Tombi, Manipur, the Mainstream (1975), pp. 54-75
Songs and dances of Manipur

The Manipuri dances can be divided into two categories, classical and folk dance. Classical dances are 'Ras Nitraya' and folk dances comprise of cholam and naga, lai haroba, khamba thoibi, courtal cholom, wridanga cholom and naga dance. Hudson counts four dances "Ras maribok, Jagoi, Khubeisusakpa and Sanjoiba."29 Ras dance is wholly a Manipuri cultural dance. It is so popular that it has many admirers and lovers outside Manipur. Jeweri sisters and Sabita Ben Mehta of Bombay are famous for their Manipuri Ras dance. Sabita Ben and Jeweri sisters have won general acclaim for their superb performance of their dance. In 1976, performance of Sabita Ben won her recognition by the State Sahitya Kala Academy. It is operative and conenographic enactment of original divine play between Lord Krishna and Radha. The demonstration gives real pleasure to the spectators, as commented by Col. McClouch (1859). 30 N. Tombi Singh (1972) says "The theme is selected from situations like Krishna in fidelity to Radha, her forgiveness and their reunion, the general concord and blissful state of agreement between Krishna and Radha and their sportive play together; or abandonment of Radha by Krishna and their reconciliation because of her threatened suicide."31 On the whole, the 'Ras dance' requires a troupe of eight dancers with Lord Krishna in the centre. The number may vary from time to time. It may have 8 Gopis playing round Krishna; some times eight Krishnas perform Ras with seven Gopis and one Radha. This

30. Col. McClouch, Account of the Valley of Manipur (1850)
31. Singh, N. Tombi, Manipur: A Study (1972)
Ras dance requires extensive training of the participants and this odd job is done by the respected 'Guru'. The girls wear bright coloured velvet skirts, ornaments with tiny mirrors richly embroidered. It is silver worked and edged with a rich border so that it falls in graceful folds. A velvet jacket and a diaphanous veil falling over the hair, complete the costume. Timings are kept on the Mridang which are accompanied by 'Kartals' and 'Wajiras'. The faint sweet notes of the bamboo flute make a charming melody. The dancers convey their feelings and emotions through supple movements of the body. Ras dance is purely devotional in form and nature and entrances even the spectator who is quite unfamiliar with the love of Radha and Krishna. "Somehow something deep with human being is touched, and the validity of experience aesthetically is undeniable. But the curious thing is that as you leave the mandal hall you find yourself almost persuaded of the spiritual experience as well."

Thabal Chungba, apart from the festival value that it has, is also important from the point of view of its unique dance styles. As a festival it is a symbol of the religious spirit and enthusiasm of the Meitheis but as a dance, it has its intrinsic and distinct artistic importance. Thabal Chungba, as an excellent dance, epitomises the intoxicating and exhilarating start of the spring season - a season of nature's vitality, infused in the human beings with a vigorous healing effect on the general health. Nature itself, with its flowery boughs of various colours and scattered fragrance, seems to be dancing around the man in all its glories.

32. Singh, N. Tombi, op.cit.

*Singh, H. Kulabidhu, Manipuri Dances, Imphal, 1964
Nature (Prakrit) and man (Purush) seem to be in conjugation with each other. As such these dances are very vital and passionate.

Khamba and Thoibi dance*

Khamba, the man and Thoibi, the maiden, were two lovers as the legend goes. Many poems, ballads and plays have since then been written about this immortal love story. It is considered also as an epic in Manipuri literature. As a dance form, it represents the age-old love story wherein physical movements - both violent and gentle - are carried on in a harmonious way. On the 'Kaital' consorts it reminds one of the violent dance of Lord Shiva known 'Tandav'. But the dance is not without delicacies of expression through physical gestures. Girls play 'Mandila Chalom' on the occasion of the Jhoolan festival in the group of 14 dancers troupe all attired in white. Men play on drums tied around their necks. T.C. Hudson (1908) says "The performers of the dance are in a mad frenzy of speed, the dance reaches its climax and again softens it down to the light gait of dove, crow or the wagtail. Here is nature represented in sound and movement in the unique manner."33

Musical aspect of Ras Leela, Lai Haraoba

In the Ras dance there are two lady singers, a flute player and a conch blower, and other instrumentalists whose muscular movements differ as the music created by them rises higher and higher and the dancers dance on the tunes in a proper resonance. This

33. Hudson, T.C., op.cit., p. 134

*Singh, H. Anganghol, Khomba Thoibi Sheireing, Imphal, 1965
serves the purpose of background music also. At this stage the atmosphere is charged with emotion, which is reflected in different pitch of music as it glides higher.

Philosophical view of Lai Haraoba*

The word Lai Haraoba is in common use but the original word is Lai-Hoi-Laoba. This means that the god is to be pleased to provide pleasure. Local people believe that by pleasing the god they will prosper. By observing it every year, we remind the God Guru Sidib (Shiva) of his qualities and by doing so the god is pleased. The first thing that is done in Lai Haraoba is that people pray to the rain god, 'Khayom Lakpa', and it is the first stage of 'Ekoh' (method of worship). At this time a bag is filled with rice, egg, gold and silver. Here egg is the symbol of god and it is kept between two pieces of gold and silver.

The popular song of this time is the song of Command. In this world, there are two types of men, one who have patience and the other who do not have it. In the Manipuri society the human association of those having no patience is called 'Cheloka', and one of patience is called 'Pombi'. Therefore, the song is sung as a symbol of command, e.g. 'Haraikhoinda chanba hainida Ashubi Thoima Haoeb Haida, Chidab Hainida'. In Manipuri 'Harankhoi' is the name of that fruit which is like an orange. It is equal in size with the breast of a mother, when it is ripe. The poet conveys the message to the people through his song that this fruit is ripe for eating purposes. The fruit has the same essential ingredients that the mother's milk has for the child. Moreover, it gives mental pleasure.

*Singh, Ng. Kulachandra, Lai Haraoba, Imphal, 1963
The second offer about the fruit is just opposed to 'Hairankhoi' and is 'Khoiranhai' which means a greedy fruit. Greed is an essential part of human life. According to Hindu faith, sex, anger, affection and greed are the signs of dissatisfaction in life, though they are essential parts of human nature. The fruit eradicates all the vices enumerated above. It also gives people divine enlightenment. It is very popular in the Manipuri society.

The Origin of the Hill Tribes, Their Appearance, Dress, Food and Religion:

The hill tribes are not different from the local people. Their origin is the same as that of the Meitheis. T.C. Hodson (1908) says, "The second group of tradition affords a link with the general tradition which makes the Nagas, Kukis and Manipuris descended from a common ancestor, who had three sons who became the progenitors of those tribes. This tradition, which is widely spread, agrees in many versions in assigning the primacy of descent to the Kukis, the next place being given to the Nagas, while the Manipuris are said to be the children of the youngest of these three brothers." By above statement it is clear that Meitheis, and Nagas are the children of the same father. Religion is the only major element of difference amongst them. Meitheis are Hindus while most of the Nagas are Christians and their number is 279,243. All Meitheis follow the path of Vaishnavism but few a Nagas follow their natural religion exclusively and their number is 83167. In the case of the Meitheis,

34. Hodson, T.C., op.cit., pp. 6-8
35. Statistical Handbook, Government of Manipur, p. 30
36. Ibid., p. 31
they all followed in part natural religion and the Christian nagas also follow in part their natural religion. In the case of those Nagas who are not converted, they still follow their religion as mentioned above. There are different stories of the origin of Nagas as stated by Dr Brown (1873), but as far as it is confirmed by Dr Brown, they are not original inhabitants of this area. They came from various places and due to the association with other communities through marriage, a tribe emerged and that was called the Nagas. Asoso Yonuo (1974) says, "On the other hand, successive hordes of people of Mongolian race from China and other parts of the south-east Asia, had passed to the arid mountainous regions and the fertile valleys which by process of time, came to be known as Burma, Meiteiland Kamrupa ... Probably, many of the earliest migrants passed into Bengal and merged with Dravadians or Aryans who were already there, from the west and south. In course of time, the two races mixed together through marriage, culture, exchange of ideas and values, the outcome of which was a new brand of people who are classified by Risley as the "Mongolo-Dravidians."

These people are found in north eastern India. Asoso Yonuo (1974) says further about Mongolian stock of people, "Some of these divergent tribes including Adi, Mishmi, Apatani, Singpho, Khampti, etc. speaking different languages, professing animism but broadly classified as the "Nagas" by Assamese or Bengalis settled down in the upper basin of the Chindwin and the Irrawady, and from there or elsewhere they slowly and doggedly spread over Assam, Cachar-Mikir hills, Manipur and the ruggedly beautiful Naga hills ...  ."

38. Ibid.
About the appearance of the naga people R. Brown says, "When one fairly comes into contact with the various classes of hill-men in Manipur territory in their pure and primitive condition, the general idea which prevails as to facial characteristics of the majority of tribe has to be modified; the popular idea is, that all or almost all the tribes inhabiting the hilly regions lying east, north and south of the British Province Kachar, are of low stature, with broad flattened faces, small flattened noses, and oblique eyes of a Mongolian cast of countenance in fact; the real truth being that a purely Mongolian cast of feature is rare ..." The above description gives a clear picture about their appearance that they have flat face and flat nose with oblique eyes.

Dress

The dress of the Nagas differs from tribe to tribe. There is difference of colour, stripe and decorations on the body in case of women folk, but the dress of the man folk does not differ much. About them Hodson says, "The dress of Tangkul men consists of simple cloth worn round the waist and tied in a knot in front leaving the ends hanging down. These ends are fringed with straw pendants. The waist cloth are made of stout cotton woven in red and blue stripe two inches wide and horizontal ... Another pattern is in white stripes with terra cotta stripes and a black and white checker pattern, the plain variety being worn by the common people and the variety with fringed border twelve to eighteen inches deep with

white orange, green and red stripes ... .” 40 About the dress of the women Hodson (1908) says, “The women wear small caps of blue cloth when working in the fields. Their petticoats reach from the waist to the knee and are made of cotton cloth manufactured in the weaving villages with red and white or black and white stripe two inches width.” 41 The rich women wear Fanek of red with small stripes of white and black. A small jacket of the style worn by Manipuri women or a single cloth of the kind worn by them completes the costume. Like it the other Nagas also wear dress with some minor differences.

The Nagas have their religious beliefs and they are happy with them. Hodson says, “Nagas are matters of great difficulty, for to a consciousness of their imperfections we add an unmistakable sense of our own superiority in which they cheerfully acquiesce. It indicates that they have their faith and they are happy with it.” 42

Earlier I have said that some of them are converted to Christianity but still they have their beliefs. Now the question is what type of religion do they have. In the words of Asoso Yonuo (1974), “The religion of the Nagas is not Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity and Islam but what we vaguely call animism which dominates substantially the temper and texture of social, economic, political and cultural life of the Nagas … what animism precisely implies by the Nagas is that there is an invisible benevolent. Creator of the earth and the Disposer of all events, conventionally known as God who created all the things including man

40. Hodson, T.C., The Naga Tribes of Manipur (1908)
41. Ibid.
42. Hodson, T.C., The Meitheis
even down to the ants, trees, stones, etc. in the universe, put divine souls in them, connected them with the Natural laws and appointed a number of white good gods what we may more properly call angles and evil black gods (the devils) including gnome to rule over mankind ... ."43 "There are different gods of earth, sky, light, fire, wind, water, streams, mountains and inanimate objects. These gods maintain every day record of the words and deeds of men for reward of good and punishment of evil done and for resolving the chain of birth and death on earth, and forgive the innocent sins of those who pray upon him. There are also some other good and evil spirits and other godheads dwelling in rocks, forests, groves streams and rivers. Malignant demons are very fond of doing harms or killing men intentionally. In order to propitiate and exorcise them, the Nagas usually offer them eggs, fowl and other things. There are also other rituals, ceremonies, prayers, incantations, taboos, gennas that are performed by the Nagas to have a religious, moral and philosophical life, to ward off evil, to obtain children and to destroy sworn enemies."44 The above statements make it quite evident that the Naga religion is different from other religions but having a common spirit of faith in god. The Nagas who inhabit the hills of Manipur comprise 29 tribes but only a few of them have a large number of festivals. "They are Thankhuls and Kabuis, Mao and Paite, the Hmar and Kacha Naga. Hillmen's festivals are agriculture-oriented. The Zemi, Laingmi, and Roungmei have festivals in almost every month. The 'Gan Ngai' and the 'Changamei' are two

44. Ibid.
most important post-harvest festivals of the people living in western
hills of Manipur. 'Salenl' is the post-cultivation festival of the
Maos. The Tangkhul have their 'Meitu' festival which is the festival
of cotton. Rishazu is post-cultivation period, enjoyed as festival.
'Deng Kiu' is post-harvest festival of Tangkhul Nagas." The
Tangkhuls are one of the major and stout tribes of Manipur. They are
beautifully built people and most of them have Aryan features. The
other festivals of Tangkhuls are as noted below:

Luira: It means the 'beginning of sowing' and the festival
heralds the coming of the new year. The festival falls sometimes in
the middle of February with the appearance of the early flowers,
fruits like raspberries, pears, etc. It is celebrated for 8 days
and the period of the first four days prior to the festival is
called 'Khasit', during which no outsider is allowed to enter the
village. The festival consists of prayers, dance by virgins, games,
sports, drinking, eating and singing heroic songs.

Yarra is a special festival of the young folk and it is held
during the middle of April and continues for 4 days. Boys and girls
feast together at such places as are selected by them every year.
The venue of this feast is generally the house of the most beautiful
girls of the village, who must be very popular. The routine of the
function is drinking, eating, dancing and singing. The function
starts in the early morning and there is break for lunch. The
expenditure of the festival is met by the subscription collected by
the boys and girls.

45. R. B. Pemberton, Report on Eastern Frontier, p. 36
Magkhap: Magkhap literally means the last drink. This festival is observed for 4 days in the early part of July when the villagers have completed sowing seeds in their fields, when the food stock of the previous year is almost consumed. The festival signifies the end of the heavy field work and coming of the lean season. The festival is marked by eating, drinking and rejoicing.

Chumpha is the great festival of Tangkhul Nagas held after the harvest, i.e., in early December. This festival is celebrated for seven days and the last three days are devoted to a social gathering, rejoicing and the dinner of boys and girls. Unlike other festivals, women play an important role in Chumpha festival. The last part of the festival has no merriment and ends with a procession in the villages.

The Thadous observe the 'Low Kivah' festival. The 'Khondou' and the 'Khobawl' are the important festivals of the Paites. These festivals are observed by singing, dancing, feasting and drinking. These festivals are connected with their way of life and undoubtedly possess a religious character. These festivals help tribal life to get rid of monotony. This festival is not without its social significance. 'Low' means a village labour union of youths and 'Kivah means a feast. Thus Low Kivah is a big village labour union feast. This is performed at the chief's house after the harvesting season. A Mithun of not less than five years and thirty jars of wine are the minimum requirements for such a moderately big village. A 30 feet long pillar named mithun pillar is erected in the house of the chief with beautiful decoration. The mithun is tied with the
pillar and the young men of the village with a view to satisfying
their sportive zeal fight and ship over the mithun. Indigenous
sports, group singing and dancing day and night mark Low festival.
They go on day and night. This continues for three days.

Kabui Naga: The Kabui Nagas fall in the category of schedule
caste in Manipur. Mostly, Kabuis inhabit the hills but major section
of them have permanently settled in the valley also. Majorkhul in
Imphal is a Kabui habitation. Originally, the Kabui tribe in ancient
times lived in Tamenglong area of Manipur. The Kabuis are by nature
a festival loving people who love to perform a festival every month.
But the price spiral has affected this practice. There are two
important festivals of the Kabuis, one is Gan-ngai and the other
'Changamei'. They are post-harvest festivals and are celebrated
necessarily every year.

Gan-ngai is celebrated for five days in the month of Wakein
(December-January). The first day of the festival starts with omen-
taking ceremony and the rest of the days are spent in common feast,
and the dances of old men and women and also of boys and girls and
presentation of farewell gifts between boys and girls.

Christians observe the Christmas. Most of them are Nagas
and their number is 152043 and it is 19.49 of the total population.46
Muslims observe their festivals, Ramjan, id, Bakri id and Shah-E-
Barat. The number of Muslims is 4858847 and it is 6.23% of the
total population.

46. Department of Statistics, Government of Manipur, Statistical
Handbook of Manipur (1975), p. 15

47. Ibid.
Tribal songs and dances

There are more than 29 Naga tribes and all are proud of their songs and dances. Each of these tribes is proud of its special cloth designs and folk dances. The folk dances are colourful. Most of them are simple in stepping choreography and talas. It is not, therefore, difficult to learn them since each of them has a distinct form. It is so because they are closely related to the growth of the tribe. The Kabui dances are most developed and sophisticated amongst the dances of the tribal groups. Here again delicacy is noticeable in the movements of hands, feet and colourful costumes. They have two types of dance festivals in which sacrifices are also offered, especially when it is "Baloo" a 'trang'. Every Kabui dance is there in their culture metaphor.

It is the same with the Tangkhul dances. They are equally charming and colourful. Stepping is simple but unique. We find much similarity between the dances of the valley and those of the hills. The Naga spear dances with their violent movements and in the colourful ceremonial costumes accompanied by loud songs and resounding drums are quite impressive and thrilling.

The Mao-Nagas also have their own exquisite folk dances which indicate their talent not only in dancing but also in the art of colour combination. The dances are heroic while the costumes represent rich handicrafts dyed in suitable colours.

The non-Naga tribal dances and bamboo dances are usually slow moving. The bamboo dance is the most popular among Kuki-Chin dances. Two or even more dancers, usually girls, hop on foot in a
cries cross pattern of four rhythmically beating bamboo held by the girls. This dance is very frequent in Mizoram among the Houngeis and the Liangmeis. Thus a fine choir of culture and movement is traceable in the Bamboo dance.

The Anals, the Moyons and the Marrings also have their folk dances. The Anals mostly inhabit in the Tengonoupal area of Manipur district. The tribal dances often remind one of 'Tandav' style. The hard life led by the tribal is revealed through artistic expressions in their dances. If we compare them with other Indian dances like Bharat Natyam, wherein one will see facial expressions uppermost while in the tribal dances these are least noticeable. In this way, we can say that the tribal dances are nearer the western sophisticated dances.

Tribal Songs

These songs are of four types and are accompanied with dances. Among the Nagas, the Kabuis have different songs suited to their occasion. The four categories are (1) The festival songs, (2) Romantic songs, (3) Work song and (4) War songs. These songs require few traditional instruments like gongs, drum, pena, cymbals, reedless-flute like a small hollow bamboo piece. The following table gives distribution of tribal population in relation to their mother tongue.
Table 2.3

Tribal Population Based on Mother-tongue and Sexwise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother-tongue</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmar</td>
<td>10,744</td>
<td>10,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabui</td>
<td>22,632</td>
<td>24,002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuki</td>
<td>6,910</td>
<td>6,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mao</td>
<td>9,305</td>
<td>9,759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paite</td>
<td>10,545</td>
<td>10,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thangkhul</td>
<td>28,001</td>
<td>28,542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thadou</td>
<td>21,376</td>
<td>21,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaiphei</td>
<td>5,665</td>
<td>5,572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>53,162</td>
<td>45,545</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Handbook of Manipur, 1975, p. 22
It is said that when the spread of Hinduism (Vaishnavism) started in Manipur, most of the old scriptures were burnt by the king's order. Some of them, which were saved, need mention here. They are the Vedas like 'Sakok Salaya Tiren' and 'Pakhamb sakok Kanlairon'. Those who have not read them, consider them to be Purana, but for the Meiteis they are like the Vedas. There are different Vedas like Samveda, Yujur Veda, etc. Kanlairon means veda amounting to extraction. This scripture is a factor in acquainting with the Meitei community. S. Gopendra Sharma (1972) regards it like 'Pakhamba' father of ancestors of Manipur. "Kanlairon deals with the creation of the earth by 'Sorain' (Indra) Sanamahi (Kartekeya) travels round the world, Pakhamba goes round the throne of his father Siva. The clans are then created with thirteen gods. It mentions the demons numbering 400 who fought against the god of the forest, i.e. Cenlai and fight between the Nagas and the gods. It also gives command on behalf of Pakhamba."48 It is a solemn duty to obey the written command of Pakhamba for spiritual development.

The second scripture of Meitei is 'Moiran Kanlairon' according to Mr N. Khelchandra Singh (1970) "It is one of the developed holy books of Meiteis. The Puran is complete and is in no way inferior to other Vedas. It deals with instructions for good behaviour. It also contains other Avtars and a good picture of the Manipuri society. The language of the scriptures is flowery."49

49. Singh, N. Khelchandra, Ariba Manipuri Sahityagi Itibas (1968)
The third scripture is 'Yumdaaba Puyaa' deals with family affairs or in other words it describes how to create the family or rear the family. In this puran the names of all ancestors are written. In Manipuri the alternative name of this scripture is 'Phungabari' which means how to acclimatize the fire in the house. Families are of three types, i.e. First Phunga, Second Middle Phunga and third Small Phunga. This process of writing about the Gotra is called 'Yumdaaba Puyaa'. It is also called an old family history. It starts from Gotra, acclimatization of fire. By remembering them one worships 'Apokpa' father. In this scripture we find the writings of our ancestors. Some of the writings are 'Konthoujam Lairembi', 'Sannrembi Chaishri' and 'Nongpok Panthoibi' stories. They are like Puran and Sastras of Vedic religion.

The first story of 'Konthoujam Lairembi' deals with the process of mental punishment to a man and it is like Puran. At the time of death, and how a Meitei is cremated can be ascertained from this Puran. 'Lainingthou Soraren' (Indra), Santho Huishu (one special dog) along with Yaro Pata (a lake) once set out for a hunting and came across Haorok Konthoujam. From her 'Khoriphaba' was born. It also tells of the burying of the dog, the prohibition of the devils addiction to wine arrival of Indras son 'Khoriphaba' in Manipur.

Sannrembi Chaishri: It is an old Meitei Penal code in the shape of a Puran. The story is believed and dates to about 500 B.C. The

50. Singh, N. Khelchandra, Ariba Manipuri Shahityagi Itibas (1968)
51. Ibid.
52. Singh, M. Chandra, Panthochi Khongoon
The story begins like this, one day Sannarembi and Chaishra's mother went for fishing in a lake. On return the mother killed her daughter Sannarembi by putting a snake in her mouth. At the end of the story there is a duel between Sannarembi and Chaishra. Chaishra was killed in the duel. There are a number of stories like it in Sannarembi and Chaishra Puran.  

Panthoibi Koongun: It is another penal code in the shape of a Puran. Some people call it Nonpek Panthobi. About this scripture Sri Atom Bapu Gavesna Shiromani has said that it is more than 2000 years old. According to Manipur Sahitya Parishad, "it was written in 6th century in the reign of Sri Khontekoha Yoireneb." As such we can say that it was written before Christ. The whole story of Panthobi came to light after the birth of Christ. By reading it we can guess that the civilization in Manipur was quite advanced in the ancient period.

Lethak Lekharon: This is also one of the oldest Meithei scriptures but its author is not known. It tells about the creation of the universe. By the mantra of Phakhamba Sakok Kelairon, the universe was created. Moreover it starts from the creation to doomsday.

Khoghonnunumbi Nongareen: It gives immense pleasure to the reader. One of the stories is about a girl named Hai Oshi Namoinu who appears in the shape of a cricket. A woman of Chh Luwan caste meets a young man of Haoeku community and passes the whole night with them.

54. Singh, N. Khelchandra, Ariba Manipuri Sahityagi Itibas
55. Ibid., p. 20
56. Ibid., p. 25
near the lake. In night all these persons go to hell.

Khawai Nonje Piwana Numin Kappa: In this scripture there is a story of a man who shot his son as a result of which the son fell down.

Language, Literature, Phrases and Sayings

Dr S.K. Chatterji (1967) said, "Manipur Language is an independent member of the Tibet-Burman sub-family - one of the four groups of the Tibet-Burman sub family - one of the four groups of the great Sino-Tibetan speech family. Manipuri is the connecting link between the Tibetan and the Burmese languages. Both languages are the important members of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family. Manipuri language is separated in the north and the north east from the Tibetan by the Himalayan, Assam and Naga groups of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family. In the south and the southeast between the two sister languages viz. Manipuri and Burmese languages are Kuki-Chin and Kachin groups of the sub-family." 58

While it is plain that Manipuri, Burmese, Tibetan and other members of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family constitute a fairly closely related group, in as much as "it has been possible to observe in an approximate way their phonic correspondence, the kinship of the four sub-families of the Sino-Tibetan speech family among themselves is vague. It is difficult to find any relationship in historical terms. If we compare it to the Chinese language we

57. Sharma, S. Gopendra, Manipuri Sanskriti - Ek Jhanki (1972), p. 90
58. Chatterji, S.K., Religious and Cultural Integration of India, 1967
will find that the related groups of words are not similar." The Assamese language is a product of Sanskrit. Thus it may be pointed out that the difference between Manipuri and these three languages is very much greater than that between Assamese, Bengali and Oriya.

While we note that the Manipuri language is intimately related with the Burmese and Tibetan and in some way to the Chinese language, we have to take note of the fact that Manipuri and its three sister languages started on parallel lines. Some outstanding facts have been dealt with in lengthy details in the 'Linguistic Survey of India Vol. III by Dr Grierson. The Manipuri Grammar and vocabulary have been discussed in the works of such authors as Primerose and Rev Pettigrew, T.C. Hodson's 'The Meithei' also contain some facts. Tibeto-Burman Morphology by S.N. Wolfenden also contains some very interesting discussions. The differences and similarities have been described in these works.

Much has been written about Manipuri language by Shri Yunjao Singh. He says, "All the facts doubtlessly show that Manipuri as a spoken language has been in existence prior to the age of the Epic or at least to the compilation of the Mahabharat as a book. Hence its age is at least 3400 years. Its phonic diversity and development is a sure proof of its long existence as an independent language." Manipuri has been the State language from time immemorial. Coins were struck, royal chronicles were recorded, and royal farmans, edicts and copper plates were issued in this language.

60. Singh, Yunjao, General Remarks on the Manipuri Language
Negotiations between the British and the Manipuris took place at that time in Manipuri. The rulers like Maharaj Chandrakirti Singh wrote in Manipuri language to Lord Duffirin congratulating in Manipuri language at the time of his succession to the office of Viceroy and on the victory over the Burmese. In 1891, Bir Tikendra Jit Singh wrote to J.F. Mitchell for seeking permission to engage lawyers from Calcutta in his trial case in Manipur.

"Manipuri literature like other literature owes much inspiration to Sanskrit literature for model. Inspite of that it has preserved its independent entity for about 2000 years and Manipur developed a literary mode of its own which is essentially native. It appears that ancestors of the present-day-Manipuri were highly cultivated section of the Tibeto-Burman speaking people taking much interest in literature. The language was always patronized by the Royal Archives and proper incentives were given by them as many kings did elsewhere in India." 61

Dr S.K. Chatterji says that 'Manipuri script is of Indian origin.' 62 It is very ancient and most of the works have been done in Manipuri. Another eminent personality Dr Kali Nag 63 was of the opinion that "this script was as old as pre-Asoka period and now in Patna museum, and the books are found in Manipuri script. The earliest epigraphic evidence recorded in the script is represented by the copper plate of king Knoongteckcha dated Saka 721 (709 A.D.)

61. Singh, N. Khelchandra, A Short History of Manipuri Literature
63. Nag, Kali, Expansion of Aryan Culture in Eastern India (1968) quoted by R.C. Majumdar
Profound faith in love of God is a remarkable strain in the Manipuri religious literature. The earliest gem in Manipuri literature is 'Ougri' composed in verse comparable only to the vedic hymns in quality and purpose. It tells about the creation of the universe and it was recited at the time of the coronation of 'Nongda Lairen Pakhangba' who was the founder ruler of Manipur. Now-a-days it is customary to recite it at every coronation. 'Ougri' is also recited with some changes either for wishing prosperity of the kingdom or for the destruction of the enemy. It is a poem of considerable length with an impressive description of the splendour of the sun. Another gem is 'Khencho' which is an arachaic composition. It is a chorus song in 'Laiharaoba' festival. Similar is the case with 'Sana Lamok', sung to evoke the spirit of Pakhangba, the presiding deity of the king. Numit Kappa is written about the shooting of the sun. Another creative work is Panthoibi Khonsul of the ancient period. In another poem, 'Hijam Hiras', there is a beautiful example of human feelings attributed to the objects of nature. The poem is inspired by the feeling of the motherland, the kings men selected a grown up tree for the construction of a royal barge. In this poem there are numerous lyrios, folk songs and ballads which really display the richness of the old poetry, rhyme, meter and imagery. Prose composition also went almost hand in hand with poetry. 'Poireiton Khunthokpa', an account of an immigrant in the ancient period, is a specimen of perfect prose. It is said that he participated in the coronation of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. The 12th century saw the growth of the secular narrative poetry in the shape of ballads. The first and most romantic one came from Moirang. The Moirang Saiyon story about incarnation has
a historical basis and is highly poetical. The seventh and the last Saiyon are that of Khamba and Thoibi. It is a true and devotional romance between two lovers of medieval India. This story is like that of Shirin and Farhad, Laila-Manjnu and Nal-Damyanti. The love is not based on the physical attraction of each other, rather it tends to be Platonic in essence. The greatest of the Manipuri Romances, Khamba and Thoibi, is quite an epic in its theme, treatment and proposition. This has been written in seven volumes by the poet Hijam Anganbal. His adaptation of the last Saiyon (incarnation) story has been described by Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji as "a huge poem of 39000 lines in Meithel roll a popular theme, old ballads about which in Manipuri are still sung viz. the love of hero Khamba and the princess Thoibi 12th century hero and heroine of the most popular story of Manipur."64

A new kind of folk poetry came into prominence in Manipur probably during the second half of the 12th century. It was in the form of ballads of war and chivalry. The poems in such works as Ahonglon and Ningthoulol came in the category of such poems describing the triumphant return of the king from the battle field with trophies, booties and praises for the heroic achievements, process and fame. They are believed to have been composed in the 11th century. They are simple yet spirited compositions, mostly anonymous and they contribute richly to our Indian literature.

'Lairon', a collection of 50 lyrics on the beauty and short life of flowers, is a work of the 17th century. Something like veiled eroticism and a highly sophisticated style is added during the period

64. Chatterji, Suniti Kumar, A Manipuri Purana, 1954
of the king Bhagya Chandra. Some lyrics of this type have been incorporated in one of the dance sequences of the Laiharaoba festival with a Maiba dressed as Tangkhul Naga youth singing them. These poems are capable of being interpreted in various ways, giving wholly different meanings. Some times the same verse can be interpreted in half a dozen or even in more senses, and with certain modifications they can be chanted in different notes. These Ballad singers can be seen everywhere in the villages and towns chanting these songs to the beat of Dholaks. They are called Penshakpas. In the second half of the century this type of singing became a business. In these songs all qualities of rhymes, assonances and alliterations are maintained. In many poems there are three lines stanzas, every word ending with the third line has "Se" as its last syllable; in other verses similarly "de" has been employed and in some other poems words with the vowel "1" only have been used.

We find that two distinct material forms became well established in Manipuri literature, one is the "helpee pahot" metre which is a sort of rhythmic verse with short lines of seven syllables and is employed in narrative poems; and the other is "helpee-thanglee" metre of five syllables which is used for lyric compositions, particularly of devotional nature.

There are some poems, mentioned in prose works like Ponviron Sekning Pudil by way of illustration, which represent some of the charming lyrical verses describing the beauties of women in lovers' vocabulary. Some of these poems are simple but profound in burden. The prose works like Lampha Lamok, Ponbiron sekning, etc. are devotional and descriptive panegyrics. Some of them are also humorous as is 'Paosa'. It appears after a keen observation that
the whole of the Manipuri community possesses a high type of aesthetic taste. They are lovers of songs, dance, and drama. The natural surroundings have made a great impact on their poetry. They have depicted their feelings, experiences and traditions in musical garb. The traditional songs are assets of centuries representing many generations. The songs are sung by the common men from all walks of life. Most of these songs are sung on occasions like marriages and spring festivals for the appeasement of irate gods and goddesses and also inculcation of the evanescent character of human existence better known as 'Khulang Isei Naosum Isei, Louta Isei, Phousi Isei, Kumdam Isei etc. There are songs of fisherman talking about different seasons and personal woes. In folk songs the stories of prince and princess are narrated. These ballads, marriage songs, harvest songs, season songs and other variety of folk songs are properly tuned and represent the life of the people.

"Besides these works of the fine literary merit, there are other books dealing with various subjects like history, Philosophy, origin of the clans, medicine, minerals, welfare, administration, duties of kings and laymen, flowers and orchards, the art of digging channels. Thus it appears that ancient writers were quite adept in prose as in verse but the names of these writers of pre-Garih Niwat period are not known. It is also due to guild system prevalent here that the credit has to be shared collectively."65

Medieval period

The introduction of Vaisnavism in Manipur influenced the Manipuri literature very much. Most of the composition is related with the Mahabharat, the Ramayan and the Vaishnava gods. 'Dhanni Sambita' a historical work of the period of Maharaja Gambir Singh was written by a Manipuri in Bengali. In this period 'Samjok Ngamba', 'Takhel Ngamba', 'Oowa Ngamba', 'Khaki Ngamba' were written and they gave a military account. Two romantic tales 'Chothe Thangawai Pakhangba' and 'Sanamanik' were also written. An account of the religion of Maharaja Bhagyachandra was written under the name of 'Chingthang Khomba Gangachatpa'. Apart from this, there are translations of the stories from the Mahabharat and the Ramayan. In the medieval period new ideas were assimilated. The effect of these ideas can be traced on the social and religious planes. During this period Manipur developed a high aesthetic sensibility due to the influence of Vaishnavism. On the other hand, they lack in the insistence and emphasis on the worship of Vishnu which is a predominant factor in the writings of the scholars and poets during the reign of King Garib Niwaz (1709 to 1748). In this way they were precursors of the Vaishnava revival and they paved the way for ushering in the great outbursts of devotional music and poetry during the reign of the great king. Masterpieces of the Indian literature were thus translated in Manipuri. Angom Gopi was the best translator among the Manipuris.

Much of the literature during this period is related with fasts, feasts and festivals, rites and rituals, mantras (magical charm), medicine, astrology, etc. and is mentioned as a part of Manipuri literature up to 1891. These Mantras have great similarity
with the vedic system in which spiritual powers were immersed.
Through mantras one can be cured of snake-bites, ghosts, demons and
various diseases. Shibika and Laichinlon both on astrology, Hidaklon
and Thebaron on medicine, are all dealing various branches of human
knowledge.

Modern period

The British rule in Manipur brought a complete change to
the native sensibility of Manipur. In 1910 the Manipuri language
was introduced as a medium of instruction. The earlier writers still
continued to write in the native idiom. These writers were Nakar,
Jatiswar, Bankabhihari, Gokulchand and Hookijam Chaitana.

Poetry: Modern poetry can be divided into two parts, i.e., the
group of Dr Kamal and his contemporaries. Dr Kamal is rated as a
famous poet of modern times. His poems are very popular as they are
modern in character. Chaoba writes of the past glories of Manipur.
Anganghaa Singh is another famous Manipuri writer who wrote about
Khamba and Thoibi and 'Singei Indu'. Dorendra wrote Kan 'sans Badha.
He made new experiment by using Sanskrit words.

In recent times the poems of Prof. Minikentan Singh are new,
and understanding and appreciation of his poems require a background
knowledge old Manipuri myths, traditions and legends and also
mastery over Manipuri language. The poetry of Prof. Nilkanta is
characterised by intense emotions, felicity of expression and
scholarly and intellectual modern idiom. Other poets of this group
are Padam Kumar, Shri Biren, Ibomcha and Ibohal.
Drama: The theme of modern drama is patriotic, pathetic and mythological. Plays written are Sati Khongnang and Aroppa Warup of Lalit Nar Singh, Noirang Thoibi of Dorendrajit, Bir Tikendrajit of Bira Singh, Chingu Khongang Thaha of Bironmongal, Mainu Pemcha of Shyam Sunder, Kege Lamja of Bormani can be rated as modern dramatists. Prof. Minaketan Singh has written 'Sita Banvas'. The foremost contemporary dramatist is G.C. Tongbra who combines the wit of George Barnard Shaw. He has also written one act plays. Among the contemporary dramatists the names of M.K. Binodini, Ramcharan, Kanhailal Tolhal and Netrajit may be mentioned. There are numerous translations of dramas available in Manipur. Abhigyan Shakuntalem, the famous play of Kalidas has also been translated in Manipuri and is taught as a text book in the degree Manipuri course.

Novels: Translations from other languages have contributed much to the real modernisation of Manipuri language mostly novels both in spirit and form. Novels of Bankim Chandra, Sharat Chandra and Rabindra Nath Tagore, Prem Chand, Bhagwati Charan Verma have been translated in Manipuri.

In this way, we observe rich cultural heritage of Manipur. In ancient times they followed the same system of education as it was in the other parts of India. Through education we transmit our culture to the future generation of our country, and school plays an important role in this respect. Prof. Nagar (1972) says, "The school should pass on our related old culture of India with modifications and adjustment of the future needs to the next generation. Simply passing on the old the dogmatism and superstition is non-transmission of culture. In many countries
such things are prevailing because of ignorance, poverty and illiteracy. In this way the responsibility of transmission of culture lies with the educational system of State and country. As education is a state subject, it becomes a solemn duty of the State to achieve this aim. Therefore culture is the part of education and education is the part of culture and the agency which transmits it is the school. It is difficult to put them in watertight compartments. Our culture has always influenced the educational system in ancient times. In modern times, education has brought revolution in our thinking which has created a change in our culture. Education has given a sense of liberty, freedom and fraternity. J.S. Mill (1912) says, "By liberty, was meant protection against the tyranny of the political rulers." The social set up was such that the rulers exploited the weaker ones. When there was excess of it, the protection of the members were required. This new change in culture, came on account of education or enlightenment as it was done by J.S. Mill. He says, "The rulers were conceived as in a necessarily antagonistic position to the people whom they ruled. They consisted of a governing body or a governing tribe or caste who derived their authority from inheritance or conquest,...." It indicates that the change came because of culture and education.

In ancient times, education was aimed at giving religious instructions in different faiths. The sole purpose was to make a

66. Nagar, R.S., Principles, development and Psychology of Education (1972)


68. Ibid.
person capable to read the religious books himself. Our religious books like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Vedas and the other holy scriptures are originally written in Sanskrit and thus a student in the Vedic period was supposed to learn Sanskrit language. Similarly Arabic and Latin were learnt to study the Kuran and the Bible. A man who could recite his religious books was considered to be learned. In this way education and culture are related. As it has been discussed earlier, culture of Manipur valley was not different from the rest of India and thus education can also not be different from rest of India.

The next question is, what should be the real spirit of education in Manipur? How should education in Manipur be different and yet be one with the main stream of national life? The second question has been answered partly above but it shall be discussed again after examining the spirit of education. Ordinarily, everybody wants to maintain his cultural identity and we have discussed that the culture of Manipur and India is one and the same. The only thing which is different is the way of life, personal philosophy and the way of doing things. Up to this extent one may be allowed to maintain one's cultural identity and it means personal habits, social status of women, ornaments, manners and customs, different local games and amusement, festivals and local gods, dances and songs and language and literature, should be maintained through education. Education should weave them in such a manner that it does not stand in the way of emotional integration. Our constitution recognises the unity in diversity through federal structure, and thus variety of cultures or ways of living do not come, in way of emotional integration. Thus the real spirit of education should lie
in the variety of culture. In the words of Mao-Tes-Tung (1956, "Let hundred flowers bloom together." It means the coexistence of others. When others shall exist, let there be, their culture. The question of clash shall not arise as there shall be adjustment between them. Now today in India, the cultural adjustment exists but the need of the hour is to weave out a common fabric for all nationals. This kind of fabric shall be the real spirit of education in Manipur. In it, we shall include all such relevant matters as discussed in earlier part of the chapter. The school curriculum shall maintain balance between our national heroes, national economy and national culture on the one hand, and on the other hand curriculum shall enlighten about local heroes, local economy and local customs. In this way, there shall be correlation between them and the national fabric of culture shall have variety as well as unity in various respect as has been discussed earlier. In future, culture and education should be related in the manner as it is discussed earlier.

The present system of education is very much divorced from culture. If we see the curriculum of higher secondary schools except 'Manipur Readers' we do not see any thing local in the curriculum. Only the co-curricular activities include local materials. Thus education should have enough local materials, so as to meet the local aspiration on one hand and on the other emotional needs of the country. In this sense the education in Manipur can be different and yet one with main stream of national life.

69. "Important Quotation from Mao" published by Chinese Embassy (1962)
70. Manipur Reader, Book III, 1963