Chapter VI

DEVELOPMENT OF LITERATURE AND FINE ARTS UNDER VAISNAVA INFLUENCE

Vaisnava culture in Manipur manifests itself in such artistic creations as music, dance, drama, painting, architecture and sculpture. To evaluate the impact of Vaisnavism an appraisal of these artistic creations including language, literature and educational policies of Manipur became an imperative.

Education primarily consisted of the male's learning military techniques, physical exercises, use of arāmbāi, sword, spear and riding of ponies. The duty of a male member was to engage in war, and to catch the wild animals. The females had to learn singing and dancing. They were engaged in marketing and weaving. Military education was self-imposed. After receiving the preliminary knowledge from the fathers or brothers at home, one was expected to live under the guidance of an expert teacher. In 1704 A.D. King Lōyāmbā established the man building clubs to train people in many physical activities.

But the people had a system of literary education. The māibās and māibus have been, as it were, its repositories and have been considered as monopolising teaching. The māibāsanglan is the college of māibās and deals with all matters

2. See fn. 1.
concerning the history of the sāgēis (clans) and conducts divination, magic, rites and worship of the Umamālis.³ Formal education produced some leading personalities in medieval Manipur, personalities like Konok Themgrā, Khomnāngthābā. It inculcated the spirit of perseverance, honesty and respect for the guru. The places of learning of those days was the grove of Umamālis. From the sylvan schools flowed the philosophy of Manipur. Thus her civilisation has been, by and large, the product of woods and forests. It started as a rural and not as an urban civilisation.⁴

With the introduction of Vaisnavism as the official religion, King Garibnīvāz played an important part in the growth of Vaisnava education. Educational policies are generally framed with an eye on the religion. It was slightly different from the one which prevailed in the preceding years.

The Loisang (official institution), village māndaps and the house of the teacher were used as centres of diffusion of Bengali and Sanskrit knowledge. Persons who know the sāstras or who pretend to be so imparted the knowledge. Instruction is carried on informally. Teaching profession was mostly hereditary.⁵


5. See fn. 4.
The curriculum included Sanskrit grammar, Smrti, Kāvyas, the Vedas and the Vaisnava literature about Caitanya. The method involved recitation, repetition and discussion. The guardian of the student have to pay the teacher in money or in kind at the end of the course. There was a custom of the pupil's doing the menial work for the guru.

The normal duration of the course for story telling, singing and medicine was from five to ten years. Vaisnavism made an important contribution to the intellectual life of the people before the introduction of the English system of education. Vocational subjects like music, dance, astrology, medicine and Vaisnavite theology were keenly studied by the people, and from Manipur went out gurus and pandits to Cachar, Hojāi, Tripura and Burma to spread its culture. To Manipur came the scholars from other parts of India and Manipur became a stronghold of Vaisnava arts. Titles were conferred on the scholars by the kings of Manipur. It is said that the great musicians and teachers of Manipur went to Nabadvip and Vrndāvana for the search of Bengali Padāvalis and Bhakti Rasas of the Vaisnavas. King Chandrakirti sent Pandit Benimadhob Sarma to Kāshi for specilising in the Vedas and Hindu Scriptures. Generations of kings, Bhāgyachandra (alias Jayasimha), Gambhir Singh, Chourajit, Mājī and Chandrakirti extended their patronage to the Sanskrit and Bengali studies, Gauḍiya sects, dance etc. The institutions owed their existence to their patronage and liberality.

6. W. Yumjao Singh, R.A.S.M., p.20; See Ch.V.
7. See Ch.V (Reign of Chandrakirti Maharaja); CK, pp.5-6.
Most of the Sanskrit and Bengali texts have been translated into Manipuri. The pandits and ojās possessing good hand-writing undertook the responsibility of copying the sacred Vaiṣnava works. They wrote with a pen of bamboo on the Meithel Che (Manipuri made paper which is a coarse but very durable material for writing). Agormak and palm leaves were also used for the purpose of writing. Inks have been prepared from the Kālī of the lamp or from charcoal. Boys were made to write the letters on boards made of dust. Good copying was valued and encouraged all over the country.

One special feature of religious education was that many people gathered at certain places and listened to the singing and interpretation of the Bengali prayers of the sacred lore through the twin processes of Lāirik Hāibā and Thibā (translating the verse and reciting the verse by two men jointly). As the emphasis was on Sanskrit and Bengali, learning the Meithel script suffered a setback.

Great advance was made in the western system of education during the reign of Śrī Chandrakirti Singh. The man who influenced the educational policy of the king was Sir James Johnstone, the then Political Agent of Manipur. He is credited with having established an English school which still stands as

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a memorial to him. Another English school was established by Major General W. F. Nuthall in 1827. Nuthall's school was endowed by the munificence of Bengal Government. It contained books, maps, and other requisites to the value of Rs.400/- or Rs.500/-. It functions up to 1837 and was on the decline within a short time since the people thought that they would lose their caste if they knew English. Few people took to the study of English language and literature.

The school established by James Johnstone gained prominence and was upgraded as a middle English school in 1883-84. It is even extant to-day under the name of Johnstone Higher Secondary. In the same year, three primary schools were established at Sekmai, Mao, and Thoubal with state finance. Medium of instruction was in Bengali. The Bengali character was used among the people.

Language and Literature

During the period between King Jayasimha and King Chandrakirti many religious books from Sanskrit and Bengali were translated into Manipuri. The work which was started by Garibniwaz was continued by Jayasimha and finally concluded in

11. See fn. 10.
the reign of Chandrakīrti. On Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism becoming a state religion in Manipur, Bengali, Brajabuli, and Sanskrit words got inter-woven with the archaic Manipuri words which were spoken there. Manipuri scholars started to adopt Bengali and Sanskrit as the medium of their literary works in most cases.¹⁴ The purāṇas were expounded in Manipuri and heroic tales were invented by the poets to fortify the converts psychologically.

Manipur owes much to Vaiṣṇava movement for its literature. Learning of Sanskrit and Bengali became a necessity for the literary and artistic creations. The language used in this period is more difficult than the one used in the books during the time of Garibniwāz.¹⁵ The Manipuris also wrote in Sanskrit and Bengali languages. Some kings themselves were scholars. Many verses and books were attributed to Jayasimha, Śīja Lāiroibi, prince Nabananda etc.¹⁶ The intellectual activity was channelised through - 1. Religious works, 2. Historical works, 3. Philosophical works and scientific works.

Translation and copying of scriptures by individuals became a great pre-occupation with the people. A valued work in Manipuri is the Virātātparva of the Mahābhārata. In 1730,


¹⁶. See fn. 15.
prince Nabānanda had the honour of translating the *Virataparva* of Rāmākrṣṇadas. The language was improved by Mayengbā Vṛndāvana and Wāhengbām Madhobram in the style typical of this period.¹⁷ Longjam Parsurām was written *Āśvamedha* from the *Mahābhārata* wherein we found the fight between Arjuna and Vabruvāhana. The language is very much the 19th century style.¹⁸ In the reign of King Jayasimha a Manipuri translation of *Janmejaya Sarpa Vaiñā* (King Janmejaya's snake sacrifice) appeared. Yumkhāibām Chandra Singh produced *Āstakālā-līlā* (Śrī Kṛṣṇa's round the clock-wise sports) which was later followed by *Mathura* *Virah* (lamentation of the Gopīs on Kṛṣṇa's departure for Mathura).¹⁹

A full translation of the Epics, the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, *Visnu-purāṇa*, *Śrīmālī, Sastras, Gītā, Gītagovinda* was achieved during the reigns of GambhĪr Singh and Chandrakīrti Singh. The study and translation of *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, Vaiṣṇava padāvalis and lyrics from Bengali to Manipuri was the 19th century undertaking by Manipuri Vaiṣṇavas.²⁰ They are popular throughout the Manipur Valley. Practical Vaiṣṇavism has produced some Sanskrit and Bengali writers. A Sanskrit work on music and dance called *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Rāsa Sangit* is said to have been written during the reign of King Jayasimha.²¹ Another Sanskrit work emunctating

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¹⁷. See fn. 15.
¹⁹. Loc. cit.; also see fn. 15.
²⁰. See fn. 14.
W. Yumjao Singh's collection includes an Assamese translation of the twelfth book of the Bhāgavata of about 1800 A.D., at which time King Jayasimha was staying at the Ahom court in Assam. It is said in the Cheitharol Kumbabā that a thakur who took along with him 60 people, 29 horses, and five copies of the Bhāgavata Skanda came to Manipur on Sunday, Hiyāngēi/October-November 7, 1889 A.D. He came from Assam to preach the Bhāgavata cult.

The historical works were cultivated with great zeal. Apart from the chronicles, there are voluminous literature which contains historical information of great merit. Some of them are written in prose while some in verse. The royal chronicle, Cheitharol Kumbabā is said to be a recast of the earlier book in 1780 A.D. by orders of King Jayasimha. It is considered to

22. Vide A. Brajabihari Sarma's translation with an English introduction by E. Nilakanta Singh published by Sri Sri Govindaji Nartālaya. Whether this is Jayasimha's book or not, scholars of Manipur have different views on this question. We cannot settle this controversy.


24. Ibid., pp. 21-22. The book is written on agarbāk or the bark of Agar tree (A quilaria Agollocha).

be the authoritative diary of the kings of Manipur. Another book of note is the Vijaya Panchali alias Garibnivaz Charit completed in 1782. To prince Mantri (name of a man) Krtichandra Lairik-yengbä and Tulasi Narayana can be attributed this work during the time of King Jayasimha.

Connected with King Jayasimha were Chingthangkhomba Vrndavana Chatpa (King Jayasimha's pilgrimage to Vrndavana) and Chingthangkhomba Gangā Chatpa (Jayasimha's pilgrimage to the Ganges). Most of the words used in every sentence have Sanskrit and Manipuri mixture.

Panegyric of kings whom the people wished to extol include Samuphabā (successful elephant ordeal of King Jayasimha at the Ahom court), Khahi Ngambā (conquest of Khasi-Jaintia hills by King Gambhir Singh). Another work of great historical value is Mavangangamba wherein an unknown author has recounted the story of the fights between Manipur and Cachar. Through it, we catch a glimpse of the personality of Garibnivāz. The bards


27. CK, p.125; This book is written in Bengali language. It was revised during the reign of King Chandrakirti. The text was translated into Manipuri and published by L. Mangi Singh and L. Mani Singh in 1966.


sang the exploits of the kings and warriors. There are books of historical ballads like *Govinda Nirupan* (the making of Sri Govindaji) *Chandrakirti Jilachangba* (King Chandrakirti's meeting with the Viceroy on the bank of the Barak river) and *Khongiom Parva* (battle of Khongjom in 1891). The writers selected for their descriptions the patriotic deeds achieved mostly by Kings like Jayasimha, and prince Koireng alias Tikendrajit in these ballads.32

Since the introduction of Bengal Vaisnavism scriptures in Bengali language became very popular. The Manipuri pandits had a good command over both Bengali and Sanskrit. They made translations of *Smrti* works in Manipuri.33 Various branches of Vaisnava philosophy were cultivated in these periods. The interpretation of the *Gita* as developed by the Vaisnava Gosvāmīs was much used in Manipur. Sanātana Gosvāmi's *Bhāgavatamrтан* and Jiva Gosvāmi's *Sanharva* with some Manipuri gloss were being intensively studied.34 A truely Vaisnava spends the latter part of his life by practising the psychological developments as enshrined in the Rasa literature, i.e., *Bhakti Rāsamrtta Sindhu* and *Ujjala Wilamani* of Rūpa Gosvāmi.


32. The point has been gathered from the ballad singers, like Bhagiratha Singh, Late Bolai Singh, etc., who enjoyed reputation in Manipur.


34. Infra, Ch.VII; I had an opportunity of examining with parts or fragment of these Vaisnava works along with Manipuri translations in my house.
From the writings left to us, it is clear that the Vaisnava Philosophy was very strong among the intellectuals. Some of their writings were either lost or destroyed during the Burmese devastation of Manipur. Some of them have been discovered at present from the Manipuri immigrants.35

Wāhengbam Madhobrahm Singh wrote the Lānglon, a short manuscript of ten leaves which the authorities compare well with the Cānvaka śloka or Nīti Satakarma of Bhatṛ Hari. It is a treatise on morals mixed with maxims. It is a philosophical work of high order and is described as the pearl of scholastic literature of Manipur which is remarkable for the light it throws on the custom of the Manipuris before they accepted Hinduism.36 Another work called Amābchā can be ascribed to this period. It is in the form of a dialogue between the preceptor and the disciple and the important points have been elucidated with examples. It teaches the doctrine of Karma, the essence of which was the denial of the existence of Heaven and Hell. It explicitly describes that happiness and misery are the results of one's virtuous and vicious actions. The language was written in archaic Manipuri.37

Dhananjay Lāibu Ningba (a fiction which is different from our modern novels) and Sonāmanic (king of Benares) can be

35. Information supplied to me by O. Bhogeswar Singh and R. K. Sanahal Singh, who are important writers of Imphal.


placed in this period. The former is in the nature of a story found in Sanskrit literature. W. Yumjao Singh observes that Wahengbam Madhabram Singh is credited with the authorship of Sonamanto. 38 Khumbong Maniram Singh is said to have flourished in the reign of King Jayasimha. He simplified learning of Sanskrit grammars by the Manipuris. He set the model for teaching Sanskrit through Manipuri medium. 39 His small commentary on some parts of the Sarasvat Vyakaran is well known. King Jayasimha alias Bhagychandra honoured him with the title of Chandra Siddhanta in view of his effective work in culture.

The Manipuris had an excellent knowledge of astrology and astronomy. Nongsemei Vidyā is the Manipuri name for astrology. An institution called Pājítī Loisang was attached to the palace for conducting the astrological studies. An astrologer of this institution has to forecast the future of the year and to predict whether any earthquake is likely to occur in the country. 40 Sivajña, a Sanskrit work on astrology is written by the Manipuris in this period. Jyotisa Chandrika was recognised as the authoritative book of the people of Manipur since the time of King Jayasimha. Khumbong Chandra Siddhanta, who flourished in the court of Jayasimha was also an astrologer of note. A new era called Chandrabada is ascribed to him. His works are well known but they are not available. 41

It is of interest to know from the Cheltharol Kumbabā that there is a conflict between Jvotisa Chandrika and Vēchaspati of King Vikramāditya on astronomical table. Some pandits were not satisfied with the form of the latter. In order to resolve the difference, junior Khumbong Siddhānta, Pandit Devakisor Singh wrote a treatise on astronomical table during the reign of King Gambhir Singh. The book is called Laghu Jvotisa Chandrika, a comprehensive book on astrology and astronomy. King Gambhir Singh became pleased with this book that he appointed him the chief astrologer in his court.43

In the field of medicine we find clear trace of the influence from the Ayurvedic system. Great stress was laid on the importance of studying the treatise for the list of medicinal herbs. Medicines for different diseases were also prescribed. Progress was also achieved in the use of iron, copper and other metals.44 In this period there is mention of maibās appointed by the king for his Loisang.45 Among the most important books produced at this time was Thebarol, a treatise dealing with the Tantric way of curing diseases. It is of interest on account of its classification of diseases into nine categories.46

42. See fn. 41.
43. CK, p.230; N. Khelchandra Singh, Aribā Manipuri Sāhityagī Itihās, pp.218-221. The chronicle gives the controversy between the astrologers of Manipur and Nabadvip on the question of the occurrence of eclipse. From its study, we know that the astrologers of Manipur gave the accurate prediction.
44. Nandalal Sarma, Meitrabāk, pp.XXXXVI-XXXVII.
45. CK, p.182.
An interesting work on the taming and treatment of elephants was written by the people. The science of taming and catching the elephant was cultivated widely in these centuries. Tigers were a great danger to the inhabitants. Mantras for controlling the tiger were composed from Tantric sources. The treatise in old Manipuri on cattle rearing is Salkon which was compiled at this time. It also deals with the aspect of kindness to be shown to the animals. 47

Songs

There were a number of folk-songs and devotional songs connected with every phase of life in the pre-Vaisnavaite days. We have occasions to note that they were full of devotional and lofty ideals. In the period covering from Chārairongbā to Garibnivāz and then the period from King Jayasimha to Chandrakirti singers and musicians have been in the forefront of the fine art. New trends of creative arts came in the wake of the Vaisnava movement enriched the realm of music. 48

King Garibnivāz is credited with having stopped the singing of vernacular songs by a royal proclamation. 49 The latter kings seem to be less serious of this policy. Thus the singers and gīgā succeeded in applying the old tunes to the

48. Supra, Ch.IV.
Vaisnavite songs and the maibas and malbis were allowed to employ Manipuri songs in the worship of Umamālāś in spite of the exalted songs in Bengali. 50

In 1858, a song was composed in Manipuri and King Chandrakirti has accepted it as the national anthem of Manipur. 51

Medieval Manipur (1750-1900) deserves special mention for its sankirtan literature. Leaving apart the ballads (Pena and Khulang Isel) the national anthem, most of the compositions were in Brajabuli, Bengali, Sanskrit and Maithili as languages of the Bhakti. 52 Lyrical compositions of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa poets, i.e., Chandidasa, Vidyāpati and Jayadeva are as popular as they were in their own time in Bengal. Jayadeva's Dāsa-vātara in the Gīta-govinda has become part of the daily ritual of the temple of Jagannātha in the car festival. The Padakalpataru, Padamrta, Samudra, Lālā and other compositions of Govinda Dās and Jñāna Dās, Kṛṣṇa Dās and Narottam too inspired lakhs of Manipuri Vaisnavas. 53

Local works such as Kṛṣṇa Rāsā Sangita and Govinda Sangit Lilavilās are the great treasures of Manipuri music. 54 Caitanya type of religious ecstasy was more appreciated in Manipur than in his native Bengal.

50. See fn. 48.
52. Nandalal Sarma, Meitrabāk, p.LXV.
54. Nandalal Sarma, op. cit., p.LXIV.
To the Manipuris, Sankirtan is a way of life. It is, by far, the best and powerful expression of Bhakti-rasa. In the devotional songs, the religious life perhaps finds its consummation. It is based on the principle of love for Krsna (Krsna-rati) as applied to the religious life. They shed tears in the grief for Radha in her role of abhisarika navika. 55

The Manipuris make Sankirtan part of their being so that in the life cycle of an individual and this festival days, they are exemplifying and demonstrating this art. 56 King Chandrakirti (1850-1886 A.D.) have been munificent to musicians. Sixty-four Bhakti-rasas of Bengal School were sung and danced in sixty-four sessions of Sankirtan at the palace. 57

The establishment of Pala Loisang which means a group of dancers and musicians is a major contribution to the artistic development of the country. Evidence goes that it was established in 1776 A.D. by King Bhagya Chandra and was improved and maintained by his successors. Here are taught music and dance of Hindu tradition. New inventions have also been made in course of these centuries. 58

Pala Loisang is the official institution which controlled and represents the cultural activity of the state. The king appointed experts as the guru of the learners to be their guide or ojas. The Guru Pranalika was a feature of Manipur

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56. See supra.
culture. The people recognize a long chain of gurus in song, pung and dance. Extraordinary honour is accorded to them. The task of keeping and preserving purity of culture was entrusted to them. The institution has preserved many rare texts, some of which have still to be edited and published.

Devotional songs composed by an individual must get the sanction of Pālā Loisang if they are to be sung in the temple. The Manipuris had also composed songs in Bengali. We have some mention of the Bengali songs of which King Jayasimha and his daughter are the composers. There is another Bengali song composed by an unknown Manipuri.

There are probably two kinds of Meithei kirtan, first there is the BangdeLPālā, the details of which are described in Chapter IV. It is represented by Leibak machapālā and Sevak pālā; second, Amoubā pālā or Nata pālā (new kirtan) is generally


60. "jaya jaya Rādhā Krṣna Govinda Syāma sange rasa ranga
nikunja mandire, madana mohana mohini dhani Rādhe jaya jaya
Rādhe Govinda deva srila Bhāgyachandra nripabara sebo."

"Victory, victory to Rādhā and Govinda
With Syāma in the arbour of temple.
Rādhā, the enchantress of Madanmohana
is playing sentimentally,
On ye waiting
Emperor Bhāgyachandra"
The Bengali song is taken from L. Ibungohal Singh's Introduction to Manipur, p.62.
considered to be kirtan proper. Here is a systematic account of this second type of kirtan. 61

The anoubā pāḷā falls into two categories, i.e., Nupa pāḷā and Nupi pāḷā. The Nupā pāḷā may assume the following forms such as Jhāl pāḷā, Nāma pāḷā and Singthetpā pāḷa on account of their functional implications. There was a pāḷa of small boys titled Nupāmachā pāḷā. The main types of Nupi pāḷā were Rāsesvarī pāḷā and Jalakeli. According to strongly authenticated tradition, the first was attributed to King Jayasimha and second to King Nar Singh. 62

The kirtan party consists of fifty or sixty singers. Two punyaiṣības (drummer of Manipuri mrḍangā) and moibungkhomba (conch blower) are invariably necessary in connection with it. 63 Nata pāḷā employs many possible combinations—the singing of songs, ringing of cymbals or kartāls, beating time by the feet and the movement of the body.

62. Surchand Sarma, "Sankirtan and Choloms", The Classical and Folk Dances of India, p.40; M. Jhulon Singh, Viśaya Panchāli, p.26; cf. T. C. Hodson, The Meiteis, pp.70-71. T. C. Hodson invented a new way of classification. "The departments known as palla ha, palla yaima, palla naha, sebok palla and yaripok chaba discharged duties in connection with the daily ceremonial of kirtan of the Royal family. The palla amanha seems to have been the choristers and musicians of Govindaji, while the Ramji palla, the Mahabali Thakur palla and Abdalī Prabhuji palla, the Kamakhya Devi (?) Kamakhya Devi) ministered into their Deities."
63. See fn. 62.
The male puts on garments in the form of trikatsa, i.e. tying three knots at three places of the waist. One knot is gunja (the frontal part), hanging from navel to the knees to the second called phirei, a knot at the left side of the waist and the third (namei) at the waist bound back tail. The dhoti is passed round the waist up to half its length and the other half is drawn between the legs and the tuck at waist behind. The portion of dhoti is pushed inside the left side. They use white turbans which cover half the ear and a good part of the brow. F. Bowers observes the Manipuri turban in this way. "These turbans add considerable height and grandeur to the imposing appearance of the pala group. Drummers and singers must wear the turban on entering and leaving the pavilion. Singers remove the turbans while actually singing." The women use pungou phanek and wrapper. They load themselves with ornaments from head to foot to show their status in the society. Only ladies of royal clan used to participate in the royal pāla.

We have many ojas who were responsible for the development of kirtan. Khumbong Chandramani represents a fine form of Vaisnava culture. He composed songs in praise of Sri Govindaji. Akham Rasānanda set the musical tune of Govinda das and Astaka. Loitam Rasiklāl set the musical tune of Lālsā. The first

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ojas of pong for the new kirtan were Dhaniram, Premananda and Langlenhanba. The first part of pong chalam was invented jointly by Sorokhaibam Selungba Singh and Haorokpam ola.  

R. K. Chandrakirti was sent outside Manipur by King Chandrakirti for studies in musical instruments. The king invited Gourachand gosai, Brahmananda gosai to teach Manohara sāl in Manipur. He also insisted on the compulsory singing of Hindustani music on every ekādasi. It went a long way in popularising Manohar sāl.

A teacher called Huidrom Jhulonmacha whose musical knowledge was very much respected by the king who awarded him with the title of 'Jivan'. Kirtan has given rise to Pung chalam and Kārtal chalam. These along with the female kirtan will be discussed later.

Ragas and Rāginis

Kirtans are governed by the rāga. Rāga is a very popular concept among the singers and drummers. The alāpas, content or melody in the rāga of the nata pālā begin with the words tā-ri-nā-tē-na. It is said that the works of Raghunath

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68. See fn. 66.
69. See fn. 67.
Bhatta and Kavikarnapur were the source of Manipuri rāga. The Meithei Kirtan instills compassion, selflessness, etc., into the people. Bhakti is associated with it. Meithei Kirtan makes use of six rāgas and thirty-six rāgīnīs as set forth in the Govinda Līlāmārti and Sangīt-dāmodara. The rāgas and rāgīnīs which are embodied in Garga Samhitā are not in use in Manipur. In Kalāwati, the rāgas are determined with reference to the position of sā, re, gā, mā, etc. The singers never mention any hrasva, dirgha and pluta which would make the criteria worthy of attention for a kalāwati singer. A Manipuri musician maintains the hrasva (one matra), dirgha (two matras) and pluta (three matras) of the three words tē-rī-nā. It is borne in mind before one determines the chanda of a particular song.

Great stress is made on the particular melodies which should be sung at a particular time. The time for the rāgas and rāgīnīs were classified according to the activities of Radhā and Kṛśna. The relation of rāgas to the prahāras of the day and seasons of the year make some scholars contend that Meithei Kirtan is Bhakti-oriented. Rāsa forms the central part of kirtan and the rules regarding the prahāras can be violated. The people have their store of legend concerning the effects wrought on man and even the nature. A particular rāga can yield better plants when the plants are subjected to music. It is conducive to the growth of flowers. Meghā-rāga can change

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71. S.A.M.M.C. (MS), pp. 41-44; Atombabu Sarma, Sarsvat Vyākarana, Imphal, 1942, pp. 3-4.
72. See fn. 71.
73. Cited to me by Gulapi Singh in the seminar when I put the question in the deliberations of the music seminar, Imphal, 1969.
74. See fn. 73; O. Gosvami, The Story of Indian Music, Bombay, 1961, Ch. VI & VII, pp. 54-68.
the set course of nature - it brings life giving showers to
the parched earth from the sky when there was no possibility
of rain. It also summons Kākyen (skylark) in a hall where
a drummer entertained the people with the sounds of pung
(Manipuri drum). 75

Tālas used in the songs are similar to the different
cycles of Indian texts. Common talas employed are ekta, 
duita, tritā, charita, pancha, brahamāta, etc. 76 In
consonance with the spirit of the times, ojās set fresh stan­
dards in sanchāra (rhythm patterns as evolved in a fixed mea­
sure and following the playing of rāga) of song and pung.

Manipuri Musical Instruments

The use of drum and cymbals dates back at least to
Pākhambā and Khuyoi Tompok (1500 A.D.). It was stated that
Tai King, Koh-Lo-Fung sent a cultural troupe composed of dancers
and singers from Burma, Assam and Manipur to China. Eighteen
kinds of musical instruments have been used by the Manipuri
artists in China. 77 Further, the association of King Kāyambā

75. See fn. 70; Surchandra Sarma "Manipuri Nata" (MS),
S.A.M.M.C.

76. Soibam Lasman Singh, "Meithei Pungi Hourakpham",
S.J.L,N.M.D.A. (MS), pp.66-68; Darshanā Jhaveri, 'Tala System
of Manipur', S.A.M.M.C., Surachand Sarma informs us that some
MSS concerning the Tāla system of Pung of an hitherto unknown
author, Padmāt Suramdrā and a book on Nata pālā called
Sangamrataśār have been found.

77. The Classical and Folk Dances of India, Introduction
(to Manipuri Dance); W. Yumjao Singh, An Early History of Manipur,
p.27; R. M. Nath, The Background of Assamese Culture, p.87.
with the mouth-organ player from the king of Pong is too well-known to need introduction.78

The musical instruments used in Manipur can be divided into four kinds, viz., Pung (drum; leather instruments or Anaf-đha), Sel (Jhana, metallic instruments or Ghana which are of percussion), Bāśi (blowing instruments or Susira) and Pena (string instruments or Tała).79

The first kind consists of those which are beaten either with sticks or with hands. They are of different shapes and sizes. They are made of woods like Jack-fruit, Olive and Twāng tree (Gamelina arborea (Bot)) growing in Manipur. The hide of the cow or mithun is used for producing sounds. The Yālbung (12 cubits in length and face), Harāopung and Tānyeipung (22" in height and 23" in width in diameter) are some of the peculiar instruments used in Lāi-harāobā and other festivals.80 The Manipuris had adopted Khol, Dholok (a wooden frame with 8 sides), Dafat and Dhol (a round big drum) to Vaiṣṇava dance and music.

The second type of instrument is made of brass which is used to mark off rhythm in music and dance. Among Vaiṣṇava circles (bell-metal gong) Selbung, Māngang (big sized cymbal), Jhāl, Mandilā (for females), Kartāl (for male), Ramtāl (used in Holi and Monohar-sāl kirtans) are in common use. The different

78. CK, p.10; Kh. Kaomacha Singh, Manipur Itiyrtta, pp.15-16.
79. This is my classification. I have taken materials from the following: (1) O. Gosvami, The Story of Indian Music, Ch.27, pp.291-316 and (2) E. Nilakanta Singh, "Some Musical Instruments of Manipur", S.A.M.M.C., pp.30-34.
80. See fn. 79.
Sals (a kind of drum) are designed on the same principles and differ only in some points. The third kind consists of wind instruments played by controlling breath with the help of one's lips and singers, Bāsi (flute with seven holes each), Moibung (conch - two conches to be blown together at a time), Pera (a metal horn-like a trumpet), Khung (pieces of logs are hollowed out for producing sounds) and Tharāochi (copper-made instrument) come under this category.

The fourth type is the Penā which is the most typical and developed instrument in Manipur. It consists of a piece of bamboo inserted into a cocoanut-shell. Hairs from horse's tail are used for strings in both Penā and the bow. The bow is called Chesegjeng. Small bells are attached to the bow. The bow has a bulb like a curve made of iron at the top. It is adorned with a beautifully embroidered cloth. The instrument is used as an invariable accompaniment of the Lai-harāoba.

The Sitar, Tablā, Violin, Talpura, Khanjuri, Pakhawāj and Harmonium are being increasingly used during the time of Maharāja Chandrakirti Singh.

Dances

There are according to one classification, six kinds of dance. These are - (1) Lāi-harāoba, (2) Nata Palā kirtan,
The Lai-haraoba and Rasa-lila are the most important forms of Manipuri dance. The former is used in worshipping the pre-Vaisnavite deities and the latter in worshipping the Vaisnavite gods. The question then arises as to whether or not, the Lai-haraoba in its present form is a Vaisnava dance. King Jayasimha took upon himself the task of converting the early traditions then obtaining to meet the need of Rasa. The origin of Lai-haraoba is lost in obscurity. It does not to-day exist in its primitive form that prevailed in the remote past. In theory the two performances are the same. Some of the similarities have been striking. Play of god and goddess, Parakiya-rasa (illicit love-play), the conception of sami and asha panthis, the dance as a means of self-realisation for the dancers and the onlookers are common to both. We shall confine ourselves to discussing the influence of Lai-haraoba upon Rasa-lila. The Lai-haraoba is the basis of the modern Manipuri school of dancing. All movements can be traced to some section of it.

In the chapter on the introduction, we had occasion to describe the Lai-haraoba festival. It is faithfully kept to this day, in its Hindunised form by the people. According to

85. A tom b a p u Sar ma and M. Amubi Singh, The Brief Description of Manipur Dance, pp.4-7 & 9-11.

86. See fn. 85.

87. Faubion Bowers, The Dance in India, p.123.
some scholars in this field the rituals and myths of this festival are similar to Vedic belief. The hastaks, mudras, and movements in this dance are drawn from the Natyasastra. The rules which the Natyasastra prescribed are found observed in the laipou (the birth of god) and love play of Panthoibi and Nompok Nimthou. According to Atombapu Sarma this is true Bhagavata Dharma.

The Lai-harāoba is essentially lyrical and have graceful and soft movements and steps. We can divide this dance into two: Lasya and Tāndava. The former is mild and majestic. It is performed by the females. The male dance (Tāndava) is forceful and dynamic. It reminds us the militant role of male in early days.

Apart from the Maibi dance and rituals, there are single dance, pair dance and group dance in the Lai-harāoba dance. The code of Manipur enjoins the performance of male dance to the males and females dance to the females.

In Lai-harāoba the people are seen hobbling along in traditional dress. Strict decorum is enforced on the people, lest a certain part of the body may excite sexual feeling or

89. See fn. 85.
90. S.A.I.Y.C, pp.21-23.
appeal to the person of opposite sex. The people do not expose the part of the body from below the neck down to the feet.  

The men use turbans and dhotis. The women use phaneks (a kind of loin cloth), transparent inaphis (scarf). The antiquity of phanek can be dated much earlier. The embroidered garland of lotus and bees on its border testify to it. Married women cover their heads with cloths which touch their shoulders. Unmarried ladies wear a crown which is made of red velvet from which the small silvers of gold hang down the forehead.

Kirtans

Under the influence of Vaisnavism, the sankirtan forms of dance were evolved. The performance of sankirtan is preceded by the following features: (1) Invocation to the images of Râdhâ and Krsna, four earthen pots or Châttas representing Caitanya, Nityananda and Advaita and bhaktas, (2) Beginning of adhibâs in the mandali where the kirtan is to be performed, (3) Worship and contemplation of guru, (4) Upásâhâ of the five Vaisnava saints and bhaktas. The preceding night is spent in

92. H. Kulabidhu Singh, Manipuri Dances, pp.4-5.
93. See Ch.I, Sec. 4; Atombapu Sârma and M. Amubi Singh, The Brief Description of Manipuri Dance, pp.5-6.
94. P. Beherja, Folk Dance of India, Allahabad, 1959, pp.44-45. According to Manipuri code the people use mythological costumes. Ornaments like necklace, bracelets and rings are used. Anklets are avoided.
singing glories of god and listening to the stories, and
(5) Night vigil of the owner.

The sankirtan hall (nata mândap) having a stage
(rangsthala) in the centre is erected in a suitable place. It
is supported by bamboo pillars and covered with foliage and
branches of trees, flowers, creepers and paper-cut designs. The
pillars and the ceiling are ornamented with white clothes and
other decorations. The pandal or central pillar is set apart
for the pūja. Generally, every temple has a nata mândap
attached to it. The dimension, design, auditorium and arrange­
ment of the seats are determined according to the religious
texts. The arrangement of pūja articles evoke the creative
spirit of the Vaisnavas of Manipur. A piece of cloth is
placed on a rounded plantain leaf and is used as the asana for
Lord Krsna to sit on. Circular banana leaves cut into decorative
designs with lamp, pān and fruits are kept near the Tulasi plant.
The arrangement of flowers and fruits amidst the cups of plan­
tain leaves kept in shape by bamboo-pins imply the artistic urge
of them. A flag is dedicated to the lord to remove obstacles in
the performance. Four earthen pots are placed in the four cor­
ners of the māndapa to indicate places of worship.

96. Nayana Jhaveri, "Raslilas of Manipur", S.A.I.V.C.,
pp.22-23.
97. Loc.cit.
98. E. Nilakanta Singh, "Classical Heritage of Nata Move­
ments", pp.67-72, Journal of Oriental Institute, Vol. XVIII,
No. 1 & 2, September-December, 1968.
The artists form a choreography in the centre of the pavilion. Two mridanga players sit on the left and right of the temple resting on the knees and toes. Next to the mridanga players on the left side stands the Dohār followed by others. The other side is formed with Isei Hanba (the male singer at the middle of the circle). They show dandavat prānāma (prostrate) to the assembly before taking their seats.

After the distribution of the incense and flowers and clothes to the artists, the Māndap Mapu (President) utters the following words (dhvani) "Ballap premase Kaha Śrī Rādhā Kṛṣna, Balaha Prabhu Nityāi Caitanya Advaita kahata sānta sādho madhurasa vāni hare hare." The mridanga players start with the bola (stroke of syllables) "Ten Ten Tā Tāk Taang" representing the Caitanya and Nityai, the founders of Gaudiya sect. The conch-player blows the conch when the pung-player plays his first movement. It is followed by the alāna (improvised introduction to a melody) of a rāga - tā, ri, tā, nā and then by bolas and striking of Kartālas. The main singer sings songs, viz., Sabha Vandana, Guru Vandana, Gourachadrika and Padavali songs in succession. Such songs are necessary in all occasions. In some colourful Kirtans the Brāhmaṇs perform dipāhuti in four corners of the māndap and throw kabok (mudky) over the bhaktas.

99. See fn. 62.
100. See fn. 98.
101. See fn. 95.
The mridanga players make use of Tintāla (Trikutaka) seven beats and two stresses, Tānchep (Chaturashrajati Ektāla), three beats and one stress and Mankup (Tyashrajati Ektāla) three beats and one stress.

Rājamela has, by and large, become an important chqlm in Manipuri Kirtan. It is a kind of dance performed by the palas with seven beats and two stresses in the Vilmvita laya. Rājamela consists of six parts, namely, Bedighāata, Lambighāata, Malhou or Malbung (the beginning and important part of the mela), Setughāata, Mel Aonba (the middle of the mela), and Mel Athābā (the finishing part of the mela). Bedighāata, Lambighāata and Setughāata are the rhythm patterns of the mela. At the stage of Bedighāata all the musicians including the two drummers move anti-clockwise up to a full round and prostrate with each other on the ground and then start singing. At Lambighāata the body bends a little. It passes to Malhou (real Rājamela) a definite pattern of rhythm in the vilamvita laya (slow-tempo) with seven beats and two stresses. This is followed by Setughāata which leads to a movement called Mel Aonba in Madhya laya (medium tempo). The Mel is finished in Mel Athābā with a fast tempo (druta laya). In it all people in the assembly shout stobha (sounds with no particular significance). The action pertains to Garuda who carries Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The singers represent

102. L. Ibungohal Singh, Introduction to Manipur, pp.112-113; Darshana Jhaveri, "Tala system of Manipur", S.A.M.M.C., pp.4-16.

this Garuḍa. Their movements depict how the bird soars high into the sky with the two murtis of Radha and Kṛṣṇa. The sound of the flight is represented by the stobha gānas. More is thus meant than what is appeals to the senses.

The closing part of rājamel abhinava is associated with some taboos. It is just a dance; songs are precluded. No sitting is allowed for the stobha is to be shouted by the singers and the audience all standing together. It is mentioned in the Śāstras that persons who enjoy this dance of the audience by sitting will be born as a cripple in a number of births. In ancient times, the audience stood up and helped the nātas by their clapping in honour of the dance. 104 With the coming of the Mayāṅgas this tradition almost disappeared among the Manipuris. The audience's participation was replaced by the blowing of conches as a short-cut device. In course of Kīrtans we come across the songs describing the birth of Gourāṅga, Madhura rasa of Radha and Kṛṣṇa, Nityānanda and six gosvāmīs. The singers remain seated in a distinctive posture towards the close of the sankīrtan. The president concludes the assembly. 105

The nata pāḷa artists have a good musical talent which they use to advantage in singing the sacred songs and in injecting emotional elements into the audience. The audience weeps and lies flat on the earth before the drummers and singers as a mark


105. See fns. 98 & 104.
of their humality. It serves as a prologue to the Rāsa-līlā and no religious festivals are complete without it.

Kartāl chalam and Pung chalam are originally arts of sankīrtan. At intervals pieces of home-spun cloth, money and pāṇ are distributed to the drummers, cymbalists and conch players on behalf of the sankīrtan holders as a part of their dāksīnā. Another feature is that many pieces of clothes are given to Iseishakpā, Dohār, Khombangbā and two mridanga players who have been recognised as having done eminent service to the Kirtan programmes.106

Pung means drum and the chalam means chalana. As a technical term it means the dance performed by two mridanga players in a nata pālā. Pung chalam has a definite role in dhumel with the performance of a hundred pung players. The different types of dhumel are enumerated below.107

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Patron Kings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mahā-dhumel</td>
<td>Kārta Mahāraj (Bhagyachandra)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nityāl dhumel</td>
<td>Mājī Mahāraj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goura dhumel</td>
<td>Nara Singh Maharāj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lairēmā (Devi)dhumel</td>
<td>Chandrakīrti Maharāj</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

No other dance has ever excited so deep an admiration of Manipur as did the mridanga tālas. The pungs articulate the sounds of thunder, the voice of birds and animals. The movement

is initially soft and joyous. It gradually gathers momentum till it becomes very vigorous. It is interesting to see how they dip and spin around on one foot. It involves a brilliant display of steps, heaps, squats and turns. 107

The mridanga players put tilaka marks on their forehead and put on garments in the form of "trikatsa" (the tying of three knots at three places as decreed by the Śāstras). In place of the usual turbans, the singers put on special turban (kovet) on the occasion. They make use of gloves in beating the drums. Of special interest in their chalam is the flicking of head and dropping of the turban into the row of surrounding singers. 108

Nupa pālā which is a form of Meithelī kirtan came to be identified with kartal or cymbal dance. The pālās dance with cymbals. Kartāls which are large cymbals are played by men. The dancers with Dohār (imitator of chief singer) as its leader performed the rhythmic movements by striking the cymbals. The movements are determined by the tune, rhythm and sentiment of the song. The dancers produce the gait of an elephant, a swan, a cran or a peacock. The movement relates to head, neck, shoulder, arms, waist, thigh and knees and feet in accordance with the specific points of dance. 109 In appreciating an unique dance

107. See fn. 106.
like Kartāl chalam Faubion Bowers writes "The chief contrast in the choreography of the dance is between the angular side-steps of the dancer's feet and the delicate swaying and rounded curves of the arms. As they wave the vibrating Kartals, the air is showered with their after tonal resonance. The trailing tassels weave sineous abstract designs in space. The dance ends conventionally with the dropping of the bells, clapping three times, picking the bells up again and then repeating the three claps with the bells."

An unusual feature of kirtan is the dance performed by the female dancers. It is called nupi pālā which may be of two kinds according to its nature and place. An example of palace nupi pālā is Rāsesvārī pāla and Jālakeli pālā, an example of village nupi pālā is seen in the māndaps in connection with Hindu festivals such as Jhulan yātra, Devī pujā, etc. This is a dance with small cymbals in which the whole village takes part. King Jayasimha and King Nar Singh are the protagonists of Rāsesvārī kirtan and Jālakeli pālā respectively. The more outstanding of these two is the former.

Rādhā is Rāsesvārī and Rāsesvārī kirtan is sponsored by King Jayasimha in about 1750. The death of descents of Jayasimha and religious event are commemorated by this kirtan.

110. F. Bowers, The Dance in India, pp.128-129.
About forty females belonging to the clan of King Jayasimha participate in this kirtan. They sit in the rāsa mandal square with two drum players. Two conch-blowers are requisitioned for invoking the god.

When the conches blow towards the end of the kirtan four seniormost princesses who take their place in the centre perform Chāli Sābā, i.e., dance of steps. No amateur or outsider can adopt this artistic disposition. Very few achieve it. Its importance can be but understood through the Manipuri saying: "māgi chāli phajei" (her chāli is good). The princesses slowly describe a semi-circle just at the time of repeating one chāli by the four heads. Chāli in this kirtan is what matters most since it creates a deep mood in the spectators. 112

Rāsa-līlā

Rāsa-līla of Manipur is a word to conjure with. The country has international recognition as a centre of Polo and Rāsa-līlā. The dance of Manipur has been highly appreciated by eminent Indians like Rabindranath Tagore. The Rāsa, the epitome of Manipuri classical dance is religious. There are certain taboos out of which the following deserve notice according to the ancient codes. 113 Rāsa is to be performed after mid-night

112. See fn. 110.

and continues till dawn. Secondly, it is performed at specific times in specific places, viz., mountain-sides and far-off temples. Thirdly, being of religious background, the Manipuri Vaishnavas are allowed to enter the mandal in course of the Rāsa-līlā and non-Manipuris have to stand outside it. Fourthly, when the dance starts, the area becomes sacred and no one either the owner or one in the audience can move close to the dancers. Fifthly, it is considered to be a sin to talk or to walk-out at the time of Prānāma Bhāṅgimā (second Bhangima) the spectators cannot move their body. They must remain steady meditate on god all the time. There is a rule concerning the age limit of the male child playing Kṛṣṇa in the Rāsa. He should be a child of six or seven years so that Kṛṣṇa's love affairs with the gopis can be freely brought out in the dance. The age of the gopis is not restricted. By Rāsa-līlā we mean the amorous play of Ṛadha and Kṛṣṇa with the milk-maids of Vṛndāvana. It reveals the sublime and metaphysical love of Ṛadha and Kṛṣṇa and of gopis' devotion to Kṛṣṇa, the full incarnation of God. The Manipurī's reluctance to speak about their Rāsa has been the source of misinterpretations and misrepresentations. Some of the orthodox people take it as an exclusive treasure and Ṛadha and Kṛṣṇa (heroine and hero of the play) on this view is the personal hus-
band and wife, intimate and private. Some accepting the philosophical sense argues that for the Manipuris, it is a process

114. F. Bowers, The Dance in India, p.131.
of self-realisation. It is part and parcel of Vaishnavite religion. Kṛṣṇa represents the inward soul and gopas and gopis the outward senses.¹¹⁵

It is held that Kṛṣṇa appeared to Karta alias Jayasimha in a dream and revealed the mystic dance to him. In another vision the Lord commanded the king to engage his own daughter, Śīja Lairoibi to play the role of Rādhā in the dance. King Jayasimha was the father of Rāsa-līlā. He carried out his promise to Lord Kṛṣṇa with the help of pandits well-versed in the dance.¹¹⁶ He improvised the Mahā-rāsa as a form of worship of the Lord through dance and music. A new technique was evolved by him by making a wise selection of all dances then prevailing in Manipur with the touches of what were commemorated in Vṛndāvana. He has substituted the following names for those used in Lāi-harāoba. 1. Tintāla (seven beats and three stresses) for Simkaklon (Nomdon Jagoi), 2. Rājmel (seven beats and three stresses) or Leitai Nomdai and 3. Tānchep (three beats and one stress) for Paring Lāmsāng. Several elements must have contributed to the evolution of this Rāsa dance. The kings showed great skill in mastering all branches of learning, specially song, dance and drum-beating.¹¹⁷

Lāi-harāoba has been transformed beyond recognition into Rāsa by him. The nucleus of Rāsa developed from the form

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¹¹⁷ S.J.N.M.D.A., pp.55-56.
in the classical Natya-sastra and Abhinava-darpana. Rajmel and Tancheep were common to all types of Rasa-lila.\[118\] The discovery of manuscripts such as Sangita-damodara of Subhankara Kavi, Sangita-Sara-Sangraha by Narhari Chakravarti, Sri Krsna Rasa Sangit (written during Gambhir Singh's reign) and Govinda Sangit Lila Vilas (written during the rule of Maharaj Jayasimha) points beyond any trace of doubt to the nearness to the lines of ancient Indian tradition with some local orientations.\[119\]

According to another opinion Manipuri Rasa was immensely influenced by the Sattra School of Assam. The resemblances found between the two types of dances, namely: 1 common costumes, 2 the chali dance and 3 the prevalence of boys wearing female costume in the role of gopis tend to such conclusion.

Dr M. Neog is very explicit, in this opinion when he says "The school (Vaisnava dance) has some features in common with the Manipuri style, recognised as one of the four all-India classical schools, and one could surmise the impact of the Sattra school on the Manipuri rather than the reverse, as the former is the style to have evolved and established itself earlier, for the Manipuris had their Vaisnavism with which their classical dancing is associated in the 18th century."\[120\]

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118. See fn. 113.

119. S.A.M.N.C. (ES), pp.4-5; See the above paras, in connection with literature and songs.

120. M. Neog, (Ed), Aspects of the Heritage of Assam, Gauhati, 1959, pp.46-47; Sankaradeva and His Times, p.272 may be consulted.
We are inclined to the opinion maintained by Dr. M. Neog since the Manipuri dance was an indigenous phenomenon which had its source in the thought of the Lai-harābā. In its evolution it underwent the influence of Sāṅkaradeva. Manipur and Assam were in contact with each other and many ojaśas found their way to Manipur through this contact. We have evidence that Jayasimha's long stay in the Ahom court produced a cross-fertilisation of culture. It is stated in Manipuri chronicles that he was in the capital of Assam (Gargaon) for as long as eight years. The chronicles of Assam in their turn mention how he was enjoying Vaiṣnava dramas in Assamese while in the capital. But it is not known how far he was influenced by the Assamese performances in making programmes. The king felt that it was his sacred mission to popularise the cult of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa through dance and music. It appears by this time that the Manipuri dance felt the influence of Sattra style of dance. Prof. Mohan Khokar of Saṅgīt Natak Academy and Prof. Santideva Ghose of the Visvabharati hold similar views.

The Manipuri Rāsa can at best be divided into the following kinds:

Mahā-rāsa ... A great rāsa celebrated on the full moon of Kṛttika (December)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rasa</th>
<th>Schedule</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kunja-rāsa</td>
<td>Arbour rāsa performed during Dasara on the 8th day of the month of Aswin (November)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasanta-rāsa</td>
<td>Spring rāsa played on the full moon day of Chaitra/March-April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitya-rāsa</td>
<td>Every day rāsa performed at any time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diva-rāsa</td>
<td>Daytime rāsa performed in all seasons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nartana-rāsa</td>
<td>Rāsa performed on appointed days only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asta Gopi and Asta Syāna</td>
<td>A rāsa held in April.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first origin of the three dances are attributed to King Jayasimha and the rest evolved during the time of Chandrakirti Singh. The rāsa performances have gone through a fairly chequered history.  

The first three rāsas may be classified into two, viz., Sṛi Govinda rāsa and Vijay Govinda rāsa according to another aspect. In the former there was no Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa performs the abhisāra. The images of Rāsesvārī (at first Sīja-āśīroibi) and Govindaji were placed at the centre of the rāsa mandala. It is a dance with two images in the centre and the gopīs dancing around them. In the latter, persons appearing in the role of abhisāras are present. Most of the rāsas performed in the villages belong to the second type.  

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123. F. Bowers, The Dance in India, p. 133; Cited to me by M. Amubi Singh when I personally discussed the matter with him.  
The Mahā-rāsa has been set forth particularly in Rāsapanchādhyaḥ of Bhāgavat-purāṇa. On the full-moon night of Karttika, Lord Kṛśna reaches Vṛndāvana to perform Rāsa-līlā. Rādharā and the gopīs maddened by the love of Kṛśna, enchanted with the melody of his flute left their home and danced with the Lord till they became mad with the joy of dance. It also contains the Bhāndi Pareng Acohoubā and Vṛndāvana Pareng as the first part wherein the arrangements made by the gopīs to welcome the Lord is depicted. In the second part (actual dance) the gopīs including Rādharā thought out of their pride and fortune, that Kṛśna loved them most. The third part depicts the disappearance of Kṛśna from the gopīs as well as from Rādharā. The separation is highly lamented by them. Rādharā and the gopīs, jealous and love-lorn made tedious search and implored the trees, birds and animals to find Kṛśna. Rādharā threatens to kill herself in the celebrated lyric aria called Gopigita. The world stood in danger of collapsing under their grief. Coupled with their longing is the humility. The fourth part depicts the reappearance of Kṛśna to meet all of them, the gopi's premsevā towards Him, Questioning Him by the gopīs. His answers to their questions and a Jalakeli. He multiplied Himself and danced cosmic rāsa with each. It shows how God hankers after true love and how egoism cannot be the means of self-realisation. The dance closes with a message of Kṛśna urging them to return home.

Kunja-rāsa depicts the daily play of Radha and Kṛṣṇa in the Kunja (a bower) of leaves and flowers made by their companions. The pretension of Radhā to spurn the amorous advance along with the separation is precluded in this dance. The scene is based on the Govinda Lilāmrtam. After performing abhisāra (setting out to meet the Lord), they give a vivid description of Vṛndāvana and dance Bhangi Pareng only. The rupa bārnān (description) and prārthana continued after the Bhangi till the end of the dance. It ends with the offering of Kunja-ārāti in which the whole audience takes part.  

Vasanta-rāsa is the dance performed by Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā and other gopīs in the spring season/ Sajibu. There is an injunction which is laid down for the performance of this rāsa among the people. It means that the village rāsa is not allowed unless it is first performed by the palace. On the full moon day of Chaitra/ Sajibu which makes the spring festival of colours and holi, the dance is conducted to commemorate the approachment between Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā after a painful separation. Jayadeva in his Gitagovinda gives the best account of Vasanta-rāsa. The chief feature of this dance is the emergence of Candravali, a rival of Srimati Rādhikā whose claim for Kṛṣṇa has been of constant interest in the Gaudiya Vaisnavism and even more particularly in Manipuri Vaisnavism. It consists of the following items:

1. It begins with the singing in praise of Vṛndāvana by the
śutrādārās to be followed by abhisārs; (2) The next portion is constituted by aberkhal; (sprinkling of vermilion), Kṛṣṇa's love for Candrāvali, Kṛṣṇa's dance and Rādhā's resentment and leaving of the rāsamandal (3) The third part pertains to Kṛṣṇa's discovery of the blue veil which Rādhā had thrown away in her jealous fury. Kṛṣṇa makes advances to her with the help of Lalita and Visākhā. The last part deals with the scene where Rādhā angry, because of his relation with Candrāvali pretends to spurn his advances. Kṛṣṇa in his plea to be forgiven speaks, "Dehi pada - pallava mudāram", "I fall prostrate at your feet. Without your love I cannot live. Take pity upon me. Place your feet which are as lovely as lotus petals upon my head." Rādhā half-pacified tenderly reproaches Kṛṣṇa. Then she joins him to perform the rāsa.  

Mitya-rāsa is an addition by King Chandrakīrti Singh in which the abhisāra and happy play of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are shown in dance. The concept of disappearance of Kṛṣṇa and the separation and the reproaches of Rādhā are left out of account. Influenced by the good of the people and the spread of Vaiṣṇavism King Chandrakīrti founded this variety of rāsa which features prominently.  

There is, as yet, no agreement among scholars as to when Diva-rāsa originates. M. Amubi Singh is of the opinion that it was introduced during the time of Mahārāja Churāchand.

128. See fn. 125. In the Cheithārol Kumbāsa, p.180, it is mentioned Mahārāja Chourajit invented Vasanta-rāsa.

129. See fn. 125.
It is performed in ordinary sāri.\(^{130}\)

In Nartana and Asta Gopi and Astha Syām, there is an interesting dance between one Kṛṣṇa and eight gopīs namely, Lalītā, Viśākhā, Citra, Campakalatā, Tungavidya, Indurekha, Rangadevī and Sadesi. In the latter is shown the sport and dance of eight Kṛṣnas and eight gopīs. Nartana-rāsa is also founded by King Chandrakirti Singh. It is also performed as the usual daily rāsa on appointed days only and not on Parvayātrāmomsātsava of Śrī Govindaji. Govindaji (the name by which Kṛṣṇa is known in Manipur) is not mentioned. Such other types of rāsa, i.e., Ḩaisa, Sangi were similar to Nartana dance.\(^{131}\)

Costumes, Ornaments and Make-up

It is but proper, to say a few words about the costumes, ornaments and make-up of Manipuri Rāsa-līlā. The costume was seen in the dream dance of Kṛṣṇa by King Jayasimha who desired the ritual. In Lāṅgon Lāṅdāl (ascribed to King Jayasimha) the dresses, mode of dressing ornaments are described in detail. It is indispensable for the performance of rāsa according to the unbroken tradition of Manipur.\(^{132}\) The ornaments and make-up were created by the makers who take to the duty of washing, cleansing


\(^{132}\) S.J.L.N.M.D.A., pp.62-64.
and dressing the dances properly. A potloi setpa (a man who keeps these costumes and ornaments) rents them out to the performers. A suit of such costumes usually lasts forty or fifty years since they are seldom worn. The rāsa costume for Radhā and gopīs also is used in marriage ceremony. 133

The style of hair dressing varies with the type of rāsa. They follow some rules as far as practicable. For Mahā-rāsa the dancer's hair is done in the form of a coil at the top of the head. The Meitheis consider an image of the Buddha to be the image of God and so they put the coil of hair on the heads of gods and goddesses like that of Buddha. This is Atombapu Sarma's estimate. 134 For Kunja-rāsa the hair knot is at the side of the head while in Vasanta-rāsa as well as in other līlās, the hair is worn in a knot at the back of the head. They usually do their hair with flowers round the coiffeur. 135 Flowers form an important item in the hair dressing of Manipuri dancers.

The costume for Kṛṣṇa consists of blue silk dhoti which signifies the blue God even though he is traditionally described as wearing yellow garments (pitavāsa). His face is always painted white and not blue. In dressing up the roles of Kṛṣṇa and Balārāma the maker must observe the rule that he should

133. This point has been gathered from my personal experience.
begin from the toe and go slowly up to the head. On the head of Krsna there is a crown of flowers topped with chura (fan-like piece embossed with silver, Jari and peacock feather). Bracelets, arm-bands, anklets and profuse ornaments are in different parts of the body. He carries a silver flute tasseled with flowers.

The costumes for Radha and gopis except in Diva-rāsa which is performed in Sāri. It consists of an embroidered brightly coloured silk skirt, a black blouse, a short flair of silver gauze over the silk skirt, a girdle round the waist, and a veil covering the head serve for them. The skirt of green for Radha and red for gopis is richly decorated with coloured stripes, sewed bits of mirrors, gold applique and some patterns. In design the skirt resembles the mirrored and embroidered skirts of the milk-maids of Guzarat. The skirt is so designed as to hide the part of the body of the limbs. It is called kumin. At the waist over the top of the skirt is a wide flounce of shiny gaze. Stiffly starched it falls into large waves and extends almost straight over the cardboard lined skirt. It is called poshwan which is made of silver jari and framed mirror. It is about 5 yards in length. The blouse which they call Resham phurit is of green or red velvet. Around the head a dancer wears a thin muslin veil studded with glittering mica and gold or silver stars. The veil is of white, purple, green or

red colour. For the Mahā-rāsa the veil hangs in front and covers the entire face as well as the back. There are various ornaments for the head, breast, waist, neck and the feet. They are valuable articles of Manipuri workmanship.

Preliminaries to the Rāsa

Rāsa is performed regularly every year at the temple of Śrī Govindaji by a royal order. The ojāṣ teaches to the small boys and girls and make them perform before the Lord. Well-to-do people perform it in their houses for the spiritual benefit of their children. Auspicious timings are fixed by astrologers for the beginning and final performance of rāsa-līlā. Two to four months' rehearsal is held necessary for the same. 138

On the day which precedes the day of rāsa the people have to invoke Śrī Govindaji, the Lord of dance in Manipur. In the māndapa, the persons playing the roles of Radhā and Kṛṣṇa stand in Yugal-murti posture and the gopīs encircle them. The ojā is provided with a piece of cloth.

In their individual house they worship Sanāmahī and Tulasi plant with betel-nut, candles and fruits. They do not take fish. They perform due saṃkalpa and gaṭṭā pūjā (worship of earthen pots) in order to avoid any inauspicious happening. 139

139. Ibid (MS), p.50.
On the evening of the day of Rāsa, dressing constitutes the important item of the characters - Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and gopīs. Then they come to the dancing hall, which is arranged in the courtyard or temples or any space adjoining the houses. The stage is provided with bamboo-pillars festooned with tender leaves. Embroidered curtains, a canopy of paper, etc., decorate the stage. Illumination is provided with big oil lamps. No audience is allowed to enter the pavilion with their shoes and sandals on. They have to leave and enter it bare-footed.

The male nata pālā kīrtan which begins early in the night serves as a sort of prologue to rāsa, in which they sing songs of saints, Caitanya and Jayasimha and personages for the coming rāsa. The latter part of the song consists of the beauty of the forest retreats of Vṛndāvana.

After the kīrtan is over, the singers put off their turbans and leave the square. Pūjās by way of invocation are held in the centre of the arena. The floor is plastered with cowdung, water, etc., in order to keep the dust from rising in course of dancing. Important personages sit just outside the mandal.

The rāsa orchestra takes its place in the northwestern direction of the hall. It consists for the most part, two Pungs (drums), an Esrāz (a many-strined instrument played

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140. See fn. 139.
141. F. Bowers, The Dance in India, p.136.
142. Loc. cit.
like a Sarangi and sounding like a high tambura), flutes, cymbals and conches. Two female singers and a small group of subsidiary male singers sing the texts of Vaisnava religion which the dancers interpret through gestures and expressions. They take their seats in the north-western corner of the hall. There are songs which are intended to be sung by the dancers.  

All singing is in unison. It consists of solo, duet, and choruses which are alternated and interchanged frequently. The music preceds and determines the nature of dancing and it involves the following. In place of voice there are instrumental music of various combinations and with these, there are passages of pure dancing. Two women sutradharas sing the arias of Radha (main features of the play) in the background. Their vocal duet relieves the performances of their continuous singing. The songs are set in Tintal (7 beats and 3 stresses), Tanche (3 beats and 1 stress) and Menkup (3 beats and 1 stress) in succession. They are an indispensable character of rasā-līlā.

The singing is also done by a vocal chorus of male side singers in the dances where Kṛṣṇa is represented as an idol and is not acted as a role. They sing Kṛṣṇa's arias.

The gopīs (about 22) sing, speak and dance. Each sing solo arias or sing with others in even numbered groupings. While


144. Atombapu Sarma and M. Amubi Singh, The Brief Description of the Manipuri Dance, pp.8-9; Darsana Jhaveri, "Tala System of Manipur", S.A.M.M.C., pp.4-16.
singing they use gestures and while in reciting lines ordinary daily gestures are used. They are highly stylised in order to project their ideas.

Each dance is in charge of a Rasadhari who is the teacher, director, and conductor of the dance. He assumes an overall command of the dance which he produces. In Manipuri dance he acts as the mridanga player. In the Mahā-rāsa held in honour of Sri Govindaji for the first time, King Jayasimha acts as the mridanga player and his uncle minister Ngoubraam Sai, as the main singer of the nata pālā.

Language for songs are Sanskrit, Maithili, Brajabuli and Bengali. Songs of Vaiṣṇava poets are incorporated in the sequence of dance. In fact there is a tradition by means of which these languages are allowed to sing and no Manipuri language - a covenant which holds to this day. But they use the lāi-harābā tunes. Another thing worth noting is that śringār, or the sentiment of love is given much importance and other eight rasas are integral to it. They have also accepted the 64 variations of śringār, the sentiment of love in consonance with the rasa theory of the Vaiṣṇavas.

145. See fn. 144.
146. My own observation supported by the tradition of Manipur.
148. Cited to me by R. K. Priyagopal Singh.
We have taken Diva-rāsa which can take place at any
time of the year. It is constituted by six main sections.  
(1) Kṛṣṇa Abhisāra (Appearance of Kṛṣṇa), (2) Rādhā Abhisāra  
(Appearance of Rādhā), (3) Rāsa-līlā proper, (4) Bhangi, dance  
of the evolution of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's Tribhanga Murti. We have several  
kinds of Bhangimas, the common ones are Bhangi Pareng Acoubā,  
Vṛndavana Pareng, Prāṇama (Khurumba Pareng), Kṛṣṇa Pareng, and  
Gopāl Gostha Bhangima, (5) Malan (union: agreement of Rādhā  
and Kṛṣṇa for dance in mirth) and (6) Prārthana (Prayer). The  
same form and pattern of movements holds good of all rāsa-līlās.  
Songs, texts and movements of dancers are different in different  
rāsas, as they change the plots in them.

Closely related to the dance are the parengs which  
are performed in the rāsa. The parengs revolve round Kṛṣṇa. Our  
analysis is that Bhangi Pareng Acoubā with which every form of  
rāsa-līlā starts constitutes the major item of dance. It was  
founded by Mahārāja Bhāgyachandra (Jayasimha).  
There developed other parengs during the time of King Chandrakirti Singh.  
The difference of parengs is that Bhangi Pareng Acoubā, Khurumbā-  
pareng and Vṛndavana are in lāṣya style, whereas the rest are  
in Tāṇḍava style.

The baledictory section which synchronises with the  
rising sun is called Ārati or sacred fire worship wherein the

150. F. Bowers, The Dance in India, p.158.
151. L. Ibungohal Singh, Introduction to Manipur, pp.116-117;  
S.A.M.M.C., pp.19-20.
audience remains standing. Flaming trays of fire are brought into the arena before Radhā and Kṛsna. The gopīs run their hands over the fire and touch their faces. After it is over, they have to take a bath before entering the houses. The audience, out of the profound satisfaction, sits from dusk to dawn, all the while without taking any food. They shed tears at the performance of rāsa. They, like the heavenly creatures, weep, smile and enjoy when the latter do so. They are openly of one mind full of spiritual significance. They take the dust of the feet of the gopīs as a sacred object, formed pūjā and place it on their heads. The dust and flowers are deposited in their houses and they were used as a godhuli (a sacred thing used as a bed for the dead Vaiṣṇava) at the time of funeral ceremony. The soil on which the gopīs have trodden in course of dancing is gathered in a pot and it is thrown into the river. By the smooth performance of the Rāsa, certain predictions regarding the future of the owner are made.

The rāsa has a well-codified and definite technique. The technique is based mainly on the principles laid down by the great sage Bharata in his monumental work Nātya-Sastra. It is also based on Abhinava-darpan and Saṅgīt Ratnākar. They strictly follow the principles which have been locally evolved in Manicuri manuscripts such as Kṛṣṇa Rāsa Saṅgīt Saṅgraha and Govinda Saṅgīt.

154. See fn. 151.
155. See fn. 151.
The Satvika, Acārya, Angika and Vācikā are maintained according to the Śāstras. The mudrās (gestures of the hand) play an important part in signifying some means and they are used in a particular manner in every movement.¹⁵⁷

In the Govinda Śāngit Līlā Vilās there are two broad classifications of mudrās, namely Asareyuta Hastas (single handed gesture) and Samyuta Hastas (double handed gestures). The sub-classifications of these two mudrās are resolved into (1) Svanugata (angikābhīnaya is extremely important), (2) Anuguta (Vacika-ābhīnaya is more important than the angikābhīnaya) and (3) Gamaka (both are equally important). From the one or more abhinayas and in any one of above ways (either Svanugata, Anugata and gunaka) arise dance compositions and choreography called Nritya Bandha.¹⁵⁸

Forty fundamental movements are considered necessary for a pupil to learn how to dance. Along with the movements the bols are brought out. A bol is a syllable uttered to accompany each movement. Chāli is the name of a step which is very important in the dance.¹⁵⁹

In the above paras, we have considered the tālas connected with music. Here we will consider the tālas of dance as set forth in Sri Govinda Śāngit Līlā Vilās. The tālas and rhythm patterns range from 4 to 54 beats. When two or more tālas

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¹⁵⁶. Darshana Jhaveri, "Tala System of Manipur", S.Ā.M.H., pp.4-16.
or their Alankar pungloll (Prastar) are combined in a single composition it is called as 'Talprabhanda'. Add to this are the various elements bringing thus in the same book, names of all tālas have been recognised. It is to be noted that some of them are characteristic features of Manipuri treatment of tālas mentioned neither by texts of North India nor by other texts of South India.  

The more important tālas of the Manipuri technique are tritāla, rupak, ḫāpatāla, dodra, kaharwa, chowtāl, sha chowtāl, brahma tāla, das-kush, and others. The Bhaṅgīmas are done in Loka tāla followed by Dodra and Kharwa. The manijiras provide the timing and the mridanga or the drum the beats.  

160. See fns. 158 & 159.  

161. My observation of the Dance in Manipur. Also information supplied to me by Amudon Sharma, an authority on dance.
the aforesaid rasa, mature persons participate in the role of Nanda and Yasoda. 162

They are said to have been composed by Guru Samayrāng at the instance of Mahārāja Gambhir Singh. Ṣānsenbā and Udūkhāla are an event in the life of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana. The cow tending play of Kṛṣṇa is danced by 200 young boys of the village. They dress as Kṛṣṇa with sticks and flutes. 163

Gopāl Gostha līlā is performed in Karāṭṭika saptāmi in the māṇḍap of Śrī Govindājī. Śrī Kṛṣṇa's game, his association with pastoral boys, Yasodā's love for her son are depicted in this dance. The young Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are taught by Narada the tasks of cattle breeding. The gopās request Yasodā to send them to the task of tending the cattle in the field. Yasodā does not approve of it for fear of demons. At last she agreed coupled with Kṛṣṇa's own request. Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and the gopās perform Kanduka-kṛīḍa, ball game and dance with eclat. 164

Then they go to Tāndava forest where they fell the tree of the forest. They feel hungry and eat the fruits. Dhenukāsura, the master of the forest rushed towards the gopākas in order to kill them. Balarāma and Dhenukāsura have a serious combat after which the former kills the demon with his mighty plough. 165 Then they start playing again. Another emissary of Kamsā named

162. The arguments are mine. They are cited to me by Amudon Sarma, N. Bipin Singh when I discuss the matter with them.
163. F. Bowers, The Dance in India, pp. 142-143.
164. S.A.M.M.C., pp. 21-22.
165. Loc.cit.
Vakāsura comes there. He assumes the form of a huge raven, catches Kṛṣṇa in his beak, but Kṛṣṇa ultimately destroys the demon. 166

Udukhala (Līlā)

Krṣṇa's childish tricks and practical jokes with the gopas and gopīs form the main subject of this dance. He, in association with the gopas steals curd, butter, and milk, and when questioned, accuses some one else. He organises children's raids into the orchards of cowherds, teases and harasses the gopīs. They lodge complaints with Yaśodā against him. On hearing them, (mother) Yaśodā ties him to a Udukhala (mortar) with a rope round his waist. Krṣṇa extricates himself from the rope. He drags the mortar after him. It falls on its side and rolls after him till it gets struck fast between two trees which are uprooted and fell down. 167

The Udukhala dance is usually followed by Sansenbā but each is independently performed. The sequence and compositions are kept in their original form. Besides the Gostha līlās, there are a series of dance dramas, viz., (1) Gaura-līlā constitutes the essence of all Manipuri dances, depicting the life history of Caitanya the great Vaiṣṇava saint of Bengal, (2) Bhārata-Yudha depicting the war between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas as

166. See fn. 164.

stated in the *Mahābhārata*, (3) Lankākanda depicting the war between Rāma and Rāvana of the *Rāmacandra*.

Nimai-līlā is highly popular in the remote villages of Manipur whereas the second and third types of līlā are very popular in Cachar district. In *Gauralīlā*, Caitanya's wild career in boyhood, his claim for avatārhood of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Kīrtan singing, the conquest of Jagāi and Madhai, the two wicked brothers in Nadiyā, Nimai's renunciation of the world and initiation into Sannyāsī by Kesava Bhārati and the touching scene of Visnupriya's separation are dramatically represented. It is more or less similar to rāsalīlā except the comic interludes.

The central characters are represented by children, but the part of Jagannātha Mīsra, Sachi, Jagāi, Madhai, Kesava Bhārati, etc., are taken by professionals who assist the children in their work. The boys who participate in the Kīrtan should number about 20 or 30. Besides the līlā orchestra, it consists of musical interludes, drum and kartāl dance of the boys.

The religious-minded people of Manipur consider the Gaura-līlā to be an act of devotion and spiritual benefit when their children do a part in it. Village boys are eager participants for invoking the blessings. Arrangements for performing it are duly done by them. This has the effect of creating a

168. Bipin Singh, "Technique and Abinaya" (in connection with Manipuri Dance), *Classical and Folk Dances of India*.

169. Eye witness. Also cited to me by Th. Borajao Singh, a teacher in Gauralīlā of my locality.
devotional atmosphere. The audience is moved and loud cries of "Hari bola" ring across the mandap. 170

Vāsak and Khubāk Isei

Vāsak and Khubāk Isei are the dances for girls. The dance of Rādhā's maids, Khubāk Isei is the dance performed to the accompaniment of musical sounds made by the clapping of hands. The Manipuris perform the latter in connection with ten-day Car festival (Ratha-yātrā) of Lord Jagannātha. 171

Khubāk Isei became very popular in Manipur after the Manipuris accepted the Gaudiya form of Vaisnavism. In the Puri temple of Lord Jagannātha, where Caitanya resided for the latter part of his life, the sight of the chariot of Jagannātha threw the Gaurāṅga into rapturous mood of Rādhā who was feeling the pang of separation when Kṛṣṇa was invited to participate in the function. Rādhā fainted when Kṛṣṇa left for Mathurā in the chariot of Kamsa. The sentiment of separation is beautifully expressed in Khubāk Isei. Individual songs are also executed in it. Khubāk Isei is in two forms, i.e., the tāndava form and the lāsya form. The tāndava form manifests itself in the height of virility and lāsya form assumes artistic fineness. 172

We may regard Vāsak as a form of Khubak Isei as they have the same theme. One mridanga player is requisitioned in

170. See fn. 169.
172. See fn. 171.
both of them. Vāsak has some differences with Khubāk Iṣei. Vāsak can be held in all seasons. Khubāk Iṣei is to be performed in the car festival. Vāsak does not involve the use of clapping of hands that Khubāk Iṣei speaks about, since the pālās use mandila, small-sized cymbals.¹⁷³

Folk Dances

Manipur has a number of colourful folk dances, the most well-known of which are the Thābal-chongbi (jumping into the moonlight), dhol and tafar dance, Augrihangen, Chingkheirol, Thengkou and Khamba-Thoibi dance. Most of them have a religious background.

A Thābal-chongbi performance which begins shortly after sunset is performed during the bright full moon day of Phālguna/ March-April. Young men and women form a circle with hands joined to each other. The participants at first echo the words of one Iṣei Hanbā (principal singer) who stands in the centre of circle. The leader of the group intermittently starts "Haribola" (Hail to God) and sings religious songs, the wording of which is often a mixture of Manipuri, Sanskrit and Bengali.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ I have gathered this point from my personal experience of this dance.

¹⁷⁴ F. Bowers, The Dance in India, pp.143-144.
The progress of this dance is proclaimed for miles around by the rhythms of dholak, a common instrument peculiar to this dance. When the dance progresses, they go round jumping anti-clockwise. They may either walk straight around the circle or form the movement of a python, i.e., Lăiren Mathek Chatpā. In Lăiren Mathek participants form two or three rows according to their numerical strength and dance by walking sideways, wearing back and forth and progressing forward very slowly. Of its special movement is the swinging of the right leg over the left followed by the left leg over the right. Faubion Bowers says, "The meter is a simple four-four and the dancer's locked hands rise and fall with the swinging legs. While continuing the jumping, the circle from time to time breaks and an intertwining chain is formed which winds in and round the dance area." It has combined in itself the legends of Sanāmahi and Pākhāmbā and the birthday performance of Caitanya. Atombapu Sarma holds that the Meiteis have been observing this dance since the earliest time. In this the dancers imitate the rising of Úṣā or the rays of the day-break. Hence it is called Ke-Kre-Ke chongbi.

The performance of this dance in early times was Keiyen, in honour of God Sanāmahi who, in his anger, threatens the destruction of the world. In the chronicle is set forth how

175. H. Kulabidhu Singh, Manipuri Dances, pp.32-33.
176. See fn. 174.
this event takes place. It is related that Pakhambá, the younger son of Guru Sidabá wins the throne by the advice of his mother, Leimaren Sidabi. It is ordained by the Almighty that Sanāmahi and Pakhambá should run a race round the world seven times and the winner obtain the throne of Kamla. Pakhambá like Ganesá rounds the throne of Guru Sidabá seven times that he has done the tour. He is duly recognised as the rightful successor of the world. When Sanamahi returns the world from his weary circumambulation, Pakhambá proves to him that he had returned much earlier. When the fraud is discovered, Sanamahi is infuriated and rushes at Pakhambá. The violence begins to tell upon the world. Guru Sidabá sends nine gods and seven goddesses to supplicate Sanamahi. They encircle Pakhambá by holding each other’s hands and jumping anti-clockwise so that Sanamahi cannot break the circle. They sing songs which are in the form of riddles and the overall effect is to overcome the anger of Sanamahi. This is called Keiyen or Ke-Kre-Ke chongbi performed in an open air with two persons, i.e., Sanamahi in the role of a tiger outside the circle and Pakhambá in the role of a cock inside it. They enact the theme of attempt on the life of the cock by the tiger and the skilful attempt of the people to stop the tiger. When the person representing

178. The song runs as follows:

"Ke Krek moh mohā Yañgoi Samba Syāo Syāo."

English rendering -

Woe to traveller;
Your voice is harsh.
'Peace, 'Peace',
Peace.

Sanamahi (tiger) attempts to enter the arena, the dancers prevent him. When he succeeds in entering the arena within the encircle of dancers, the dance provides easy path to Pākhambā to go out of the arena. In the 18th century Thābal-Chongbi and Ke-Kre-Ke dance were merged with the Yāosang or Dola-yātra festival. Thābal-Chongbi dance is accompanied by certain songs of Radha and Krishna, Rama and Sita, and tales of the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa which are generally added to the already existing ones. The dancers wear no make-up and costume in it. Another aspect of Dola-yātra festival will be dealt with in connection with the religious life in another Chapter.

Thābal-chongbi dance lasts for six days beginning from the 15th Lamā (February-March) Purnima (Full-moon day) to the 20th Lamā. Night is considered to be the appropriate time for the performance of this dance. Both Ke-Kre-Ke and Thābal-chongbi appear to be performed by young boys and girls. By the length of their arms they form into a ring at the courtyard or any open air space. Persons violating the rules by performing it in the day-time and for more than six days, are punished with the sanction of the society.


180. See fn. 179.

181. This is a well-known code of Manipur. I have heard many evils and disgrace for those who transgress the code.
To bring out the difference between Ke-Kre-Ke and Thabal-chongbi, we may point out that two persons representing Sanamahi and Pakhamba are the notions involved in Ke-Kre-Ke chongbi. For Thabal-chongbi proper, this feature is absent.\footnote{182}

Dhol and Tafar Dances relate to the occasion when the Jagannatha cart is pulled through the village streets in the month of November. They are the dances with drums. Dhol is a larger and thicker type of Pung. Tafar is an octagonal wooden frame about two feet in diameter covered like a (tamboura) on one side only with a hide. The dancers stand in a row face to face with each other and with different drums. The drums are violently beaten by the drummers. These are various masculine and vigorous body movements which are mostly associated with the energetic manipulation of the drums.

In Holi, too, they usually perform these two dances before Sri Govindaji or Vijay Govindaji. Persons put on dresses of different colours which are peculiar to each party and the singers have small kartals in their hands and to the accompaniment of drum dance they strike the cymbals. The drummers stand at the centre of the party and have independent performances in the midst of holi.\footnote{183}

\footnote{182. See fn. 179.}

\footnote{183. F. Bowers, The Dance in India, p.143; also my personal experience of the holi festival.}
Among the Lai-harāobā dances there are certain war dances, i.e., augrihangel and thenkou, principle of classification being the constructive and destructive aspects of god. Augrihangel is a dance of victory which symbolises the ways and means of a good government. Both thenkou and augrihangel are performed to mark the prosperity and destruction of a particular country. The conquest of a particular country and the appeasement of a terrified deity are the occasion for this dance. 184

The entire augrihangel to which thenkou is not an exception, is an extremely sacred dance in Manipur and this is performed by the māibās and mābis when they sing the constructive and destructive song. It is said that if this dance is performed in the land of an enemy that particular village can never rise itself above destruction. Dances with swords in hands, with spears in hands and free hands are the essential trait of augrihangel. A particular movement indicates prosperity while the other movement indicates destruction. 185

Atombapu Sarma holds that augrihangel is a variant form of tāndava dance of Lord Siva. The word augrihangel is derived from the Sanskrit word angāhara (movement of the body) meaning movements of Ougri (Siva). It is similar to the body


185. The special feature of this dance is its association with Tantricism from which it has developed. In the chronicle, there are cases where the kings performed this dance, CK, p.4; F. Bowers, The Dance in India, p.145.
movements in the Nāṭya-sāstra. A popular account takes it back to the ancient people celebrating the body movements of Siva. It is said that Manipur was a part of the sea surrounded by the range of hills and its position was like the navel. Siva drained off the waters by making a hole. After this, he arranged a dance as an occasion for joy. Gods and goddesses partake of the dance. Augrihangel is that type of dance. 186

Chingkheiroirol is a dance of ancient Meithei sādhakas (spiritual aspirants) and in this the performers with naked body at an open place imitate the movements of the crows, cocks and rise of Ūsās. It is a Lāṣya type. No spectator is allowed in it. 187

Khamba-Thoibi dance appears to have been current among the people in the pre-Vaishnava period. The hero and heroine, Khamba and Thoibi of the Moirang legend have been hinduised in the Saivite form, for they are treated as the counterparts of Siva and Parvati.

It is a duet of male and female partners, a dance of dedication to God Thāmjing in the dancing ground. It is a dance which tells the story of a village youth, Khamba who fell in love with Thoibi, the princess. Khamba married Thoibi after a series of heroic feats, but it all ends in an unhappy death at the hand of Thoibi through inadvertance. The exile of Thoibi by her


187. Loc.cit.
father (loikumbā) and the coming back to Moirāng (loikābā) are also depicted in the dance and song. 188

The Meitheis avoid the last tragic part. This is probably due to the fact that evil omen will befall the kingdom. The dance along with the abovementioned forms became an integral part of Lai-harāobā. This dance though extremely romantic in Manipur especially among the Moirangs is treated by the generality as based on historical facts. The dance has been given religious value by the scholar and the pedant.

Apart from the dances, there are tribal dances of Kabuis, Koms, Tangkhuls and Khongjais. In the last part of Maharaja Chandrakirti's reign, Kathak dance was introduced by Kunjo Misri and Gopimohon in Manipur which they called "Mārbāk Jagoi". It means foreign dance. The Kathak dancers, it must be mentioned, degenerated with mere people who extorted money from the low class people and neighbouring provinces. 189 The hatred of the Manipuri gentleman class for it was profound. In the post-war days, the dancing girls held a low position. Their conduct and behaviour have something to do about it. 190

Declining trend of Manipuri Dance and Music

In 1891 Manipur was conquered by the British Government and Manipur suffered from the alien dominance. It was

188. For details of the story of Khamba and Thoibi, see J. Chatterji, Religious and Cultural Integration of India, pp.48-49.
190. Loc. cit.
passed through a short period of confusion which continued well up to the beginning of the 20th century, till the setting of the renaissance of dance and music by King Churachand Singh. The following causes were mainly responsible for the decline of dance and music.

The change of religion during the reign of King Garibniwāz was a cause which prompted the decline of dance and music. The king obsessed, by a religious fanaticism, denounced the original practice of singing and reading the Meithei script. Singing in a foreign language was accounted religious among the Manipuris. The religious conflict affords so striking an example of changing the modes of music and dance that we discussed earlier. Legend paints him as a man who banned vernacular song. His order broke down the exclusive spirit of the original Manipuri music. There was a conviction that those who sing in Meithei language would be transformed into owls hereafter in another birth if they die in the night, and into crows if they die in the day. They believed that these people would fly in the Makoi-Nugol hill and be condemned to hell. So, Manipuri dance and music had a decline consequent upon the strong efforts to root them out.

King Jayasimha has a more developed conception of the culture of Manipur than his predecessors. He adopted the love-story of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa to his own culture. He did it...

after consulting the best artists available in his day. His successors whose patronage, we have already cited, continued to take the same line. Dancing is all along punctuated with songs. But the practice of singing commentary songs in a foreign language entails, as we shall see, a great hardship. If the meaning is not known, dance loses its due effect on the performers as well as the spectators. This practice is inimical to progress. That is why the Meithel Jagoi declined in a short period. 192

The beginning of a dance in childhood is inimical in certain ways. A child is made to obey in dance without any meaning of the theory, import and significance. It often happens that he loses his curiosity when he knows these things in his advanced age. Very few can explain the dances fully. These dances being of the nature of charming and emotion, do not need the support of reason, though they cannot manage to give an account of themselves, if called to the bar of intellect. It is the reason why there is deterioration of mudrás and meaning in Manipur. Yet we have to admit that the religious aspects of these dances when coupled with song take on genuine aesthetic profundity. 193

The dances and music lost much of their prestige and glory in the Manipur war of 1891. The dancers were associated

192. See fn. 191.
193. F. Bowers, The Dance in India, pp.146-147.
exclusively with what was performed by the loose moral people. There is a social stigma attached to the dancing girls. Dancing was unpopular among some section of the people. It came to be looked upon as a vulgar pursuit. This sense which prevails at an existing level of the then society has often impeded progress to a new level. 194

Drama

It is generally held that for centuries, līlā, viz., the popular form of drama continued without any break since the time of creation, to be performed for amusement. It is regretted that the dramatic technique of ancient Manipur have not, so far been, written down. In case they are written by some exponents, these are not accessible to us. There are references to representation of heroic deeds of King Khuyol Tompok (middle of the second century A.D.) mask plays to Tāsthimmāng (262 A.D.), etc. There is also evidence that stories of the Rāmāyana were performed with opera in 410 A.D. To King Kyāmbā in 1467 A.D. are ascribed the opera performances of Prahlād and Chandrajini. 195 Technically the period from 410 A.D. to 1748 A.D. may be taken to be the years wherein the opera held its sway over the minds of the people.

194. See fn. 191. Cf. It should be noted in this connection that the revival of Manipuri Dance began a little later. King Churāchand introduced the use of vernacular language in sankirtan and other līlās. He adopted many means for development of Manipuri dance by honouring the ojas.

The art of improving the settings and decoration, with the use of painted and embroidered curtains was cultivated with success in Manipur in the reign of Khāgemba in 1597. To him belongs the play house. Women were allowed to sing in the opera. The performance of religious opera formed an organic part of the drama up to 1753 A.D.¹⁹⁶

Another stage of Manipuri drama was reached with the improvement of King Gaurāśyām (1753-'59, 1862-'63). In his reign, the people broke away from the tradition of performing religious operas. The dramatic performance of Moirāṅg Kamleiron (stories of Moirāṅg) and romantic stories about the prince and princesses in the drama began in his reign.¹⁹⁷

Then came a period of great achievement in the realm of dance and song which synchronised with the development of drama during the periods of Jayasimha and Gambhir Singh (1825-184). During the first reign of Chandrakīrti Singh (1834-'44), Nara Singh Yubarāja directed his men to perform Sanjilīla at Leisāng Hithen, a river bank on the 21st Wednesday of Thawān/July-August 1839 A.D. On Thawān/July-August 26 of the same year, Naukālīla was performed. Later, when, Nara Singh became the king of Manipur the play of Kāliya-damana (the subduing of the mythological serpent, Kāliya) was performed on Wednesday, Merā/September-October 13, 1845 A.D. It was staged on the natural background of Thangkap lake. Prince Kāma, the king’s son by the first queen,

¹⁹⁶. See fn. 195. Cited to me by Kh. Dhanachandra Singh, President of Manipur Dramatic Union, in the conference 1968, in which I participated. It was in reply to my question.

¹⁹⁷. See fn. 196.
acted the role of Kṛṣṇa. 198

Similar performance of Kāli-damana was repeated in
the second reign of Mahārāja Chandrākirti Singh (1857-1886). It is generally maintained that Kāli-damana was first staged during the second reign of Chandrākirti. But this point is disputable on the authority of the Cheithārol Kumbābā. However, this much is beyond any trace of doubt that the Vaisnava plays were very popular in those times. 199 Chandrākirti's second reign opened the formative chapter in the cultural life of Manipur. The decoration employed in the above play deserves special notice. A beautiful part of the hill (Langthabāl hill) with a river (Chandranadi, a small rivulet which was dug by the king) nearby, representing the Yamunā was chosen as the theatre of the play. The players acted in the true spirit of the play and their movement and gestures were very significant. 200

Other vātrās that deserve mention are of Draupadi Vastra Haran, Chitrapad, Udukhaḷa, etc., which captured the imagination of the people. When Draupadi Vastra Haran was staged publicly, Mahārāja-Kumār Gandhār Singh, son of Chandrākirti took the role of Draupadi, the main character of the play. R. K. Raychandra and Bājāl Tolchou represented Bhima and Duhsāsan, respectively. They were gifted actors. The drama was so impressive that when the audience saw Duhsāsan catching

198. C.K., pp.248 and 269.
199. Ibid., p.241; cf. fn. 195.
200. See fn. 195.
Draupadi by the clothes and dragging her, the audience shed tears as though paralysed by the immensity of the outrage. They cursed Bājāi Tolchou believing him to be a real one.

In Chandrakirti's time Manipuri theatre came under the influence of Calcutta. Modern methods were evolved to a little extent. The Manipuri tradition is that the king used to keep clowns in the court. It was in between 1886 and 1891, which saw the political set-back of the country. With the attack of Manipur by the British, the Manipuri theatre showed little signs of development. Despite the tendencies, Mrs E. Grimwood referred to a play performed in their honour on the occasion of Christmas in 1890.

We may offer here a few passing remarks about the drama in these centuries. Drama performances were held in the palaces on religious festivals. Unlike the dance and song it had catered only for the upper layers of society, viz., the princes and the nobles. It was rarely performed in the locality of ordinary villages.

Another interesting feature is that the name of the play or the role in a play "Kāli-damana" or Balarāma has a real significance in Manipur - these names are borne by persons concerned. People identified the actors or actresses with the

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201. L. Lalit Singh, 'Manipuri Drama Meihourongi Wari Matek Ama', S.A.M.T.H.C., pp.33-34.
204. My own view supported by Kh.Dhanachandra Singh, S.Lalit Singh and Thanil Singh who happened to be the noted dramatists of Manipur.
roles they performed to such an extent that in real life also they were given the names they assumed as actors or actresses. It may be pointed out that N. Ibungohal Singh who represented Krsna in the play was better known as Kāli which is the name of the play. R. K. Sanajaoba who appeared in the role of Balarāma in the same play was afterwards honoured with the name of Balarāma Sābā. The actual names were forgotten in course of time. The title of līlā connotes the peculiar skill and success which are vivid to the people.

Another feature of drama is that we have no scientific work on drama and rules of representation and acting till the nineteenth centuries. We have not, so far been able, to discover any written work on dramatic theory. So, dramatic performances must have been performed through oral methods. It may be added that in Manipuri Vaishnavism, drama was treated as a subsidiary of music and song.

Painting

Painting was at a low ebb in Manipur on account of the wars with Burma. It is also alleged that the art had not a firm footing in Manipur because the painters hold that any error in his work will make him have a defective child. To the eye of

205. See fn. 201.
206. The drama is not as famous as the dance and kirtan. But in the Sattras of Assam it is fairly common among the Sattradhi-kāras to produce a play and perform at the time of accession to the headship of the Sattra order. The point is grounded on my personal observation of Manipuri drama.
the casual observer like Captain E. W. Dun and McCulloch, "They (Manipuris) have some taste in the arrangement of colours, but of drawing or painting they have no idea." This does not seem to be a correct view. A few points about painting will be necessary. Tradition speaks highly of painting and each king is mentioned as worshipping an image of Pākhāmbā drawn by his artist. At one time, the palace was full of figures of Pākhāmbā produced by a group of artists belonging to different periods. Most of them are now lost through neglect and ravages of time.

The colour of clothes used in the Lāi-harāobā is associated with the painting of Manipur before the introduction of Vaisnavism.  

The spread of Vaisnavism over Manipur since Garionīvaz influenced the spiritual life of the people and it is reflected in the art also. There were craftsmen who built temples, skilful sculptors and carvers who made statutes of deities following the Vaisnavite models and painters who showed good pictures. By the time of King Jayasimha the miniature painting made its appearance. An interesting example is the one in which the King, in course of his stay in Assam asked his royal artist Wangkhet Pandit Gopiram  


209. cf. T. C. Hodson holds that dyeing in a few colours is practised, a yellow dye is common, procured in the hills, vide The Meithais, p.29. The above information is revealed to me by Shyamo Sārma the well known fine artist and principal, Imphal Art College, when I personally discussed the matter with him. According to him Manipur has a distinctive feature of its own. There is no excessiveness in its physiography. We find this picture in its painting. Simplicity forms an important part in the painting of human being and deities.
Pachahanba to execute the picture of Sri Govindaji under his specification as revealed in his dream. It is again with King Chandrakirti that we can properly begin the final development of painting. It was he who established Karigad Loisan?, the institution usually associated with the work of painting and sculpture on important festivals. Scenes from the sacred Vaisnava Scriptures and the Epics are brought to life in vivid colours. The pictures tell the story of Siva, his love for Gangā and his landing in Manipur after drawing away the excess water through Chimunghut. It bore the impress of Bengal system of 'pāt'. Through their paintings the handsome personality of Caitanya and the sankirtan scene where he gave solace to Jagāi and Madhāi, assumed a visual reality which made the people of Manipur intimate with them. One fine achievement of Manipuri painting is the specimen which narrates the story of Khamba and Thoibi. We may refer to Bhadra Singh as one of the greatest animal painters.

The amorous play of Kṛṣṇa with the gopīs as well as their dance and music formed the typical theme of Vaisnava painting. We may surmise about the influence of Kangra Valley painting on Manipuri art. It is indigenously Manipuri and not an importation in the true sense. In painting the artist has to use a brush made from the hair of the goat or the cat. Colours were prepared from flowers and vermilion and 'nim' (indigo).

211. See fn. 207.
212. S.M.F.A.A., pp.16-17.
213. See fn. 207.
this time, Manipuri made paper, wooden cover and cloth became increasingly used. European colours and brushes were not available in Manipur at that time.

Paintings of this kind covered the walls of palace, temples, as well as the Ratha (Kāng) of every Brāhman. There are certain paintings which are not hung on the walls but compiled in albums. They were meant for decoration of these paintings.

In Manipur as in other parts of India, we find the painters illustrating the Vaisnava texts, and Meithei Purāṇas written in Meithei script. In them are found the scene of Kamlā Capital (the Tāntric centre of Manipur) picture of Pāphān (nerves of the human body) and Thengkhou (the technique of a kind of dance). 214

As regards the position of painting, we can quote the following words from Dr S. K. Bhuyan "The paintings of Manipuri artists have a delicacy and sweetness which are beyond the expression of words." 215

There is another thing. In 1891 the Rajput Regiment which invaded the country in alliance with the British carried away most of the masterpieces of Manipuri painting. It is said that they are preserved in military head-quarters called

214. I am deeply indebted to Th. Madhusundar Singh, Pandit and L. Tolamu Singh who produced the books and illustrations of Tāntric works when I discussed the point with them.

Dharamasālā in the Punjab. In the general decline of Maniour, painting was also affected.

Sculpture

Sculpture and painting are inseparable. The earliest models of folk art that have come down to us are in fine pottery. The artistic activity is seen in the successful use of colours in the carving of flowers, fish, snakes, etc., on customary clothes. The carving of huge boats speaks well of their knowledge. With the growth of Vaišnavism in the 18th and 19th centuries began a period where the sculptors found many themes to work on. It was put mainly to the purpose of making stone inscriptions and images in the temples. The sculpture of this period is characterised as high relief work and group work. 

216. See fn. 207. One of the most prominent representatives of the 19th century painting was the painter and sculptor, Ningthoujam Bhadra Singh (1862-1927 A.D.). He took to the career of a painter and sculptor and for nearly half a century saw the fall of the dynasty of Chandrakirti and changes consequent on the conquest of Manipur by the British. He was a disciple of Mangsidam Angāngmacha Singh who was the chief Karigād of independent Manipur under King Chandrakirti. He produced four art plates some of which have been included by T. C. Hodson in his The Meithels. In the same epoch flourished R. K. Yumjaosana Singh (1860-1954) of the same calibre and inclination. He was the son of monochrome painter Goura Singh who was at the court of Kulachandra Mahārajā as Dolāri Haniābā (carrier of litter). He was also a born artist absorbing the Rajput and Mughal influence. Vide Manipuri Chitrakala, a souvenir issued by the Manipur Fine Artists' association, Imphal on the occasion of Bhadra Singh Birth centenary celebration in 1968.

sculpture of Viṣṇu Thākura is a fine example of this group work. It is also the earliest image so far known to us.

According to some authorities, there are various kinds in the works of sculpture which are as follows: (1) Metal sculpture, (2) Stone works, (3) Wood works, (4) Clay figures and terra-cotta objects, (5) Ivory works and (6) Folk art products made of perishable metals.

The chronicle says that Kings, Jayasimha, Chandrakirti, Chourajit Singh, etc., cast metals for the different Meithel gods. The bronze image of Sanāmahi in the aspect of creator is an outstanding contribution of Manipuri sculptors. Some of the images were produced by craftsmen outside Manipur and imported from such places as Nabadvip, Vṛndāvana and installed by the Meitheis in their village temples in Manipur. Metal image of Gopāladeva is a case in point. Its small size enables the Brāhmans to carry it from the temple to other places whenever necessary.

Metal sculpture was of many forms and we have already referred to some for whose production provision was made by the kings. They also worshipped the yantras made of copper and brass.

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218. See fn. 207.
220. Cited to me by M. Borajao Singh. P. Tarango Singh who enjoy reputation in my place in preparing the Yantras.
Most of the images of Siva are depicted in stone which are found in Ingourok, Sanahal Lokchāo and other places. The long ears of ascetic Siva practising the meditation are reminiscent of Buddhism as modified in later stages of Hinduism. We have stated that the phallic emblem was popular with them. The stone images of Hanumāna at Mahabali and of Devī at Hiyangthang are in relief. 221

Wood work of images was very popular during those periods. The image of Śrī Govindaji, Vijaya Govindaji, etc., are the fine examples of the Vaisnava period. A feeling of devotion pervades the sculpture in these temples in which they are placed. 222

Kṛśna and his incarnations are a favourite subject for the sculptor. In every temple Kṛśna is shown as playing the flute standing with Rādhā. Apart from that we found the wood images of Jagannātha (attributed to Gambhir Singh), Subhadra and Balabhadra in the temple. Sculptures of Caitanya formed an adjunct in some of the temples. One important point in this connection is that the images of Ācāryas, donors, etc., do not find a place in the temple. 223

Of the important clay works mention may be made of the image of Durgā in connection with the festival of Durgā Puja.

221. Infra, Ch.VIII (Saivism).
222. See Chs. V and VIII of the work.
223. My own estimate supported by the tradition of Manipur.
It appears to have interested the sculptors since the time of Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh. The image of Saraswati in clay is not uncommon.

The ivory idols of Khamba and Thoibi and scenes showing the boat race produced in Manipur have found a place in the shops all over British India. Candle or wax idols were seen at this time. As a folk art of the culture, the women's work holds a very important position. More interesting are the representations of Tal-Samu, Tal-Sagon (elephant and horse made of flour). Cloth-dolls made by women are a feature of Manipuri life. There is another distinctive piece of no mean artistic excellence. Sembāṅg Mahum (the design set after the likeness of the building of nest by sparrow with marvellous ingenuity was a tremendous success for from the time Chandrakirti, this style became in vogue. The walls of the palace and the āsana (on elephant's back in royal procession) are adorned with this design. It is designed to inspire awe.

Architecture

The work of architecture in Manipur owes much to the countries like Burma and China in middle ages. Their influence

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224. C.K., p.308; Images of Saraswati are fairly common at the time of Saraswati Puja.
225. See fn. 207 and 217; T. C. Hodson, The Meithais, pp.28-29.
is so well-marked in the architecture that the word 'Phurā' (temple of stone or brick erected for god) is derived from the Burmese word 'Phayā'. Most masonry work of the old buildings were done under the direction of Burmese experts.

The earliest structural work in brick is connected with the rise of Vaisnavism during the Khyāmbā's time. It has survived the ravages of time. Some of the important buildings and temples were constructed between the time of Charāirongbā and Chandrakīrti. Most of them have been destroyed during the Burmese devastation of Manipur. B. C. Allen mentions that there were seven masonry temples in the town prior to 1891. The most important temple is the one dedicated to Šrī Govindaji. It stands opposite to the old palace site and consists of a square building with a porch supported on masonry pillars.

Another famous temple almost as famous as that of Šrī Govindaji is the temple of Vṛndāvanchandra attached to Tempākyum of the Yubarāja. It is built on a square plinth. It deserves particular mention as it was the scene of fighting between the British and the Manipuris in 1891. Another masonry temple is that of Hanumāna Thākura at Mahābali. A marked feature of the temple is the grove which abounds with a swarm of monkeys as his attendants. Other temples are made of wood, bamboo and combustible

227. T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, pp.25-26; see also supra, Ch.IV.
229. B. C. Allen, District Gazetteers of Assam, Vol.IX, Part II, 1905-1907, Shillong, Section on Architecture; L. Ibungohal Singh, Introduction to Manipur, pp.148-149; see supra, Ch.II.
materials. A point to be noted in this connection is that in
the earlier centuries such temples were repeatedly destroyed
and rebuilt.

Very few secular buildings have come down to us. The
king's palace which was inaugurated in 1884 is lively. The
architecture of the palace in these centuries shows the influ-
ence of the western style. The public are rarely allowed
to have brick buildings for secular purposes.

230. See fn. 217; also Ch.IV; R. M. Nath, The Background
of Assamese Culture, p.90. Architects came to Manipur from
Tripura and Koc Behar.

231. Cited to me by N. Khelchandra Singh, Superintendent,
Record and Library, Manipuri Secretariat, Imphal. Instances are
on the chronicle where the king destroyed the buildings by
letting the elephants fall upon the buildings. This is explicit
and categorical in Manipur. As we have seen this conception of
kingship as incarnation of God dominated the Manipuri mind in
the 18th and 19th centuries. It is also enjoined in the sastra
that private residence must not compare in grandeur or excellence
with the temples of god. These are the root causes of the scar-
city of architectural work in Manipur.