Religion is a spiritual process. It is man's faith in a power beyond himself whereby he seeks to satisfy emotional needs and gain stability in life in the face of manifold forces which threaten him. In its developed forms it presents a reflective view of the world as a whole. Manipur supplies us with an example of the beginning and growth of a religious philosophy. The traditional religion of the Meeteis is an immeasurable advance on the crude animism of the primitive culture. It reveals to us a stage of polytheism where the deities retain traces of their original connection with the objects of nature. But there is a movement from the many to the One. All the gods and goddesses are conceived to be modes or manifestations of one Ultimate Being. The multiplicity of Lais is resolved into the unity of Tengbanba Mapu. Monotheism is attained in Manipur, not by a mechanical identification of the different local gods but by seeing through the veil of the manifold the spiritual unity which underlies it.

The early Meetei thinkers were not unmindful of the philosophical problems of the origin and nature of the world. Their religious consciousness was lifted into the region of speculative thinking. The whole world is pictured as emanating from one being of incomparable vastness and immensity, pervaded by darkness. This principle called Atingkok-Amamba is
an eternal manifestation of the Supreme Lord. The world is not a purposeless phantasm, but is just the efflux from God, a manifestation of the substance of his being. Such a conception lays emphasis on the principle of continuity. There is no break in the transition of the world-ground into its consequent. God is the necessary source of the world. The created world, though it is distinguished from God, has no being apart from God and is sustained by His will. Man is created by God in His own image. He has a mortal body and an immortal soul. The body is constituted by different elements manifested in the universe. So long as there is equilibrium of the elements, there is no illness or death. But man is not merely a body. The body without thawai and a shadow is inert matter. God dwells within man. The very macrocosm is in the microcosm. Our consciousness, our breathing and our activities are all part of the cosmic process. Everything has come from one infinite source. The life-force represented by thawai has come into existence from that source, and from the same source have come all the elements. Thus the whole universe is nothing but the expression or manifestation of all the powers that exist potentially in the absolute Being.

The cult of ancestors has left its mark on the whole religious life of the Meeteis. Some awe of the ghosts of the departed prevails among the people and has left its impression on many burial customs. But the deliberate worship of ancestors is something higher than this superstitious terror.
Each yek has a set of traditions and has a deity peculiarly its own. Yek deities are generally believed to have had human existence at some point in the past. The religious importance of worship of ancestors and tribal gods lies in the social motive which works behind it. It lends sanction to tribal loyalty and mutual obligation. It establishes an essential kinship between man and his god and realises a fellowship between all the members of the tribe.

We should not represent the ancient Meeteis as full blown arm-chair philosophers engaged in metaphysical speculation about the reality as a whole and man's place and function in it. Their response to the environment was reflective as well as emotional. For this reason, in the traditional religion of the Meeteis there is intermingling of crude beliefs, blind superstitions and religious faith of a higher order. This is evident from the different rites as practised in the Meetei society. A multitude of usages has developed out of the magical view of things. The world becomes crowded with gods and goblins. Diseases of men and catastrophes of the world are traced to angry spirits. The employment of spells, incantations and curses, the practice of divination and taboo, the uses of charms - all these require specially qualified persons, maibas and maibis. As a consequence, the traditional religion of the Meeteis has become an amalgam of sublime pantheism and mechanical sacerdotalism.
The Meetei religion is not sectarian. It is not a mere structure of creeds but is a living force that brings out all the manifold experiences into a system. The sectarian religion brings divisions among the upholders of different faiths. But the Meetei religion transcends our narrow individuality and small interests. The word 'Meetei' signifies mankind. Thus the religion which the Meeteis follow is the religion of man which is universal in outlook and is not built around any particular personality.

When Vaishnavism became the state religion of Manipur, there was in the beginning, resistance to change on the part of the devotees of the traditional cults. The resistance was more political than doctrinal. The spread of Vaishnavism was slow. It was achieved only by a compromise with the ancient faith. Traditional Lais were brought into the Hindu pantheon. Hindu deities were absorbed into the Meetei culture. As a consequence of this process of assimilation Manipur exhibits today a remarkable synthesis of the indigenous faith of the Meeteis and Chaitanyaite Vaishnavism. No conflict is felt between the two. All the important lais are worshipped according to prescriptions drawn from both the traditions. The Hindu festival of Rās Līlā is based on the traditional dances of the Lai Haraoba. It is the genius of the Meeteis that has raised this stylized dance to the domain of a very high artistic expression and has thus produced one of the beautiful traditional schools of religious dancing in the world.