Chapter VII

RITUALS AND OBSERVANCES ROUND THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

A Manipuri Vaisnava's life is dominated by *Krsna Bhakti*. His ultimate aim is to achieve the union with god. His devotion to *Krsna* is expressed through the worship of this idol, the saying of morning and evening prayers, the habitual recital of the *māla*, the respect shown to Vaisnava saints, the observance of fasts and other penances, the offering of certain rituals and observance of custom and manners peculiar to Vaisnavism.  

Persons who take vows to live a life approved by the *Brahma Sabhā* (a committee of Brāhmans who suggest the methods of Hindu rites and rituals) are called 'Religious' according to Manipuri conception.

T. C. Hodson observes, "It is difficult to estimate the precise effect of Hinduism on the civilisation of the people, for to the outward observers they seem to have adopted only the festivals, the outward ritual, the caste mark, and the exclusiveness of Hinduism, while all unmindful of its spirit and inward essentials." He further confirmed McCulloch's remark that "the observance of the rites and festivals are for appearance's sake"

---


2. Ibid., p.249. The important religious institution was the palace which framed an elaborate ritual, regulating in detail every point on the basis of scriptures. The *Brahma Sabhā* is a part of the palace which interprets the *Smrti* texts for the people. Nandalal Sarma, *Meltrabāk*, pp.27t-27th.

3. T. C. Hodson, *The Meltheis* (Ch. on Religion).
and not from the promptings of the heart. Achyuta Charan Chowdhury in *Srihatter Itivyrtta* holds a similar view. These observations, however, are not borne out by facts. The religious behaviour of the people proves beyond any trace of doubt that religion is the way of their life. The contribution of the Manipuri Vaishnavas to the music and dance through Kirtan and Rāsa are widely recognised.

With the rise and progress of Vaishnavism, idol worship became very popular in Manipur. There are many temples, the most famous among them being the palace temple dedicated to Sri Sri Govindaji, Vrndāvanacandra temple at tempāk yum (Yubārajā's palace), Hanumānji temple at Mahabali Rāmji temple at Ningthempukhri at Wāngkhei and Vijoy Govindaji temple at Sagolband. Images are made of wood and clay. Metal images like Śalagrama were also worshipped. The worship in temples is conducted by priests. The high priests, namely, the Ācārya (Rājpurohita) and Vyāvasthakāri (T. C. Hodson takes the two as one) are the authorities in religious matters. They are consulted in connection with the injunctions of both the Śrutis and the Smṛtis. They are regarded as the custodians of tradition and enjoy a higher status.

A form of relic worship has struck deep roots in Manipur. Foot impression of Maharaja Gambhir Singh (1825-1834 A.D.) was carefully preserved and worshipped at Kohima by the

---

5. See infra, Ch.VI.
Nagas till the end of the nineteenth century. It was worshipped by Thangal Menjor and the Manipuri force on Thursday, Wâkching/December-January 14, 1873. Thangal presented one flag with a salute of two hundred guns to it. The sword which King Jayasimha alias Bhagyachandra awarded to a certain Angaobā, a Naga of Akhim Kabui village on the merit of service is still preserved and worshipped on the occasion of the great festivals. The weapons and the dresses which the kings used, form important relics of worship.

The cremation places of kings like Jayasimha, Gambhir Singh, Chandrakirti and religious preachers of Vaisnava sects attract a large number of devotees from all parts of Manipur on the days of death anniversaries. The hill of Kaina which is associated with the sacred jack-fruit tree (as the image of Sri Govindaji was then carved out of it) is referred to as an important place of worship.


8. W. Yumjao Singh, R.A.S.M., 1935, Ch.III, pp.24-25. Imphal had the honour of possessing many tombs. I have seen the people celebrating memorial day every year to perpetuate the memory of the kings and patriots of Manipur. This custom supplies the information what is lacking in books about them.

The temple of Sri Govindaji is the institution par excellence connected with the cultural life of the people. The worship of Sri Govindaji consists of daily bath with mantras, bhoga (offering of cooked rice and vegetables), burning the incense and arati. The worship is elaborated on special days. The worship stands cancelled on the days of Ekadasi Ambuvaci, lunar and solar eclipses and on the days of death anniversaries of some kings. The daily routine of pūjā begins in the dawn of the new day. The temple is open from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. in the morning and from 4-30 p.m. to 6 p.m. in the evening for visitors.

There are three aratis (offering of light) prescribed for Govindaji. The performance of them is extremely complicated and absolute accuracy in the observance of every detail is insisted upon by their code. The kings made the necessary arrangement for the due observance of them.

When we analyse the daily prayer routine observed in the palace we find three main services - Mangalārati (Morning service), Bhogārati (Forenoon service) and Gvālārati (Evening service). These three services consist of ten rites. They are associated with chanting some mantras. The first item is called Dhūpārati (Offering incense) which imitates the awakening of Kṛṣṇa by Yasodā. The priest-in-charge of the temple wakes up

11. Information given by S. Amuba Sarma.
12. The point is based on my personal experience.
13. Cited to me by G. Tombi Sarma of my locality. Sri Govindaji was kept in his temple during the Second World War, 1939-45.
in the Brahmamuhurta (early dawn) and takes his bath. The idol of Sri Govindaji and other idols are thoroughly washed. The water used in washing is kept in a pot. (The holy water is called carnamrta).  

The next item is called Sringar which describes the dressing of God at 8 a.m. (pānighanta). Some chapters from the Gita and Gopālasaṅgama are read by the Brāhman. During the Sringarārati religious minded men and women may be seen singing around the temple and offering fruits and flowers. Water is sprinkled from a conch on all present and the priest distributes nirmalva (flowers) to the bhaktas who are assembled in the temple. The men sticks the sweet-scented flowers in their turbans, while the women-devotee entwine them in their hair. They take a little carnamrta and eat the tulasi leaves. After this, all the worshippers disperse.

The third item consists in the offering of bhog or rice with one hundred and eight types of curry to Sri Govindaji. The vegetarian dishes were the creation of Manipuri Brāhmans. During the offering of food, the Brāhman tinkles a little bell, which is held in his left hand, shows the lamp in his right hand. It is concealed from the profane eye by using a cloth or curtain drawn

---

14. The description is based on my personal experience of the rites. It is supplemented by G. Tombi Sarma of my locality. The devotional practices as found in Haribhakti Vilās have been modified by local pandits with the consent of the king.

15. See fn. 14. The devotees went to the temple regularly morning and evening. They enter the temple after bathing and wearing clean clothes saying that they are not worthy to enter except when clean. When the prayer is over, they bowed to God and then rising went to bow one another.
between the worshippers and the idols. Music forms a part of bhogarati.\textsuperscript{16}

After arati, prasad is distributed among the devotees who live within the temple precinct (persons attached to the temple). They are fed on banana or lotus leaves.

The fourth item in the afternoon is called Sayana which consists in offering arati while the God takes a siesta.\textsuperscript{17}

The fifth item is called Utthāpana arati which means the awakening of God from the siesta. The sixth item consists in depicting the cow-tending activity (gocārāṇ) of Kṛṣṇa. The seventh item in the evening called gwālārati (at about 4.30 p.m. I.S.T.) Bera (sweet-meat) is offered to the Deity to the accompaniment of mantras and songs. The songs centre round the return of Kṛṣṇa with the cows from cow-tending. The songs composed by King Jayasimha (Bhagyachandra), Sija Lāiroibi and other gurus are sung by the bhaktas.\textsuperscript{18}

The eighth item is called Sandhyārati. Bhajan songs are sung to the accompaniment of kartāl, pung and bell. It begins with the words "Arati Vrajārāja Nandakumāra ... ... " The nineth

\textsuperscript{16} See fn. 13.

\textsuperscript{17} See fn. 13.

\textsuperscript{18} There is some contradiction between the fourth item and the sixth item. The God who is sleeping in a bed cannot return from cow tending. The fact which appears contradictory will be found less so on analysis. The Vaishnavas substantiate it with reference to the two classifications of his Līlā, viz., Prakāta and Aprakāta for clearing up the confusion. In his prakāta Līlā (manifest) he goes from his house to the field for tending the cow and returns to his house. In his Aprakāta līlā he remained eternally in his home.
item consists in offering bhogarati to the God for the second item. The tenth item, the last item, is called sayana (sleeping of God). The God is put to sleep with songs. Kunjarati is offered to the Deity before four hours of day-break. 19

On important occasions, such as the birth day of the King, special programmes of story-telling, nata pala kirtan and religious discourses are held besides the normal service. The priests engaged in the worship of Sri Govindaji number nearly thirty to forty. The performance of the pūjā for Govindaji is realised through a number of institutions. To quote T.C. Hodson "To the service of (Govinda) Govindaji were dedicated the Lai Bhandari (to prepare ration), Mantri sebok (to prepare candle) and Kirtana. The Duhon Loisang scattered clean water over the people of the Deity. The Keis of Charang pat and Wangbon Ningthoukhong and Thingnungei were also employed in the service of Govindaji." 20 The departments known as pālās will be noted in chapter VI. The close adherence of the kings and princes to their idols of worship is well-known. During the Burmese devastation they carried them in the bustle of the march. They were strict in performing the daily devotional rites and duties. 21


21. See supra, Ch. V. The CheithARol KumbAABA records that the idol of Sanamahi was brought back from the Changgang village of Burma by Sagolsem Soipai Singh on 2nd, Thursday, Phairen/January-February, 1822. Five pāris of land were awarded to him by the king.
The images worshipped in the village temples are those of Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, Jagannātha, Subhadra, Balārama, Gopala Deva, Sāligrama, Caitanya Mahāprabhu, etc. Composite figures are very rare. The Manipuri Vaisnavas do worship the sacred scriptures such as the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, Caitanya Caritāmṛta and other Vaisnava scriptures. In every temple the books are placed on an altar and devotees offer flowers and dhūpa (incense). In this respect, they remind us of the Sikhs who worship the Granthasāhiba.

In minor and village temples a shortened form of daily routine is followed. Temples are fairly numerous in Manipur and the images exist by thousands. There are few villages which have not at least one. It is said that a place without a temple, a Brāhmaṇ and an astrologer is not worth-inhabiting. It is considered virtuous to spend a part of one's earning in the construction and endowment of temples. Every family of consequence in the villages has a temple in its compound.

It should be noted that the village temples are not only the centres of religious diffusion, but also of the social life of the Vaisnavas. A good many sources record the land grants for the temple and the gift of a vast amount of wealth.

23. S. N. Sarma, The Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam, p.124. The practices of the Sikhs may be considered in this connection.
to the village priests by the Vaisnava kings. They encouraged
the people in the religious work with the presentation of idols,
money, cloths and cultivable lands. 25 Many of the ornaments of
the deities have been presented by the rich people. 26

Rites-de-passage

For a believer in Gaḍiya Vaisnavism there are rituals
connected with the various stages of life. They are: Birth,
Name giving ceremony, including food giving, Hair cutting and
ear boring, Initiation, Marriage and allied ceremonies, Confer-
ment of rosary, and Sannyāsa, and Death rites and connected
ceremonies. 27

When a woman perceives labour pain, she is confined to
chāboksang (a hut or room set apart for child delivery). A Brāhmaṇ
has to cleanse her twice, once in the third month and another in
the fifth month. It consists of sprinkling of ritual water with
the uttering of some words. The mālbi (mid-wife) manages the
delivery process from the very beginning till the cleansing of
the house on the twelfth day of child birth. She worships the
sun and the moon in the event of difficulty. After delivery she
cuts off the umbilical cord. She was helped in her work by one
female attendant called māvyabā and the mother of the woman

25. See supra, Chs. IV and V.
26. This custom is practised among the rich people.
27. I am indebted to T. C. Hodson (Toga Virilis) and T. C.
Das, The Purums, Ch. VII for this classification and description
of them.
delivering. For some days the child is nursed by some women of the place. The father purifies the child by reciting Harināma at the time of giving milk to the baby.  

Sāstī pūja is performed after the sixth day of the birth of the child. The presiding deity of the sixth day is invoked with the offerings of fruits, pān and flowers. The father bows before the Ghata (pitcher symbolising the presiding deity. It is filled with water) with the citation of holy mantra. The child is carried out of the mother's room and kept near the Ghata on a piece of thick cloth. He paints the vermilion on the forehead of the child and cleanses the child. The maternal uncle of the child is then called and is given a bow and five arrows to drive out the evil spirits by the officiating Brāhmaṇ. He shoots the arrows in four directions of the courtyard. The bow and one arrow are kept near the child to ward off the evil spirits. The maternal uncle blesses the child by placing some coins on the body of the child. Friends and relatives, who are invited also, bless the child and present some money. This is called Dān Thādābā (gift of money to the baby).  

28. See fn. 27. The mālibis and mā yoknabis who are the specialists in the conception and child delivery make striking contributions to the culture of Manipur. Their works entitle them to a place of honour.

29. The Vaisnava rites have been modified by local usages in these periods; also my personal observation.

30. See fn. 29.

31. Dān-thādābā had a notable feature in Sāstī pūja as well as in marriage.
It is customary to entertain the people by kirtan songs and reading of passages from sacred Scriptures. The *arāngphām* (a man specially appointed for managing the event) distribute sweetmeats, pān and daksīna to each audience. The cook distributes mahāprasāds among the people. The maternal uncle is fed with fried peas and is given a handsome daksīna.

For some days the child is nursed by some other woman of the village. The woman has to live on boiled rice, curry of Ngamu (loach) and Okābi (a species of arum fish). The house or the family in which the child is born is considered unclean for twelve days. The rooms are plastered with cowdung, pitchers are broken and plates are washed. A Brāhmaṇ has to conduct the purificatory discipline.

Then the name-giving and food-giving ceremonies are performed. In some cases the name-giving is observed formally. Every Meithei assumes three names, namely, vumnak or surname corresponding to a family name, actual name of a person and a nick name. The Meitheis took the surnames in the reign of Gaḷambā about four hundred years ago. Surnames, are derived from the profession or peculiarity of the persons who first bore them. The actual name is suggested by the astrologer after consulting the horoscope. Sanskrit and Bengali names are very common as a sequel to the Vaisnavisation though distinctly

---

32. See fn. 29.
33. See fn. 29.
34. T. C. Hodson, *The Meitheis*, pp.112-114.
Meithei names are not altogether abandoned. At times a male child is called by a female name and vice versa. Every male name except the Brahmans is suffixed with 'Singh' while every female name ends with 'Devi'. Pet names are given to a certain individual by the elderly people of the family. 36

The kings assume a new name on or after their formal ascendency by which they are described in all official documents. From the chronicle we know that from the time of Charāirongba personal names became more popular than the reign names. 37

In the sixth month after birth Caumbā (first rice or solid food eating) ceremony is conducted. In the case of girls, this is performed in the fifth month. Astrologers are consulted to fix auspicious timing. The child is fed with rice cooked in milk, or rice with seven kinds of fish. The mother puts five balls of solid food one after another into the mouth of the child. If the baby takes all the five, the omen is good. In case of failure, it is repeated. The mother's milk continues to be the staple food of the child. 38

Then come the two ceremonies of hair cutting and ear boring. These two sacraments are conducted on the same day. In Manipuri language they are called Šamkokpā and Nāhutpā. The first hair cutting ceremony for a baby (irrespective of boy or girl) is held on the end of the third or fifth year. It may

---

36. See fn. 34.
38. See fn. 27.
take place in the court-yard of a child's father or in the māndap of a local temple. A sankirtan party is held on the night previous to the day of ceremony.

According to the prevailing practice a barber is engaged to shave the hair and bore the ear of the baby. Some kumāris (virgins) have to sprinkle sacred water on the head of the child thrice by a piece of cloth called phijang. Then the officiating priest who performs the sacrifice inserts the flowers into the child's ear and puts the sacred marks on the forehead. On the advice of the priest the baby bows down to the sankirtan party and the assembled audience to get their blessings. All were served with mahāprasād on this occasion. The priest, the singers and the barbers are entitled to clothes and daksīna for their works.

Ear boring ceremony may be performed immediately after birth in case of the children who are preceded by several deaths of their siblings in infancy. The midwife pierces the ear-holes of the child with a needle and inserts rings of black thread with some incantations for the safety of the child. The thread is replaced by gold ear-rings after sometime. This is conducted in some cases by the village goldsmith with gold wire, for which they receive fees.

39. Eye witness.


41. See fn. 40.
Then the ritual of initiation into the Vaisnava order is performed. This ceremony called Lāiming Loubā signifies the end of early childhood and is said to take place at the age of fifteen for a boy and thirteen for a girl. It may also be delayed under unavoidable circumstances. In the case of Meitheî Brahmans the age of initiation is very tender. This aspect of life in Manipur seems to be of indigenous origins and has some pre-Vaisnavitic elements. T. C. Hodson says that for the eldest son of the family there is a custom to go into the jungles at the age of twelve with twelve bundles of fire wood and silver hilted dao to show that he possesses the necessary strength and courage. 42

Samkalpa, kirtan, fasting, etc., are necessary for the performance of Lāiming Loubā. The candidate to be initiated is shaved by a barber. After his bath, the priest presents him to the God. He then bows down to the audience who bless him. He is taken to the place where the sacrifice is held. A fire is now lit with sacred twigs and is fed with fuel and ghee. In front of the sacrificial fire he is made to wear a sacred thread. The sacred thread consists of six strings of cotton entwined into one. 43 He also puts on a Kanthī (a garland made from the sacred basil plant) around his neck. The priest provides him with a strip of yellow kaupīn (loin cloth), a yellow cap, a yempāk (bamboo umbrella), a bowl and a stick. The Dīkṣā Guru

42. See fn. 34.
43. Vide Guru Pranālika a MS at my possession; also supra, Chs. IV and V.
whispers the sacred Hari-rama Mahamantra three times into the boy's ear and the latter repeats it as many times. He is asked to worship Krishna and Rama daily. The history of the sect of Gaudiyavaisnavism is taught to him. It is co-eval with Manipur's cultural history.\footnote{For comparison as well as for reference see S. N. Sarma, The Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam, G.U. 199, Ch.VI.}

The candidate drinks a little of water used in the washing of the feet of the Guru and promises to live like a Vaisnava monk, by walking ceremoniously around the Guru. After taking alms from his mother he walks off without turning back symbolising desire of becoming a mendicant. A friend of the initiate's mother appears on the scene and intervenes and requests him to abandon the idea of becoming a wandering mendicant. She induces him to come back home before reaching gate.\footnote{This feature is peculiar to the Manipuri Vaisnavas. The information was supplied to me by the Brahmans like G. Tombi Sarma, Amuba Sarma, etc.} This ends the ceremony. The guests are treated to a feast before dispersal.

In case of females, the initiation ceremony takes place in a simple way. It takes place after puberty. On an auspicious day she goes to the temple with some pūja materials. The guru whispers the Hari-rama Mahamantra into her ear and invests her with tulasi garland before the idol.\footnote{See fn. 46.}

The Laiming Louba is a distinguishing mark of the twice-born. The lugun or sacred thread and urik (garland of...
tulasi beads) are supposed to promote their happiness and ward off evils. The twin things are under no circumstances be taken away from one's body. A person has to wash them daily and replace the old (worn out ones) by another one. Persons who do not put on these things are shunned by the society. It is difficult almost to join feasting and other social functions without wearing them. 47

Luhôngbā (marriage) sanctifies the contract of marriage to found a family, with the view to produce children for the Vaisnava society. The details of marriage and associated social customs are dealt with in chapter III.

A person who wants to be true disciple of Caitanya is usually conferred with the rosary by the dikṣā guru. He or she takes to this stage when the responsibilities of life are less intense. The chaplet of heads used by the Manipuri Vaisnavas is made of dry stems of tulasi plant. The person must have an acquaintance of the prakāśika system - the history of the sect from the guru to Caitanya. The rosary consists of one hundred and eight or sometimes one thousand beads. The beads should be complete, free from malformation or broken face. It must have a sumeru the largest bead at the head. 48 It must have eight larger heads as holy knots. The largest bead represents Kṛṣṇa while eight large sized beads represent eight main gopīs. The

47. See fn. 45 and Chs. IV and V.

rest have been considered as the other gopīs of Vṛndāvana. They are rolled using the right thumb and the middle finger of the right hand uttering the name given by the guru. The ceremony of conferring rosary consists in muttering Sūla-nāma for every bead with vācika japa (the discipline in which they pronounce the mantra sometimes loudly and sometimes slowly). The Brāhmaṇ guru who conducts the ceremony is entitled to some presents including a dhoti, a wrapper and daksīṇā. The art of mental prayer (japa) with the help of the rosary is also taught by the guide.

The devotee has to pray counting the beads in appointed time. He may perform it in all times - morning, evening, before and after meal if he so desires. It is performed in a clean place. It is considered good if he makes four rounds daily. The daily and frequent recital of the mālā keeps before one's mind a sane view of life. We are informed that Haridās (Yavana Haridāsa, a famous Hindu convert and a follower of Caitanya) repeated the names of Kṛśna three lakh times daily by reading in a thicket. The system of conferring mālā on an aspirant is described in a book called Vasudeva Rahasya.

There is yet another sacrament which in a special manner emphasises the peoples' ascetic nature. It means the entry into the sāṁyās or vairāgī order through which an aged Vaisnava receives the grace of Kṛśna. It is only proper that

—
49. See fn. 48.
50. See fn. 48.
one should have sufficient time and training in the Vaisnava way of life. One is trained to be a vairāgī or sanyāsī.

On one's taking to sanyāsa, one is given the name of mystical bhakta of Kṛṣṇa. A nun is given the name of a bhakta of Rādhā. They convey the sense of dāsa and dāsīni (servant) of the lord.  

He or she is above varṇa or gotra and becomes acrūta gotra since his or her initiation to bhak.

A vairāgī's life is different from the life of a householder and his dress and habits are similar to that of, Caitanite mendicants. They are invited at the śraddha, kīrtan, dībāsa of a Manipuri Vaisnava. They enjoy many privileges in the code of the Vaisnavas. The majority die without entering these orders. Some of the sanyāsīs are disappointed men who failing in love affairs, have taken to the life of a monk as a means of livelihood. There are of course, persons who take sanyāsa to heart and try to live up to this ideal.  

When the symptoms of death become manifest in old age to a man, a physician has to attend him and chant some mantras. The presence of one vaidya is held to be necessary for death and other connected ceremonies. The dying person is placed on a bed in the verandah. His head is directed towards the east. A Brahman has to perform certain rites immediately before the death. He stamps the tilaka marks on the forehead. He (the dying man) is then dressed with kālpūn cap (a cap associated

51. Atombapu Sarma, Ātha Vesgrahanam, Imphal, 1950, pp.1-16; T. Kennedy's The Chaitanya Movement, pp.163-164 may be consulted in this connection.

52. My own; T.M.P. Mahadevan, Outlines of Hinduism, pp.78-79.
with a mendicant). A begging bowl and an umbrella are placed near him. The namabali cloth on which is inscribed the name of Krsna is laid over his head. Holy water of the Ganges or water used in the washing of the foot of the local deity is offered to the ailing man. Flowers and dust of the Rasa-lilä are placed upon the ground where the dying man is laid. A name connected with a bhakta of Krsna or Caitanya is given to him. The Brahma reads out some passages of the Rasapancadhava. The ceremony is called bhakpiba or aturabesa. The priest invites him to recite the mantra of atma-samarpana (self-surrender) to Krsna. If he cannot articulate distinctly certain mantras by virtue of which he can commune with god, they are uttered by the attending priest.

On the death of the person, he is taken out of the house and placed in khangyenpham (a place in the courtyard) near the tulasi plant where a hut is constructed. Devotional music, mantras and mourning form the special feature of this event. When the first wave of grief has subsided, the dead body is carried in a litter which is borne on the shoulders of four men. A few and close friends and relatives follow the litter to the accompaniment of zhal and pung. On arrival at the burning ground, the corpse is placed on a pyre. On the advice of the priest, a relative of the deceased walks round the funeral pyre seven times with a pitcher full of water. Persons who have

54. See fn. 53.
55. My own estimate supported by fn. 53.
gone to the cremation ground, weep, roll the ground, and bow down the pungvisbas (drummers) and singers. Then the pyre is set to fire by the relative. After a while, every body retires. Some remain on the spot until the whole pyre has been consumed. Every body takes a bath and return to his house after touching fire in the gate.  

A small fraction of frontal bone is taken away from the dead person while burning and kept locked up in a bamboo tube near the cremation ground. A practice of sowing the mustard over the grave is current among the Manipuris.

The mourning lasts for one year during which period a large number of ceremonies connected with the dead are performed.

On the sixth day, Asti-saṅcaya takes place. It is the duty of the sons to drop the bone of the departed parents in the Ganges or the Irawaddy. For its performance, near and dear ones go to the cremation ground where the priest conducts the ceremony by pūjas and mantras. A sankirtan party dominates the scene. The Brāhmaṇ purifies the bone and makes it over to the son of the deceased by placing it on his neck. The bone is brought to a house. The Brāhmaṇ chants the relevant mantras and read out portions from the Bhāgavat-purāṇa in a loud voice before the audience. The near and dear ones offer flowers to the bone which

57. T. Kennedy, The Chaitanya Movement, Sec. on 'Death Customs'; Atombar Sarma, Pūjāpadhati, Imphal, 1942, pp.88-89.
58. See fn. 57.
is wrapped in a piece of cloth. A distribution of fruits and pān to the participants marks the conclusion of the ceremony.

In the case of some people, the bones are burnt along with the body and the ceremony is not performed. For fifteen days the family where the death occurred is considered unclean. On the first day the adult members of the house are to fast and children abstain from salt and chilly. Then they are allowed to eat certain kinds of diet for the remaining days. The house is washed, utensils are cleansed while earthen vessels in use are thrown away. The recitation and exposition of the Bhāgavat-purāṇa and singing of kīrtan are done properly. The members of the village singlup are to look after the bereaved family. To them is assigned the task of arranging the progress of the rites.

In the case of death of a sānyāsī the śrāddha or sōrāt is performed on the fourteenth day and rituals are avoided. For those who die without taking the bhikṣa, a sōrāt takes place on the thirteenth day. For the virgins and youths, it is after seven days. In both cases, a relative is required for the performance of girāṭhāṅga (a man who performs the ceremony of performing oblation for the departed). From the first to the sixth or eleventh day he raises a mound of earth (two inches in height) near the cremating ground and offers pindas, i.e.,

59. The poor and the wretched people follow this practice. I collect it from my personal experience.

60. See supra, Ch.III.
cake made of rice, banana and black mustard to the departed soul and throws it to the nearby river. The rite is performed to the accompaniment of mantras (by Brahmans) and songs. The performer uses one knife and uttariva. It is believed that the soul of the dead man (thawai) resides in these objects till the śrāddha is performed. 61

The śrāddha may be performed in the village temple or in the courtyard of the deceased. It is to be performed in a bamboo hut constructed ad hoc in a particular pattern. The preparation of the hut, its roofing, and laying the Yātrā (the chief pillar) are all accompanied by the chanting of mantras.

Śrāddha requires many Brahmans. The chief priest is called māndan mapu (president of the ceremony). He chants slokas when the kirtan starts. 62 He is assisted by two or three Brahmans in conducting the rites. The ceremony may comprise some more Brahmans to prepare buns or sweetmeats of different kinds.

The ceremony is performed in the day-time. A large number of things, viz., the bed, pillow, the bedstead, metal utensils, the things of a mendicant (kaupin, jhuli, stick, begging bowl, etc.) are required which after the bhek katpā (a rite for the deceased who had received sannyāsa) are presented to the Brahmans. 63 A kirtan party is engaged to sing songs

61. Atombapu Sarma, Pūjā Pachati, Imphal, 1942, pp.89-94. 62. Atombapu Sarma, 'Sankirtanarāmbha Jayadhvani', Sankirtana Mahāvaiña, Imphal, 1954, pp.95-97; also supra, Ch.VI. 63. The description contained in this para is taken from the information gleaned both from the long standing code and eye witness.
for the ceremony. It has come to be equated with the main ceremony. The members of the family shed tears, weep and throw homespun cloth on the shoulders of the drummers and singers. The two drummers and three main singers, namely, Iseihanbā (the principal singer) the Dohār (imitator of Iseihanbā) and Khombāngbā (assistant to Iseihanbā) get the lion's share. All the participating pālās (singers) some of whom are the members of Singlup get a share. The audience get their fees or daksīṇa. All people are served with pan throughout the singing at intervals.64

A refreshment programme to the guests takes place in the adjoining courtyard after the kirtan. They sit in order of seniority. A feasting is arranged on the next day. It is called Dibasa in which the Brahmans and the members are fed with fish. With this, the period of controlling the diet is over.

In pre-Vaisnavite times, they performed Cup-Sābā ceremony (a pre-Vaisnavite form of rite), an institution by itself. This is still performed in certain cases. In the case of death in child birth, death of a bachelor and of unmarried woman and of the person who commits suicide, the ceremony of Cupṣābā is still being performed by a māibā (pandit).65 It is well to remember that several texts are extant where minute details about the nature of the soul and concept of obsequial rites are very succintly given. Every Manipur Vaisnava is

64. See supra, Ch.VI.

advised to organise a feast each month on the day of the death for twelve months. Monthly feasting is not expensive and is performed in the house of the son in the presence of either a monk or a nun.

In the annual śrāddha the son feeds the guests with vegetarian diet. He gives them daksīna duly. A devotional kīrtan, offering of a chatra (flag) and a brick tomb over the grave are regarded as obligatory duties towards the dead and normally met only by the well-to-do class. Feeding the Brāhmaṇs, Vaiṣṇavas and the guests in the fortnight of Langban/August-September is also a part of the cult of the dead. The idea is that the forefathers are fed through the feeding of them.66

The bone of the departed is covered by a piece of hand-spun cloth and kept in a safe place. The well-to-do person has to carry the bone and throw it into the Ganges. The places for the ceremony are Nabadvip, Vṛndāvana, etc., where the Manipuris in charge of the idols conduct the rite for the pilgrimage. The Manipuris of these places thrive on the fees and offerings collected from the pilgrims who came with the bones to be thrown into the Ganges.67 The Irawady and the Ningthi rivers were also considered holy. According to the Meitheis they were supposed to be mystically connected with the Ganges. T. C. Hodson explains the point in his book, "At a later date in his reign 1724 (King Garibniwāz alias Pāmheiba)"

66. The primitive festival of Manipur like Langban Canou Tamā has been hindunised in Vaiṣṇavite fashion. The information was supplied to me by Thongam Madhab Singh, a pandit of Manipur.

67. See Ch.VI.
he exhumed the bones of his ancestors and cremated them on the banks of the Ningthi river, and from that time ordered his subjects to burn the dead. The system of cremation in vogue among the Meitheis is very thorough as Mr Colguhouse remarks, and the frontal to be preserved and thrown in the Ganges at a later date as opportunity arises. There is a regular flow of pilgrims from Manipur to Nadiya and Vrndavana. The Manipuris maintain their contact with the sacred tirthas which were established by King Jayasimha.

It is stressed that all the ceremonies must be passed through in their proper order.

The more important occasional practices adopted by the Vaisnava sects in Manipur can be divided into the following types: (1) Festivals, (2) Birth and death anniversaries of the Vaisnava kings and Gosvāmis, and (3) Vratas or fasting or vows. They are observed in the palace and individual houses alike.

Festivals

The Vaisnava festivals have much in common with those of the rest of India. The pre-Vaisnavite festivals and the

68. B. R. Pemberton, Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India, p.39; T. C. Hodson, The Meitheis, Sec. on 'The Disposal of the dead'. From the study of Garibniwaz Carit (Edited and translated by L. Mangi Singh and L. Mani Singh in 1965) we know that purificatory bathing of the water of the Irawady is an important aspect of Meithei piety in the 18th century. A large number of bones of the early kings of Manipur were dropped into the Irawady river by King Garibniwaz alias Pāmheiba.
practices have been thoroughly vaisnavised during the centuries under study. The observances contain a good deal of primitive as well as newly invented material presents within a pro-brahmanical garb. Ancient cults were modified in the Vaisnavite environment. They are associated with some local peculiarities which are not found in other parts. The Saiva and Sākta festivals are also observed in addition to Vaisnavite ones.

The following festivals have been popular in Manipur. The birth anniversary of Kṛṣṇa is observed by the Gauḍiya Vaisnavas on the eighth day of the month of Śrāvaṇa/July-August. It is celebrated all over the country. The performance is carried out more or less on a uniform pattern under the direction of the royal priest in the temple of Śrī Śrī Govindaji. The main items are the visiting the temples of Govindaji and Hanumāṇa Thākura at Mahabali, listening to the recital of stories and performing pūjā. The elderly Vaisnavas observe fasting up to midnight, the time in which god is born. A special practice of performing a kind of Manipur indoor game known as Likon Sānaba (ludo game) as a part of the festival is current among the bachelors and maidens in the night. On the next day which is called Nandotsava, a feast is organised on a grand scale in the temples of the palace and of Aram Nityānanda at Khwai Lalambung makhong.

69. The time is announced by the palace by a boom. The people around Imphal town can hear the announcement. I have seen it many times.

70. This game ceases to be practised by the people in the middle of the 19th century.

71. My own.
The birth day of Radha, the consort of Kṛṣṇa is celebrated in Manipur in a similar manner.

The worship of Vāmana, the fifth incarnation of Viṣṇu is observed on the twelfth day of the month of Bhādrapada.

Another important festival is the Holi on the full-moon day of Lāṁḍā/Phālguna/February-March. The festival has a special charm for the Manipuri Vaisnavas. It is a five day festival of importance. There are many theories which explain its origin.

The Meitheis call it Yāosang festival. One important feature of the festival is that the boys collected bamboos and thatches and constructed a small mandir called Yāosang (Yaosang = Sheep, Sang = Shed, i.e., Sheep-shed) near the road sides. The image of Caitanya Mahāprabhu is brought in to the shed and a group of people, male, female, old and young arrange a feast in conformity with the Gauḍīya manners. In the evening of the full-moon day they set the hut on fire. It is not clear why the small sheds are called Yāosang = sheep-shed and why they are set to fire on the Gauda Purnima day.72 In Manipuri language, the shed in which the child is delivered is called Wāngol Sang or Chabok Sang. If the temporary huts built on the road side are meant to be the shed for the birth of Sri Caitanya, it should have called Wāngol Sang.

The Meitheis maintain that Sri Krsna cannot meet Radhā because of the care of Jaṭilā and Kuṭilā. So he stealthily set fire to the sheep-shed of Āihana. At this, Jaṭilā and Kuṭilā go out to the release of the sheep. In the meantime Kṛṣṇa enters Āihana's house and sees Radhā.\textsuperscript{73}

The festival is observed in order to symbolise the pang of separation between Radha and Kṛṣṇa and the manner in which Kṛṣṇa sees Radhā after burning the sheep-shed. This happens to be the day on which Śrī Kṛṣṇa was born as Lord Gourāṅga.\textsuperscript{74}

The festival also symbolises the farewell of the winter and the advent of the spring.

Another legend says that the earth is placed on the head of serpent god, Pākhamba. He gets tired of the pressure of the earth. Śiva then sends seven Apsarās to entertain dance. Pākhamba is so enamoured of the dance that he forgets his torment. The earth is then balanced properly on the head of Pākhamba. The seven maidens does not leave Manipur and give birth seven clans of Manipur. The Thābal-chongbi dance which is performed in the Dola-yātṛā festival is traced to this story.\textsuperscript{75}

In Manipur the characteristic feature of the festival is that small boys walk from house to house to collect money.

\textsuperscript{73} See fn. 72.
\textsuperscript{74} Atombapu Sarma, Manipur Itihas, pp. 216-217.
\textsuperscript{75} Faubion Bowers, The Dance in India, pp. 144-145.
The virgins beg money from the male passers-by. Youths can be seen parading the streets with red powder painting or besmearing the girls. They also sprinkle red-powdered water on each other as a kind of practical joke. The boys and girls participate in the Thabal-chongba dance.

The more elderly people go to the practical side of Vaiṣṇavism. The males and females alike perform Holi kirtan on the occasion of the festival at the temple of Śrī Govindaji. The participants are the chosen people of different villages. Among the pālās of the kirtan some are experts in music and dance. The performance of holi continues till the sixth day of Lāmda/February-March known as Hālanḵār. Before we conclude the holi festival we must say something about the Hālanḵār day at the temple of Vijaya Govinda at a distance of one mile to the west of the capital.

We have stated earlier that the lineage of Ananta Śaṁ Mantri worshipped the idol of Śrī Vijaya Govinda at Sagolband, on the sixth day after the five day festival of Yaōsang. A great festival takes place annually in this temple to which the king pays a visit. At the end of the holi, a mock fight takes place between sanāpālās, attendants of Śrī Govindaji and vrajamāis, attendants of Rādhā. The sanāpālās put on yellow colours while the vrajamāis dress like the gopīs. The fight is the imitation of the quarrel between the gopas and gopīs. The

vrajaśāis attack with sticks and pursue the male party when the gopas hurl taunting remarks at them. It is popularly believed that if the Halāṅkār (mock-fight) is not duly performed, misfortunes and epidemic are likely to visit the people. This is said to be observed in memory of a similar rite performed by the minister, Ananta Sāi. 77

Ratha-yāтра is a festival of nine-day duration in the bright fortnight of the month of Inṣeṇa/June–July with elaborate paraphernalia. We have in the Kumbābā a passage which says that Mahārāja Gumbhīr Singh introduced the car festival (Rath-yātra). He founded the images of Jagavandhu, Balarāma and Subhadra and commenced worship on the model of Puri. In other village temples also image of Jagavandhu is also worshipped with proper rites.

The images are bathed on the day of Snāna-yātra, before fifteen days of Ratha-yātra. Then images are carried out on the Ratha to the accompaniment of music, offering fruits by individual house-holders. 78 Sometimes persons stand behind the image and fan it with a yak-tail fan while in procession. We may add that the recitation of Jayadeva’s Daśa-vatāra in the evening is another essential ingredient of this festival. If a villager is unable to worship Jagavandhu with Khubēk Isei, he must invoke god by reciting the verse of the Gītā-govinda.

---

77. Atombapu Sarma holds that the festival appears to be observed more as a matter of pūjā than fun. This is intimated to me in a personal conversation with him.

The rite also sanctions the offering of rice and dal cooked in oil which we call khechri (a dish made of rice and split pulses). The priests distribute the prasadas among the Vaishnavas. 79

The festival is celebrated in the Royal temple on a grand scale. The kings and nobles used to go out on the first and last days of the festival. 80

On the eleventh day of the bright fortnight in the month of Ingeiv/June-July the people observe Harisayana. The idol of Jagannatha is laid in water ceremoniously. 81

Hari Utthana is celebrated on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Karttika. It marks the awakening of God Jagannatha from sleep. It consists in the ritual awakening of God and the performance of kirtan. Youths and virgins indulge in stealing the fruits and sugarcane from nearby fields. Congregational walking in the night sometimes leads to fighting and abduction of girls. 82

79. The description is based on Vaishnava tantras. As a result of local colouring the festival wore a Manipuri garb. I observe it from my personal experience.

80. See fn. 79.

81. See fn. 79; T. Kennedy, op.cit., (Section on Public Worship and Festivals) pp.201-204.

82. From the intense study of the Cheitharol Kumbaba, we know that the washing of the temples, the performance of Nagarakirtan, etc., were very important in these centuries. But the practice is gradually dying out among the Manipuri Vaishnavas nowadays.
The Jhulana yātrā festival is held from the eleventh to the fifteenth day of the month of Thawcuv’ July-August. The Vaisnavite section of the community, and more specially the ascetic Vaisnavas and Vairāgīs as they are called, are very fond of this festival. Images of Radhā and Kṛṣṇa are placed in a dala and swung to and fro. Special male or female pālas are held in every temple. At the temple of Śrī Govindaji it is celebrated with great pomp. It has spread to other village temples, small and big and thus it helps the kings to universalise its celebration in all religious institutions alike.83

On the full-moon day of Mera-November-December, the Manipuri Vaisnavas plant a bamboo pole near the balsam mound of the courtyard and illuminate it with lamps. It lasts till the following full-moon of Hiyāngel October-November. On the first day which is called Mera Wayungba, Sarada-rāsa or the dance of autumn is performed in the palace. On the last day, the people remove the bamboo pole and this is known as Mera Wāphukpa. In this day too, the Maharāsa yatra is celebrated. The youth of the country share the joy by performing Likon (ludo) on these two days.84

The Manipuri Vaisnavas believe that an ancestral spirit return to their households to receive homage from the surviving members and to bless them.85 During this month the people

85. Information revealed to me by my father, late M. Borajao.
abstain from taking fish and listen to the chantry and reading of sacred books. King Jayasimha (1763-1798) is said to have drawn up rules and regulations for its celebration at the palace as well as at the households. It attained considerable popularity under his successors.

On the first Hiyangei/November-December after the Dipavali festival (which is also observed), the worship of Govardhana hill is current among the Manipuri Vaishnavas. In the temples and individual houses, a grand feast is arranged. In the evening lairik tabā (listening to the sacred book) is held where two persons learned in purānic lore are seen (one for reading the Bengali or Sanskrit language and another explaining sentence by sentence in Manipuri). This celebration reminds the extraordinary and miraculous power of Kṛṣṇa in saving the herdsmen from a heavy down-pour. Cow-dung figures of the hill and clay figures of cows are made and worshipped.86

The festival falls on the second day of Hiyangei/October-November and is observed as a day of feeding the married sisters in the house of the parents. They reciprocate by giving the parents and brothers boons which are supposed to protect them. In other parts of India the sisters devote this day to feeding the brothers. Manipur has a different version. 87

Singh who happened to be a lairik thibā (recitor of sacred scriptures).

86. See fn. 85.

87. According to some scholars, this mode of feeding the sisters is assigned to the reign of King Chandrakirti. But this view is not definite.
The eighth day of Hiyāngēi/ November-December is celebrated as the Gostha or cow-tending ceremony of Kṛṣṇa. In the day time, a dance drama called Sansenba is performed at the palace. Its origin is traced to King Gambhir Singh.

Heikru Hidomba is another festival observed on the eleventh day of Lāmān/ September-October. The temple of Vījaya Govindaji is noted for its boat race ceremony on this day. The idols of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are kept on the prows of a boat. The offering of the garland of Heikru (amalki) fruit to the deities forms a special item. Though the festival had a pre-Vaiṣṇavite origin from the reign of Irenhba (984-1074) details of it have assimilated much of Vaiṣṇavite elements. The chief personnel of the boat race are to offer two beads one of one hundred and eight pieces of hoop grass to the Lord and to place round their neck.

As in other parts of India, in Manipur Vasanta Pañcamī is celebrated on the fifth day of Phairen/ January-February.

Besides the widely observed ones, there are minor or local festivals which are celebrated in particular localities. The people are busy with religious activities throughout the year.

The birth and death anniversaries of Caitanya, Nityānanda, Gosvāmīs of Vrindāvana and of Narottam Thakura are

88. See Ch.VI. More of its descriptions are found in the said Chapter.

89. Supra, Chs. III and V.

90. N. Khelchandra Singh, M.M.B.D., Imphal, 1954, p.226. Ananta Sai is supposed to be the inventor of this idea. This amalgamation pervaded the whole of the culture of Manipur.
celebrated in due solemnity in all important temples. They also commemorate the birth and death anniversaries of the lives of Vaisnavas of Manipur, such as Jayasimha, Nar Singh, Chandrakirti Singh, etc., with a good deal of festivity and honour.  

One common practice adopted by the Vaisnavas was the observing of vows which involve total abstention from cooked food or from fish. It is to be noted that a kind of limited fasting (one meal in a day) for one month has its counterpart in the primitive religion of the Meitheis. Vaisnava householders devote to religious life usually engaged in the observance of fasts sanctioned by the tattas. The people including the kings and princes are very scrupulous in observing them in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The commonly observed fast is ekādasi or the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight. They do not maintain the distinction between ekādasi of dark fortnight and the bright fortnight. Fasting on important festivals or Rāsa dance or Gaura-līlā is believed to bring great merit to the people. Fasting is popular among the disciples on the death of the Brahma Diśka Guru.

91. Detailed lists of the festivals and tithis of the Manipuri Vaisnavas are found in the Chandrabād Pānjika. It is published by M.A.S., Imphal under the editorship of Th. Suro Singh Jyotiṣa Ratna, Founder-President.

92. Yubarāja Tikendrajit was too ill to meet the Chief Commissioner of Assam in a Darbar to be held on Sunday, March 22, 1891. This happens to be the ekādasi day on which he observed fasting. Vide, Mrs E. Grimwood, My Three Years in Manipur, pp.181-182; R. K. Sanahal Singh, Manipur Itiḥāṣ, p.124.
Passages in the Kumbābē refers to practice of fasting in the time of solar or lunar eclipses. A boom from the gun announces the time for the end of eclipse. The kings fast on the day when the Sun's rays are obscured by rain or cloud. Women are particular in observing Sāvitrī Vrata on the full day of the month of Jyeṣṭa in honour of Sāvitrī. Confirmed (Vairāgīs) devotees observe the custom of fasting in the precincts of temple or in their monastery for gaining the favour of the deity. They are the unconditional (naimittika karma) duty: binding only on special occasions.

The Daily Ritual of a Vaisnava

The daily observance of an average Vaisnava householder is much the same as the celibate life of a monk. The monks are adepts in the details of the devotional life. The codes mention that an initiated Vaisnava should be a performer of certain religious duties during a day divided into three main parts. The ritualistic division of time was strictly followed by every Manipuri Vaisnava.

A Vaisnava devotee wakes up before day break with the name of Kṛṣṇa or Rāma in his lips. Seeing a cat or broom immediately after getting up considered to be unfortunate day. Then

93. This information has been gathered from the practice of the women of Manipur.

he bows down to Sanamahi (set apart in a corner of the house) and the tulasi plant. After attending to the calls of nature and cleansing himself with earth and water he cleanses the teeth. He uses a small bamboo stick as a tooth brush and when the brushing is over, he splits it into two and utilises it as a tongue cleaner. Some use charcoal, salt and ash as tooth powder and right index-finger as the brush. The shaving of beards, cutting of hair and nails are done on Monday and Wednesday. The avoidance of shaving and cutting nails on one's own birth-day for the devotee is also important.

Then he goes to a nearby tank or a river for his morning bath. He gets into the water with the night cloth. The head is rubbed with Cinghi, a kind of sweet-scented liquid which serves as soap. During the process of bathing the Sun and Gange (river goddess) are worshipped. The initiated person arranges and unties his long tuft of hair (Sikha). The Brāhmans may bathe more than once a day. Abdul Ali informs us in his account, "The oldest family of Brahmin in the country is known as Hangoi bum derived from the word 'Hungoi', a frog. The name was given by the Manipuris to the first 'Brahman' whose frequent baths or ablutions to ensure the purity of the body filled them with astonishment."

95. See fn. 93; Hari Bhakti Vilas Kana by Atombapu Sarma, (Imphal, 1955) may be consulted in this connection.

96. This practice is strictly adhered to by the Manipuri Hindus. See also, S. N. Sarma, The Neo-Vaisnava Movement and the Satra Institution of Assam, pp.129-131.

97. See the above para (naming); Abdul Ali, Notes on the Early History of Manipur, Calcutta, 1923, pp.1-10.
After the bath he comes back to the house with a pot containing water. He changes his cloth for a fresh one (Ekta or muga cloth). He applied the sacred Gauḍīya marks of sandal paste (tilaka) on the forehead and various parts of the body. He daubs his forehead with two perpendicular lines joined together at the bridge of the nose. At the bottom there is something like the bamboo leaf or basil leaf. The usual painting material is the faint yellow gopi-chandana, whitish clay or the black clay from Radhakund (for old men and women and widows). He paints not only forehead, but the neck, both arms, breast and both sides of shoulders. By means of engraved metallic stamp called Sāpa immersed in a solution of gopi-chandana he imprints marks on the parts of the body. He paints the names of Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, Goura, etc. He does the ācamana (sipping of water from the palm of the hand) and drinks a little, makes offerings of flower to the deities and the tulasi plant. He reads verses from the Gītā, Gopālasahasrāṇāma and tiny books of local composition. He then eats the breakfast. Before cleansing his teeth and bathing, no initiated Vaishnava will take anything. They are very particular on this point and follow the rules laid down in Hari-bhakti-vilāsa.

In the evening, he worships the setting Sun, performs sandhyārati if he is a Brahman. He invokes god Śanāmahi and


99. See fn. 95. The whole of Hari Bhakti Vilāsa has been summarised in A Study of Vaishnavism in Ancient and Medieval Bengal by S. C. Mukherjee, Calcutta, 1966, pp.117-199.
Leimaren, tulasi plant by offering incense. Those who are conferred with rosary should count the beads and sing devotional songs. They engage in the recitation of jagya. The Brahman-inmates and those who live near the village temple join the congregational prayer by ringing the bells, and singing the sacred songs.

Then he eats his supper and goes to bed. He repeats the names of God in the act of doing every thing. These religious acts are unconditional (nitya) duty. They are obligatory in themselves independently of any a subjective prius of pathological motive.

Vaisnava customs and manners

Sacrifices involving the killing of animals are stopped by King Garibniwaz and were replaced by Vegetarianism. Drinking being a social vice was given up by the orthodox Vaisnavas. The masses except the princes and the Loh people avoid meat eating and drinking as a religious taboo.

The normal food materials are rice, pulse, vegetables, fish, milk, curd and milk. The staple-food is boiled rice with curry made from fish or vegetables. Dried fish is also taken


101. See supra, Ch.III.
with a pinch of salt. Meat is avoided by an initiated person. There is a practice to the effect that none of the people conferred with mâla is to eat fish. Children before the initiation and some of the princes take meat dish. The children take three meals in a day whereas the adults take two meals a day (except the solar and lunar eclipse).

The chewing of pan with betal leaf, lime, a piece of cocoanut and tobacco is more common than is supposed. Fruits, flowers and pan form the constant diet of the Vaisnavas in all religious and ceremonial functions. Any invitation is to be made by arecanut and leaf on a round plantain plate. The pan mixed with a number of spices is presented by the king or a noble to the people in token of honour. The system of chewing pan is a taboo for the son or disciple during the ceremonies (up to the bone-gathering ceremony) performed in honour of the departed.

Cooking for the Manipuri Vaishnavas and the other people of India is more or less the same. Inter-dining and feasting have social implications too. On religious feasts, cooking is mainly discharged by the Manipuri Brahmans who

102. E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, Section on Religion.
103. This point is based on my personal experience of the Meithhei habit and manner.
105. See fn. 103.
attained great popularity in cooking. Different types of vegetable curries are cooked in sesamum oil (ghee and sesamum). Rice cooked in milk, boiled and sandes play an important part in feasts. They attach great importance to the personal cleanliness and sanctimoniousness while dinning. Non-Vaishnavas are not allowed to join the dining. So far as the arrangement of seating, the Brāhmans, the mendicants and the elderly people take their seat in order of position and seniority of age. Women, young men and children may not sit with them but take a separate place meant for them. It has been noticed that princes or Brāhmans are offered the first in a feast whatever be their age.

Food offerings for the deity consist of cooked and uncooked articles. The service of a Brāhmaṇ is also requisitioned in cooking rice and vegetables. The offerings of rice cooked in milk (Kṣira) and pholār (a kind of liquid food prepared by the Brāhmans from the combination of milk, sugar, flour and kabok (sweetmeat) are done in the worship of Nārāyaṇa (Vishnu), Saturn and Śaṁmah.¹⁰⁸

Uncooked offerings comprise the fruits, pāṇī and sweets. Such offerings do not require the mediation of Brāhmans. To Umanāḷais (pre-Vaishnavite gods) animals and fish are offered. Pigeons are let off when Kālī is worshipped for recovery from diseases. The aboriginal and purānic modes of worship are

106. S. K. Chatterji, Religious and Cultural Integration of India, Preface, pp.IV-V.
107. See fn. 103; S.A.I.Y.C., pp.22-23.
fused in the worship of the various deities. 109

Sacramental Relationship

Sacramental relation is concerned with a man's spiritual progress which can be said to consist the relation between the Dikṣā Guru and devotee and the relation among the devotees themselves. They constitute the cardinal principles on which the devotional structure is based.

The function of a guru is of vital importance. He must be well versed in the Vaiṣṇavite Sastras and help the people in their spiritual development. Brāhmaṇ-gurus have made the religious life dynamic. They provided the masses with some kind of background of religious culture. They are therefore of as much importance as the kings and rulers in the religious life of the people. 110

The authority of the guru is moral or spiritual. It is neither physical nor political. There is something in him that compels respect of the devotee. A Guru's authority has its source in the deep understanding of devotional life. He shows the knowledge of self-realisation to his disciples. 111

Worship of the Guru is recommended because only by the way taught by him is spiritual perfection possible. His

---

109. See infra, Ch.VIII.
110. See Chs. IV and V.
111. The Guru and the disciple are related to each other just as perfect experience is related to the imperfect one. T. M. P. Mahadevan, Outlines of Hinduism, p.25.
teaching is a boat which the disciples use to cross the ocean of māyā. A disciple is never left desolate or disappointed by the teaching of the Guru when the soul has to cross the river Vaitarani to Yamalaya. 112

It is improper for a disciple to address his Brāhmaṇ Guru by his name. It is rigidly observed among them than among other things. He (or She) should refer to him as ājñā or pābung. To have a look of him is called a 'Darsan'. One should bow down the Guru whenever one happens to meet him. He has been described as an integral part of the gods. 113

The devotees are bound to one another by various ties and relationship which would lead to organised groups or societies, viz., with rights and collective responsibilities. They should love one another. A devotee who offends another is deprecated. 114

When two or more persons are initiated by the same Guru, a sort of brotherly relation is established between them. They should address each other as tāda (elder brother), ināo (younger brother), etc. If they happened to be of opposite sexes the man should not marry the woman. Any marriage of persons under the same Brāhmaṇ Guru called guru-bāri and is branded as a great sin. 115

112. In this respect, Madhava's philosophy influenced Caitanyaism. M. Neog, Sañkaradeva and His Times, pp.348-349.

113. E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, Calcutta, 1886, Sec. on Manners and Customs, Sri Jiva Gosvami's Bhakti Sandharya may be consulted in this connection.

114. Cited to me by Amudon Sarma, an authority on the dance of Manipur.

115. My observation supported by tradition; also S. N. Sarma,
Manners

The Vaisnavite influence on inter-personal behaviour is very marked. The people are addressed by the office one holds. The princes are called *sana* (Gold) and the princesses *sila* in the right Manipuri style. The Brāhmans are called Brāhmans (*Bāmon*). A Vaisnava bows down to the Brāhmaṇ Gurus by touching the ground to show respect. Sometimes he touches the feet. Foot and knee are not allowed to be exposed before them as they are an offence in the society. While discussing them, one should talk softly.

In view of the dignity and high responsibility of their position, it is said that they do not walk but move, they do not sleep but recline.

The devotees bow each other with the name of Rādhā and Kṛsna on their lips. When a Manipuri expresses contempt, grief, curiosity, etc., he utters the name of Rādhā and Kṛsna as a means of consolation.

We find the following observation to

---


117. Polite words or expressions are used before the king and the dignified people. This was a courtesy which contributed not a little to the maintenance of peace and harmony among them, and added a charm all its own to their department. I have not discussed the list of polite words in this para. For details, L. Ibungohal Singh, Introduction to Manipur, pp.18-19. E. W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, Section on Custom and Manner.

this effect in the account of Mr Mukundal Chowdhury, "The Manipuri Hindus have polite manners. They are courteous but not flatters like the Bengalis. The courage of up country, the gracious manners of the Bengali and the simplicity of the Assamese have combined to form some of the characteristics of the Manipuri people."

Offences and Penalties

Religious offences are called dosa or aprādha. A person who commits a dosa is condemned by the Vaisnava society and is treated as an outcaste. The astrologers whose predictions are fallacious were condemned to sink into the water on account of their miscalculation in fixing the timing of the events. King Chourjit Singh punished the man in charge of Tanveisang on Saturday, Kālen/ April-May 18, 1808. This was because he beat the Tanveibung some hours before the actual time. The person who breaks taboos in food and marital relationship is often excommunicated. If a Manipuri woman falls in love with a Muslim and a Naga male, the king used to send them to a Loi village or Naga village. Very few can break through the walls of convention. There is an instance in which Ismail Thambāl, a Manipuri lady showed determination and courage in remaining true to her marriage with a Muslim. Once a Brāhmaṇ...

119. Tanveipung is a drum beaten for every hour by the Tānyelā, a member of an institution in the palace. Vide, N. Khelchandra Singh, M.M.E.D., pp. 220-221.

120. The Chaithārol Kumbābā contains many instances of it in its pages. I have not named them individually.
received an order from king Gambhir Singh to eat the flesh of one dead goose which had died in his custody on account of his negligence. It amounts to the loss of caste if someone fails to carry out the order of the king.  

But there was no sharp antagonism between the Meitheis and hill people. In the nineteenth century hundreds of Nagas were converted by the kings themselves. A well-developed expression of sensitivity to pollution and the desire to get rid of it has been widely current. The pollution or excommunion can be removed by paying a small fine, or by confession. The conception of prāvāscitta is quite common. For the person should approach a committee of the Brāhmaṇ to prescribe prāvāscitta. In serious cases the king should preside. Courage for speaking the truth and the recital of the name of god are often spoken of as having expiatory value. The story is that Marjit kept in touch with the Burmese and had formed alliance with the Burmans against King Chourjit Singh. On his return to Manipur on the 30th day (Monday), Sajibu/ March-April of 1808 A.D. the expiation ceremony took place. The chronicle says that he built five houses for five Brāhmaṇs and he passed twelve years distributing paddy, salt and clothes among the Brāhmaṇs. There existed among the Manipuris a strong feeling that persons who settled in Burma must lose their caste.


122. As observed earlier, the king administered to the Nagas and the Loi people the sacrament of sacred thread in these centuries. James Johnstone, My Experience in Manipur and Naga Hills, p.84.

123. C.K., p.199. In the Cheithārol Kumbāba, it is mentioned that Maharāja Jayasimha in course of the seven years' rule of
The seven years which the Burmese overran the country involved great ritual impurity and Gambhir Singh tried to regain the purity of the country by expiation ceremony on Sunday, Sajibu/March-April 22, 1826 A.D. On Saturday, Wākching/December-January 15, 1809 King Chourjit performed a big vājñā in which all the pibās of all families were summoned. They were made to take a dip in the waters of Pāonām Hiden in order to absolve of the sin committed by the people in his reign.\textsuperscript{125}

The Vaisnāvite deities, viz. Śrī Govindaji, Vrindāvanakṛṣṇa, etc. are worshipped according to paurāṇic rites. Fish, meat and wine are not offered to them. On the 1st Saturday, Inga/May-June 1847 A.D. King Nar Singh was informed that the Brāhmans in charge of the deity offered fish-bone to Śrī Govindaji. No sooner did he hear the words, than he dismissed Thākur Tebā, the head sebait. He also punished the cook, the water carrier and Lāi Keirungbā (another officer). He did not like the inadvertence of the sebaits. He did not treat them better than criminals.\textsuperscript{126}

All the Manipuri kings, from Garibniwāz to Chandra-kirti were staunch Vaisnāvas. They stood firmly against the

\textsuperscript{124} C.K., p.220.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p.201.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p.277.
sorcerers and night worshippers. They banned Tantricism and took various steps to punish them. In the *Cheitharol Kumbabā*, it is stated that King Jayasimha sent Hangoibam Malba, Yaima Satrukhol, and a man of Sorais family to Sugnu and several loi villages. Prince Pāchahanba and prince Kukila were found guilty of indulging in nocturnal practice. They were throne-thirsty also. They were driven to the Mayāng country on Wākching December-January 20, 1788. Similarly King Chourajit exiled Naorem Murāri Singh for his sorcery on 23rd Sunday, Sajibu/March-April. We find King Gambhir Singh expelling two night worshippers from the country. The kings tried to check their activities through an extensive espionage system. The village headmen were informed to bring the matter to the notice of the king.