CHAPTER VII
FOLKSONGS AND BALLADS

A. FOLKSONGS

A folksong is a lyrical, simple, not too artistic, rhythmic composition of the folk. It is not an expression of the sophisticated mind. It generally reflects the social heritage, the environment, the joys and sorrows, problems and worries of the life of the folk living in a particular territory. Its chief characteristic lies in a fine blending of its wordings in unison with the tune in which it is sung. It is characterised by a spontaneous simple, but natural melody that springs from the emotion of the common people -- an emotion caused by the natural surrounding. It has its literature embedded in the oral tradition which is transmitted from one generation to another orally. "Folk songs are best defined as songs which are current in the repertory of a folk group ... ."¹

A "folk song is an art in which the average member of the group participates more generally than in the case with cultivated music or literature of the city. Nearly everyone in a folk group knows songs and sings them ... ."²

B. MEITEI FOLKSONGS

The history of Meitei folksongs could be said to be as old as the history of Manipuri language and culture. Meitei

² Ibid., p. 1034
folksongs can reflect better the entire Manipuri culture than the Manipuri classical literature can do because there is no dichotomy between cultural and national poetry of the people. As a matter of fact, these folksongs have drawn vigour and rejuvenation from the life of the Meitei people, and as such, they echo the religious movement, heroic deeds, customs, manners, traditions, beliefs, entertainments, love, separation, beauty, wealth, sorrow and grief, etc., in short, all the facts of the national life of the Meitei; through simple and sweet notes. Since ancient times, dances, music and religion have been inseparably interlinked with the life of the Meitei folk. Thus, the folk music and the community dances continued to be an integral part of the life of the people of Manipur.

As can be expected in a tradition-bound society, folksongs fulfil various functions in the Meitei society. Folksongs play an important part in fulfilling the ritual functions of various rites, and ceremonies prevalent in Manipur. They are also sung in praise of gods and goddesses. Besides, they are sung while observing certain festivals. For example, Hijan Hirao, a ritual song is always sung in fulfilling the ritual of the Lai-Haréobā festival.

Meitei folksongs of love and yearning, expressing the mutual attraction between man and woman are particularly popular among the youth, although they are sometimes sung by grown up
people. They express eternal human sentiments, and might have been associated, at least in the past with the idea of fertility.

Often folksongs provide good recreation and amusement to the people. The folksongs like Phousu Ishei (husking song) through their enchanting tunes, love and sex themes convert the dull work into a sportive experience while providing an avenue to forget the fatigue and hazards of hard work. Women sing songs throughout the day while cultivating the field or protecting the crops from wild birds. Similarly, men also sing songs while catching fish at the lakes or while returning home from their day's work. They also serve the function of communication channel for knowledge and belief. They are one of the most powerful propaganda media to direct the attention of the people towards a particular programme.

Folksongs also provide pleasure and joy as they enliven their plays and games. Now there is a tendency towards disappearance of such game songs and play rhymes from amongst Meitei children studying in schools imparting 'modern' education.

In Manipuri, a 'folksong' is called Khullak Ishei or Khunung Ishei: Khulluk or Khunung means rural; Ishei means song. There are various kinds of folksongs in the Meitei society. However, these folksongs may be conveniently classified in the following groups for the present study: (a) Songs
of Religious and Ritualistic Association, (b) Songs of Love and Yearning, (c) Songs sung in connection with certain Ceremonies, (d) Work songs and (e) Lullabies, Rhymes and Children's Game Songs.

(a) Songs of Religious and Ritualistic Association
(1) Invocations

Sanā Lamok: Sanā Lamok is sung while invoking and praying Pakhangba, etc. by a māiba. The singer takes much care in singing this invocation song unerringly. As mentioned in the book 'Nāothingkhong Phambāl Kābā' (circa A.D. 663), the song Sanā Lamok was also found to be in vogue at the time of the coronation of king Naotthingkhong. It is also said that it was sung as a welcome note to the king near his throne when he returned from a tour or military expedition. It was also believed that it bestowed upon the king longevity and immunity from illness if sung correctly. It has an obscure origin. A part of this song is quoted below:

"Lāiren ngāngdi / Lānggoi sayāng thakṭā / Kari läktaroinongthoirago lākshik-o / Shāren yetnā lam / Khubi kāorong shu / Khuyā yet-o thumnā / Sanā Lamok phamdā / Tubee sanā namiren / Miren thouyāngbabu tillaremle."


Because of the archaic nature of the language, a literal translation is almost impossible. In this and other specimen of this kind, which follow only the main idea has been given in English after quoting the text itself. However, even this has not been possible and simply the text has been quoted.
An English rendering will read like this:

0, King! Why should not you
Come on a horse back?
Come and surpass all,
Be seated comfortably
On the royal seat
I have stood as the royal shadow to thee.

**Ahonglon**: Ahonglon is a ritual song of medieval Manipuri literature, most likely a fragment of lengthy composition, now forgotten. From olden days, the māibās and the māibis have been still chanting Ahonglon while worshipping the gods. It also describes the yearly joyous festivals called Ahong kummei celebrated in honour of the gods, which was performed by the successive Meitei kings every year according to the particular month of the calendar with pomp and grandeur. The song was sung to the accompaniment of a Manipuri musical instrument called 'penā' (a multiple-stringed fiddle played by a bow). The rhythm of Ahonglon song is vigorous. There is a traditional belief that the gods were pleased if Ahonglon was sung and that the pleased gods would bestow plenty and prosperity on the community of the village in which it was sung. There are still people who believe in the efficacy of Ahonglon song. Although the "fun-making" referred to the Ahonglon song was not meant for amusement of the people, it was a jubilant activity of the gods. A portion of this song is as follows:
"He hao he hao he hao / Hongnemlo hongnemlo /
Hongnemse hongnemse / Lamlenmadā hongnembā /
Kangleiyondā hongnembā / Pungmayondā hongnembā /
Khoyamthaotu hongnembā / Māiyingthaotu hongnembā /
Lāirenynā nānongyāinā hongnembā/ Liklāirennā
ningthacrennā hongnembā /
Loidāmgidi thā kāodānā / Lāngheigidi kumkāodana hongnembā/

... ... ... etc. etc. etc."

It means: "Make fun, make fun, Let us make fun in the best of lands. To make fun in a corner of the realm. To make fun in the kingdom of the Meiteis. To make fun in the best of cities. To make fun every year without any omissions (skipping) even a single year, and in the same month." etc. etc.

Yākeibā : Yākeibā is sung to the accompaniment of the penā as a daily service to wake up the king in the morning. It is also sung by the singer with the penā as a ritual morning prayer offered to the deity during a Lāi-Harācōbā festival. This song gives an exhaustive and descriptive survey of how the day breaks in the hills and the plain and in the neighbouring state of Senbi (Burma) interspersed with regional legends. An English rendering of this song is as follows:

"Day breaks in the region of Moirang

When the Uthum, a water bird

Sweetly sings; 'Turn Turn'
In the bush by the lake.
And that was a bird
Transformed by the soul of a woman
Who happened to be an unfortunate step-wife.
Thus the people of Moirang did perceive rising of the sun.
And on the side of Senbi (Burma)
The little bird that heralds morning
Is no other than the beautiful parrot
Which was transformed from a lovely girl
Who used to protect the field from wild birds.\(^6\)

Pākhāngbā Lāngyensei: Pākhângbā Lāngyensei is related to the coronation of a Meitei king. The coronation of the Meitei kings was held at Kanglā (situated at the present cantonment area of the 4th Assam Rifles). There is a mound with a deep hole in it. Ancient and Medieval Meiteis believed that there was a serpent coiled up in a characteristic way beneath the ground of Kanglā and that the hot air above and inside the hole was the fiery breath of the serpent emanating through it.

For coronation, the king and the queen sat on a high platform built on the hole, but the king's posture was vertical above the hole. This Pākhângbā Lāngyensei was sung by a person of Thongām Sāgei and it was repeated in chorus by sixty-four...

\(^6\) Ch. Manihar Singh, 'A Note On Early Manipuri Poetry' in Quarterly Journal Vol. 11, No. 4, (October-December), 1981 Published by Manipur State Kala Akademi, Imphal, pp.5-6.
courtiers while the king and the queen were climbing the golden ladder to reach the top of the platform. This song consists of 48 stanza of three lines each with a syllabic refrain in the third line. As it would be a futile attempt to give its complete translation, the central idea of this song may be put thus:

"With the blessings of my preceptor and bowing down to God, I, the singer, sing this song. All those who assembles here! Please listen with undivided attention. Now I sing of the big serpent. It has now uncalled itself and has come out. Its eyes are shining. O, what a dazzling sight. A lotus of gold has appeared in the bosom of the serpent and a gem, in the bosom of the lotus. Let us look at the gem conferring immortality on our king. Gems of love are falling in showers from heaven and the Earth-goddess has received them for the king. Let us now bow down to the Earth-goddess with her blessings, this kingdom is now happy and prosperous like the kingdom of the gods."

Lumārol Ishei : On Lāirol numit (last day of the Lāi-Harāobā festival), the Meiteis perform a ritual on rice cultivation. The meeting, subsequent quarrels and reconciliation of Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi during the rice cultivation is a compulsory rite in the festival. Nurābi (Panthoibi in

disguise) sings invocation song of the presiding deity of the community for giving prosperity to the community. Then, Nurābi with six girls after an early meal are out to work in the paddy field. Then, they chant Loutārol, an invocation song to the paddy spirit along with dancing. A fragment of Loutārol Ishei is as given:

"Poirei khunjā hup / Tayum näijā tin / Yotlei nongthāng kup / Thouri leeshāng toli / Tengpāk lāllu shā / Hāru nonggā phou / Porom natā sham / Kāithet maru tup / Yupā khuman tān / Yāngdou mamei shām / Wāhi koktāi tup / Louri shungdāi yān / Peeren machee khom / Khāleī ngam thungle."

Another fragment of Loutarol Ishei is:

"Lamlenmadā heyi 0 / Madāimadā heyi 0 / Kangleiyondā heyi 0 / Pungmayondā heyi 0 / Yooyaināitu heyi 0 / Tāorimāitu heyi 0."  

There are three kinds of Loutārol namely, Phouocibi Akongjāmbagi Loutārol, Shoubol Lāirel Loutārol and Poireitongi Loutārol. According to the deity, one of Loutārol invocation songs is generally sung by māibi. In Lāi-Hārāobā this Loutārol song is followed by Louyāl Ishei (cultivation song).

9. N. Khelchandra Singh, op.cit., p. 8
10. Ibid., p. 17
An English rendering of *Louvāl Isheī* is as follows:

It's father's field, that they should hoe it,
Let us hoe.
It's grand-father's field, that they should hoe it,
Let us hoe.
It's a field that gives peace to the land, that they should hoe it,
Let us hoe.
It's a field of long life to our king, that they should hoe it,
Let us hoe.
It's a field of prosperity to our land, that they should hoe it,
Let us hoe.
It's a productive field, that they should hoe it,
Let us hoe.
It is a field, that gives longevity.
They should hoe it.
Let us hoe.
It's *chāk chayil*’s (a variety of rice) field, that they should hoe it.
Let us hoe.
It's *pānphuk pānphoi*’s (another rice variety) field, that they should hoe it,
Let us hoe.
It's shongree mayāngbā's (another rice variety) field, that they should hoe it.
Let us hoe.

It's lombā tektā's (a variety of rice) field, that they should hoe it,
Let us hoe.

It's phourel phoujāo's (a kind of rice) field, that they should hoe it,
Let us hoe.

It's shingkha shingthun's field, that they should hoe it,
Let us hoe.\(^\text{12}\)

Phougu Ishei: According to Meitei folk belief, there is a harvest goddess whose blessings are necessary for a bountiful crop. She is called Goddess Phouoibi. Therefore, after harvesting, the threshing work is done on a mat called louyei phak in the field itself and on that very day, the paddy thus collected heaped up in the form of a small mound after winnowing it out and is usually followed by worship and prayer to Goddess with song known as 'Phougu Ishei' ('Phou' means paddy; 'gou' or 'kou' means calling; Ishei means song; a song symbolising welcome to paddy crop). Fertility is the central motif of this song. This song is still in vogue in the Meitei society with some variations here and there:

\(^{12}\) Ibid., pp. 109-110.
O Goddess, Phouoibi;
Come, come, come;
Make for us heaps of Thāngyi paddy
Come, come, come,
Bestow what is good and wealth
Come, come, come,
Bless us with hills of Thāngyi paddy
Come, come, come
O Goddess Phouoibi
Come, come come. 13

Nānglāo Ishei: In Manipur there are various rituals
to invoke the rain. However, one of the oldest process to call
for the rain in times of drought was the ritual performed at
Nongjukhong, a place towards the south-east of Langjing, a
hill to the west of Imphal. The māibās would make various
kinds of offering and sing a rain invoking song called
Nānglāo Ishei. The song runs thus:

0 rain, pour down
Submerge the peak of Langjing
Float down maidens of Pātsoi
Let the youths of Unam pick them up.
0 Rain of Koubā Koumu
0 rain of Loijing Loiā

0 rain of Irene Thakham
0 rain of Thangjing Koirel
0 rain of Wangbren, the supreme deity of south
0 rain of Shambum Mahârâbâ
0 rain of the north-east
0 rain of Häokap chingsâng
0 rain of Khunpham ngângjeng
Come down in torrents
May the sky produce thunder
And may the clouds rumble
Let the earth be heavy
May the goddess of water glide rain
And may the goddess of water shower rain on us.¹⁴
Children also sing the above Nonglao Ishei with some modifications.¹⁵

Mikon Thâgonbâ: On Lairoi numit, the Lâi-Harâobâ is concluded with a song known as Mikon Thâgonbâ - a hymn sung by a singer to the accompaniment of the benâ instrument. This song reveals that the souls which are believed to be in the state of ecstasy due to the pomp and grandeur of the Lâi-Harâobâ festival are usually called back into the human being. Likewise on the last day, Thâbal Chongbâ is also concluded with the performance of Mikon Thâgonbâ song which is sung by the lead singer and responded in chorus by the participants of it. A

¹⁴. Chinglon Laihui (MS)
¹⁵. For details see section (e) of Lullabies, Rhymes and Children’s Game Song$. 
specimen of Mikon Thagonba song sung at Sagolband Meino Leirak, Imphal is as follows:

Living at far off place,
Let us call the souls nearer
The best of the Guru is wākā boat
Immortal Atiya Guru
Is sitting on the stern
Immortal Ima Leimaren
Is steering the boat
Oh : five souls
Six with shadow.
Oh soul, Don't be empty.
Oh soul, Don't lose your entity.
Let us call in the soul with Koo Koo.
The soul would come gradually, step by step
And would keep behind the Chinghunghut
Further,
The Chakpi River is your yonder
And further,
When the Chakpi river is past
The Toibi khong (canal) is there a-head
Still farther,
Past the Toibi canal
\[ \ldots \ldots \ldots \]
The Loktak with her nine tributaries
And the eight of them being blocked
With the pegs of reeds
The dam being the Lāngom (a kind of plant)

• • • • • •

The place called Khwairamband
On the track of the Naga river
Collides with the reed pegs
Lāngom would act as dam.

• • • • • •

Three fingers below the navel
There are golden
And silver vessels.
Open with the golden key
And with the silver key.
Inside the golden vessel.
And the silver one
The soul, would house
Both the vessels being locked
Let us call in the souls with Koo Koo
Do you concede to it (soul)
I, the soul, do
I, the shadow do. 16

(ii) Songs Containing Myths Or Legends Or Allusions to
Legendary Or Historical Events

Ougri : Ougri is a creation hymn. Ougri is an old

Manipur word corrupted from our meaning rope. Ougri song is of mystical origin. On Lairol numit (the last day of Lai-Harāobā), Ougri is sung for the prosperity of the community in a locality or of the village. Equal numbers of both male and female catch hold of a rope tightly forming a circle, the knot of the rope is in front of the deity. The male participants stand at the side of the Lainingthou (God) and the female participants towards Lairembi (Goddess). While singing Ougri, the line is not to be broken and the rope should not fall on the ground. There is a belief in the Meitei society that if the rope falls on the ground in course of singing, that will bring ruin to the community of the locality or of the village. Therefore, at the time of singing Ougri, the participants take sufficient care to observe the rules strictly. The mâibā, standing in the middle of the circle, sings the first line of the Ougri as a lead singer and the participants follow it in chorus. Thus, the song continues till the end. Choral singing of it with its vowel harmonies and matching consonants in a long drawn stylised manner on such a festive occasion as that of Lai-Harāobā makes at all times very charm. A fragment of this song is given below:

'Hoirou hayā hoirou hayā hoirou hayā
Hayā so hayā sā hayāsā Ingsā Ingsā Ingsā
He hup he hup he hup Ougri -o Kolle.
... ...
Apānbabu Charāngsenbu
Kholungsenbā Nongshābā meibu
Nongpok Leimachābu Toureg Leimachābu

Mālem houn-eigibu
Nonggā houn-eigibu
Poirei shem-eigibu

Konglouton Louthibā gā
Hāo muknāre Lengphāi challe
Mongbā yetle tāsil yetle khuronyetle

The first portion describes the various appellations of
the sun and the rest tells us about an incident of the creation
of the universe.

Anoirol : Anoirol, a long composition forming a part of
the Lāi-Hārānōbā rituals is traditionally sung by penā-sakpā (a
singer with penā instrument) with brisk rhythm and refrain
thrown in at irregular intervals. It describes the evolution of
dance in different ages. This song also reveals that when Ashība,
in accordance with the initiative of the Immortal Ruler of the
Universe had finished the creation of the world, dancing was
introduced to the world, as a mark of relaxation. In the very

17. O. Bhogeswar Singh and P. Kokngang (eds.), Ariba Sheireng,
Imphal, 1977, pp. 29.32.
song of Anoirol it is mentioned that Konde khuchum Mai had composed the dance and taught it to Panthoibi who was also called Tubi Ngangyok Chanu Toibi Targanubi. This dance was performed at the Mahouching by Panthoibi during her incarnation as Khabi Lengnao Mombi before her father Taoroinai whom she had invited to a feast:

At a place at Mahouching (Mahou Hill)

At Mahon Phaipok ching (Mahou phaipok Hill)

... ... ...

Khabi Lengnao Mombi

While serving her father with feast

While serving Taoroinai with feast

... ... ...

The dance performed in the Hayichak

Danced by Soraren, the Chakpas saw

... ... ...

Hijan Hirao: Hijan Hirao, a ritualistic song was composed in connection with a historical incident which reportedly seems to have occurred during the reign of a king of Luwang dynasty (circa 400-600 A.D.). This is now sung in a certain customary rite or at the conclusion of a Lai-Harabá festival only by the māibā. This song tells us about the significance of Lai-Harabá and also the rites that the māibi

conducts during this festival. Besides, a fragment of this song describes the customary rites to be performed by the māibā at the time of felling a tree. The last part of the song is charged with deep human sentiments. The king's men with two skilled artisans, namely, Wāngmitkhu Khutheiba and Wāngmanāo Silheiba spotted a tall and beautiful tree at Kouba Ingel Hill for making a royal boat out of it. On the night previous to the felling of the tree, the forest which is lying on the hill side, in the form of a mother, cried in agony for the tree as her departed child. A portion of it has been rendered in English thus:

"At the dead of night
The mother who had begotten the tree
And the mother of all giant trees
The Queen of the hill-range
And the Mistress of the gorges,

Took the tall and graceful tree
To her bosom and wailed,

"Oh, my son tall and big,
While yet an infant, a sapling
Did'tt I tell you

To be an ordinary tree ?"
The king's men have found you out
And bought your life with gold and silver.

... ...

On day break backed at the trunk
You will be found lying prostrate,
No longer will you respond
To your mother's call
Nor a likeness of you
Shall be found, when I survey
The whole hill-side,
Who shall now relieve my grief" 19

So also the lofty range (mentioned in this song Irok Ningthou Ningthibā and chingsāng ningthou Arembā) has been personified as a father lamenting for a dying child.

Khoiju Lamok: Khoiju Lamok is obviously ritual song and is not easily understandable to the present generation. But this song, with a particular form of recitation and with the allusion to incidents, historical or traditional belief, can create an aura of the hazy past. In the Lāi-Harāobā festival when the Lāi arrives at the lāibung (place of worship) after 'Ikobā' (I = water; kouba = call), Khoiju Lamok is sung. At the time of singing of it, a fire is lighted in order to ward off the evil spirits, disease borne

germs and effluvia. The text of the song is as follows:

'Korou Nengthoren 0
Sanā namiren miren thouyangbatu
Khānuwai yāmwāirakki kolle.
Leichikchiklibā Leitham thamlibalakki Kolle
Koubā kounu khati
Makhan khungam khati
Chamāngāng phānā kon
Shanthong heimari heimarāngnā
Heisup heiso vān
Naben khoimom läiremmā
Pui ehagninungdā lirouhei
Teenjā lāichā tānnahei
Teenmu lāimu tānnaheinā
Konmā nanzine
Chākshānubō masheeng khāng
Namān luwāng taptetapläibā
Hāiningshānngā shonmoi yāmme
Shishano peekhatkhiye
Ngāmranubeenā peekhatkhiye
Khamdingnubinā peekhatkhiye
Hāomān yetoi konphaba
Ngāirong shingmi yētnānaphaba
There is another song generally sung while dancing in the Lai-Haraoba festival. The song is as follows:

O Ingellei flower blooming in the mountain,  
You are falling off without having been of any use.  
It is a pity.  
I am not falling on my own free will.  
I am falling because the wind blows.  
I (wind), too, am doing nothing  
The flower is falling,  
Because the strength of its stem is diminished.

The above song has different meaning and conceptions. Many scholars interpret it in different ways. According to R.K. Jhalajit Singh, the Ingellei flower blooming in the mountain refers to a beautiful woman living high on a social pedestal. In the 17th century, there were many such women inside the royal harem in Manipur. Though their beauty attracted the attention

of many a commoner, they were far above the reach of the common men, since they lived inside the royal compound. They are, therefore, compared to flowers *ingellei* blooming in the mountain. As desire remained unfulfilled they were compared to flowers falling off without having been of any use. The flower, in reply, says that she is gradually withering not willingly but compelled by the almighty time. 22

Some other scholars say that this song alludes to a historical event in the annals of the history of Manipur. In the seventeenth century Charairongba, the adopted son of king Paikhom, and Nungthil Chaibi, a daughter of a servant were in love and also had illicit relation. She became pregnant and this news reached the ears of the king and the queen. Therefore, a plan was made to keep her at the Thangal hill situated in the north of Manipur. In course of time, a son was born to her. When Charairongba became the king, he could not keep her and her son in the palace due to the fear of objections from his courtiers and subjects, she died before he met her again. Thus, he lamented over such separation. Therefore, the flower *ingellei* was compared to Nungthil Chaibi who could not get fulfilment of her youth though she was in love with Charairongba. She is like flower *ingellei* withering unused. People believed that it was sung by the king Charairongba. Now-a-days, it is sung in the Lai-Harōobā dances.

Khencho : Khencho is a type of old ritual songs of Manipur whose composition is archaic. It is difficult to say when and who composed this song. Khencho is quite obscure to the present generation. We can find it in the book Nāthingkhong Phambāl Kābā. It is also found in some old Manipuri books namely, Pānthoibi Khongkul, Pudil, Leithak Leikhāron, etc. Khencho is chorus song in the Lāi-Harāobā festival. It is still sung in this festival till to-day by male and female standing in front of the god and the goddess. Like Ougri, the māibā as a lead singer sings Khencho and the participants repeat the same by clapping their hands and also stepping out their feet in forward and backward movements. It is noted for its music arising out of the modulating sound of impressive consonants. It is generally said that it was composed after the likeness of reverberating din produced by the mad torrents, of a hilly stream flowing in the western part of Manipur and striking against stone boulders. Another fascinating account is that the undulating rhythm was in imitation of the light footed wild goats jumping on the rocky hill slopes. It runs as follows:

"Khencho-re khencho-re / Khencho rāngmei khencho-re / Achi chirong chi chirong / Hāmeng khencho makhengo / ... ... Shagol tongbā kāirambā / Nangbu tongbā yāngdedo / Langi pānā khongsāmgti / Nangbu shāibā ngāngdedā / ... ..."
Athing kore thingkore / Thingko længmai thingkore /
Läiren kokpā thingkore."

Paosa' is one of the songs which formed part of the Lai-Karaoba rituals. There are many variations in Paosa Ishei. This song is really erotic riddles. In the Manipuri version of dance, Panthoibi dances incorporating Paosā is sung by the māibi and the pena harpist. The song is a pungent love repartee supposed to take place between male and female divinities (gods and goddesses). Therefore, the song is called 'Paosā'. The ancient Paosā songs are terse and laconic but their philosophical interpretations are rather long. It is also sung in a light-hearted tone by men and women participating in the Lai-Karaoba festival. A fragment of Paosā Ishei usually sung in the Lai-Karaoba may be seen as follows:

Oh, little young man,
Angling by the cave
Angling by the bank
As you have thrown a clod
My water pot has broken
Won't you repay?
Repay, repay, please repay
Ho ya ho ya ho ya

Oh lady, I didn't throw that
Which dwells in the house of earth

Another very popular love song with poetic imagery is as follows:

When the he-bird (chekla) flew away.
The she-bird returned home
And not knowing the whereabouts of her husband
The she-bird is smitten with sorrow
O dear son of my mother-in-law
From the golden ravine of the mountain,
Come back flying to me.

The imagery of beauty of a lover waiting for her beloved in impatient expectation forms one of the beautiful aspects of Manipuri folk-songs. The above folk-song has many layers of meanings and also the art of personification. We cannot overlook such imagery of luminous beauty. This song is also usually sung while dancing the Khamba-Thoibi dance before the deity during the Lai-Harācbā festival in Manipur accompanied by musical instruments. However, the origin of the song and the composer of this melodious song are remained untraced.

Another imagery expressed in another folk-song reflects the mood and passion of a lover who is fully concerned for his beloved. In this folk-song things are suggested, intimated,

hinted at, but nevertheless expressly stated:

The lotus blooms yonder in the east (front)
The bees are hovering around lustily
Come, my beloved, come,
The world is full of envy and jealousy
March ahead my beloved. 26

This is one of the most popular folksongs sung during the Khambā-Thoibi dance in Lāi-Harāoba. There are various interpretations but the commonly accepted view is that it describes the feminine beauty. The breasts of the beloved are like the lotus. The black bees (mean the youngmen) are darting forth towards the lotus. She unmasks her beauty to the bees in order to entice the willing lover whose looming shadow falls upon her. Everything in this song is an idealised world embracing nature and humanity.

(b) Songs Of Love And Yearning

Khutlang Ishel: Love themes pre-dominate the folksongs in Manipur. In the previous section we have dealt with songs with erotic and love themes, having ritualistic association. But most of the love songs that are sung with full of emotion are secular in nature. They are generally sung outdoors, in the fields, lakes, etc. --- in solo without the help of any

musical instruments. For example, a young man, who works in the field or fishes in a lake, starts singing. He may address group of girls who work near the same place. One of the girls gives an indirect but reciprocal reply spontaneously through a song medium using words appropriate to the questions of the youngman. This kind of songs are termed as Khutlang Ishei. The beloved is compared to objects of nature, often at a level which Y.K. Sokolov defines as "Psychological parallelism." In the Khutlang Ishei the girl is a beautiful flower and the boy a bee or black bee:

**Young man:** Sweet flower, maiden, most beautiful one

When I see you, 0 flower.

I have no language and I cannot express

Like a fish-bone stuck in the throat

Enchantress of my heart

And for me the mountain bee

On which day may I express

The unexpressed words

Intended to express to you my dear.

**Young woman:** 0 most excellent bee;

When I hear your bachelor's voice

My maiden's heart loses.

The strength of the tiger

Is the dense forest,

The strength of the bird,

Is the air,

The strength of the female
Another songs in the same singing style as that of Khutlang Ishei is generally sung by a boatman, or a wood cutter, etc. while returning home after his day's works or driving cattle towards home in the evening or returning home in a narrow or lonely road at the late hours during night. He sings it addressing his beloved who is at a far off distance in a plain voice in full-throated high pitched note. He sings alone. He does not care whether somebody listens to it or not. But, he sings in wilderness. The only peculiarity of such songs is that it is composed extempore. The feelings espoused in such songs are the products of the singer's own experience and the composition is exclusively his. The burden of such song is more often a Meitei legend:

It is all calm and quiet place.
In such a land,
I thought
To converse

27. Informant : H. Mangoljao Singh, a renowned Khongijm-parbu singer in Manipur.
With his lady love
Which is more important than my life
Being the daughter of someone from a separate family.

I cannot take her father
Which I had been thinking
The sweet voice of you maiden:
Is imprisoned in my heart
Just portraying in the core of my heart
In such a land
Walking side by side facing front and back
With you, maiden,
I shall find the fulfilment of my life.  

(c) Songs Sung in Connection With Certain Ceremonies

Songs connected with Thābal Chongbā are sung by a lead singer on dholak and the participants respond to in a chorus repeating their leader's singing. At the outset the leader chants, 'Hari Bolā', the participants respond, 'He Hari'. It means that the song would proceed further:

28. Ibid.

29. As we have seen Lai-Haraoba happens to be the biggest festival of the Meiteis and thus songs sung in that festival would also come under this category. However, they have been already treated in earlier sections.
It means, 'As the time of the year approaches, the Yaosang is set on fire. We will dance for the prosperity of our village and the land. O God Here, you are.'

The Thābal Chongbā lyrics are very lovely, Songs connecting the Ramayana and the Mahabharata events, and those commemorating historical narration of early Meitei kings, folk-tales, etc. also form part of the Thābal Chongbā. It is worth mentioning here that song about spring season, the lotus and the black bee, Khamba-Thoibi, Mainu Pemcha, Tonu Laijing Lembi, etc. are popularly sung. On the last day Thābal Chongbā is concluded with the performance of a song called 'Mikon Thāgonbā' a hymn which is sung when the souls which are believed to be in a state of ecstasy are called back into the human bodies. Some specimen of Thābal Chongbā songs are as follows: (Song on Tonu Laijing Lembi):

'Phairen thāgi thajindā / Kumpagi marāngyāidā /
Moirāng leimarol taretā / Ibemā Ayāng Leimagi /
Chainabā kabok poklingei / Pākhān Thāngja Hanbagā /
Moirāng pākhān asinā / Thāngā leikāi koirakle /
Moirāng leimarol taretā / Moirāngi tādā angambā /
Ningthougi manāi achanbā / Lāisi kabok poklingei /

30. For details see Preceding pages 325-327.
It means at the beginning of the month of Phāiren while seven Leimarol (girls) of Moirang were making parched rice at the residence of Kumaba for Ayang Leima, the young men of Moirang with Thangjahanba came there and wanted to poke jokes with the girls. Thereupon, the seven girls of Moirang told the noble and favorite courtiers of the king of Moirang that while they were making the parched rice for the goddess Ayangleima, it is prohibited (as per the existing taboo) to crack with them. The two youngmen returned home. After some time, seven girls of Moirang also returned home just after they had made the parched rice. Thangjahanba, the youngman met Nura Laijing Hanbi, at the cross-road of Khundinbi of Moirang Khori. Lord Thangjing had already decreed that they should be spouse, etc. etc.

And another song on Spring season:

Victory to God, Yaosang is set on fire
All the youngsters
Thing for the prosperity
Praise the glory of God, with their mother,
So that they might live happily.
O Hari, O sisters
Let us sing the glory of God.
The Spring has set in
Plants and trees grow green,
Sheiják blooms,
The mustard plants too bloom.
Cuckoo, the bird
Bites bowers on the mango trees
And keeps it inside the mouth intact her throat full of it
With her sound of cooing in the melodious rapture,

And another Thābal Chongbā Song runs thus:

To-day, the day
Let us sing the glory of God, Hari.
Its being the full-moon of Lamda month
The moon is full in her glory
Chaitāñya Prabhu was born
Just after his birth.

Heribol Yaosang was set on fire
At the court-yard of the father
And in the four corners of the courtyard
Let us make a Neela Chhatra
Bina, the sakhi
Makes the image of Radha-Krishna
Before the image of Radha-Krishna
And in the middle of the temple of Hari
Let us sing the glory of God Hari. 33
etc. etc.

(d) Work Songs

The number of purbe 'Work Songs' in Manipuri does not seem to be very large. Most of the work songs proper in the Meitei language relate to rice husking. These songs of rice husking are known as Phousu Ishei. Such songs are generally sung on a moonlit night when women folk are busy in husking. Occasionally it is also sung by young boys and girls while husking together. Although Phousu Ishei abounds in variety here, one can easily hear the tunes:

Broad face of Misi's paddy-pounder (Misi—a kind of tree)
The smooth pestle of Uthāo (a kind of tree)
A round winnowing fan of Leihou Sintak (a kind of bamboo)

Keeping the winnowing fan before me (lady)
Holding it with both hands fisted
Praising the Almighty God’s name frequently.
The smooth pestle of Uthāo
She raises it in the sky
Her belly getting squeezed
And drops it in paddy pounder’s hole
With movement in her waist
Praising the name of god
The girls husk the paddy
In the father’s courtyard.  

Another Phousu Ishei is that:

Hayum yānabā thoudāngkok/ Shing chalaku hairagā/
Phou purakā yānabā/ Nangnā chākpu hāiragā/
Phougāk chajik namthibā/ Chākpu sādanā pijage/
Nangnā yensāng hāiragā/ Laphu yengang thumnamdabi/
Yensāng sānā pijage/ Nangnā ngābu hāiragā/
Khongbandagi ngāchakto/ Ngābu sānā pijage'/

It means: O servant when you are asked to cut the firewood you have gone to bring the paddy. If you ask me for rice, I will feed you stale meals of Phougāk (a kind of rice) as rice. If you ask curry, I will give you plantain without salt as carry.

34. Informant: Angom Khongnang, a renowned Khongjom-parba singer in Manipur.

If you ask for fish, I will feed you on tadpole caught from a ditch instead of fish.

And another one is as follows:

O mother, O mother
Let us come, O mother
Don't come. It is raining.
We will come by holding the Yempāk
Don't come. The road is slippery.
We will come by holding the stick
When we grow up by to-morrow
And become mature.
At the middle of the Sanjenthong bridge
While coming on the back of the elephant
We won't forget you
O mother O mother. 36

In the Meitei society traditionally just before the Yäosang festival, the girls of a particular locality assemble in a group at the residence of a particular girl in the evening to begin the husking activities of the paddy. Since there would be no time during the Yaosang they compulsorily begin the proceedings as early as a month before the Yäosang. As such they keep sufficient stock of paddy for this occasion. While they are husking in a group, the young boys also join them.

Usually, a girl and a boy husk the paddy. During the husking they sing the Phousu Ishei and quite often they talk about their love affairs mutually. Sometimes, they make use of riddles. The song is aptly unisoned with the rhythm produced during husking with pestles.

Some work songs are connected with the agricultural operation. For example women sing songs while keeping a guard over their crop to protect from predatory birds, etc. One of the songs generally sung by the women folk while protecting the crop from the wild birds in the Meitei society is given below:

Ha! Urit (tailor bird), a deaf bird,
Not responsive to the call of your mother.
No reply to the call of your father.
Ya ho ya ho
Ya ya ho!

(e) Lullabies, Nursery Rhymes And Children's Game Songs

Of the several kinds of rhymes current, lullabies, nursery rhymes and rhymes connected with children's games constitute the most important group, both qualitative and quantitative invariably. In Meitei rhymes, logic and coherance are conveniently dispensed with. It may be said that many of the rhymes have variations in different versions. Some of the
these rhymes are pure lullabies and others are meant for amusing or humouring the child.

A lullaby in Manipuri is termed as 'Nāosum or Nāothem Ishei.' To lull a child to sleep is a very tedious job for a mother. She adopts several methods to lull her child by giving sweets, toys etc. and by singing Nāosum or Nāothem Ishei. Invariably these types of songs have a haunting music and soft and tender notes natural to the themes. Usually they are fanciful compositions. The rhymes in these songs are often meaningless. In the Meitei society, soothing a crying child with the help of Nāosum or Nāothem Ishei is also found associated with the mythological story of Konthoujam Lairembi:

"Ne ne hayinage/ hayā hum/
Hayinage hayā ho/ Ne ne /
Ne ne hayinage/ Hayā hā /
Ne ne hayinage/ Ya-ho',

This song was initially sung by Ima Leimaren Shidabi in order to lull the crying child Khoriphaba to sleep. The language of the song is very old, and as such, it is difficult to render it into English. However, the only word 'hum' in the second line of the song is still in vogue in the Meitei society to

37. Nāosum or Nāothem Ishei: 'Nao' means, 'child', sum or them means 'to lull or to soothe'; Ishei means song. In other words, it means a song for soothing a crying child.

38. Khoriphabā Nāothemlol (MS): It is remarkable to note the nasal voice in the rhyme which can easily lull a child to sleep.
lull a child to sleep. It is not, however, now-a-days, found in use as a lullaby in Manipur. It is, sometimes, sung as ritual song here and there in Manipur.

And another lullaby is as follows:

Moon, Moon, O, beautiful Moon,
Put your baby on my back.
I shall lull to sleep.
Will you oblige me, O, beautiful Moon.
With a fruit of fig-tree
Oh, it is fallen on your dung
It has fallen on your urine
Oh, who will eat it?

This song is still popularly and traditionally sung by any woman in the Meitei society on a moonlit night to lull a crying baby to sleep comfortably on mother’s back. The mother very often allures her child to look at the beautiful moon. The theme of the song simply expresses that the mother of the baby beseeches the moon to give a boon in the form of a fruit of a fig-tree so as to enable her to beget a fruitful baby. In this context, different interpretations of many scholars abound. However, the above one is a commonly accepted interpretation.

There is a traditional belief among the Meitei people that the black spot on the surface of the moon is an old woman sitting at the foot of a fig-tree.

39. Pombiron Shekneeng (MS)
Another type of lullaby which has been rendered in English is as follows:

0 længthre
Why don't you shoot?
The cow eats my shoots.
0 cow
Why do you eat the shoot?
The cow-boy does not tend me
0, cow-boy.
Why don't you tend the cow?
The mother does not feed.
0, mother,
Why don't you feed?
The fire-wood is not dry.
0, fire-wood
Why don't you dry?
The rain pours.
0, rain,
Why do you pour?
The frog croaks.
0, frog,
Why do you croak?
The custom of my forefathers.
Why should I give it up?
Go ... go ... go ... ga ... ga.

This type of lullaby related to what is termed as formula tale can be spun out ceaselessly in Meitei society. It is a Meitei analogue in which the first thing addressed is the lāngthrei (a small medicinal plant used by the Meiteis while


Assamese version of this song is as follows:

O flower, O flower,
Why don't you bloom?
The cow nips my shoots,
Why should I bloom?
O cow, O cow,
Why do you nip the shoots?
The cowboy does not tend me,
Why should I not nip?
O cowboy, O cowboy,
Why don't you tend the cow?
The cook does not make rice,
Why should I tend?
O cook, O cook,
Why don't you make rice?
The fueller gathers no fuel,
Why should I cook?
O fueller, O fueller,
Why don't you gather fuel?
The smith does not make me a dao,
Why should I gather?
O smith, O smith,
Why don't you make the dao?
The charcoal-man supplies no charcoal,
Why should I make?
O charcoal-man, O charcoal-man,
Why don't you supply charcoal?
The cloud pours,
Why should I supply?
O cloud, O cloud,
Why do you pour?
The frog croaks,
Why should I not pour?
O frog, O frog,
Why do you croak?
The custom of my forefathers:
Why should I give it up?

offering oblations to their deities). A song of this type is also found in Assam and in Orissa. Accordingly, the belief, in this regard is that if the frog croaks, it would be raining sooner or later.

Another logic type of lullaby sung by a mother and a baby in the form of dialogue is as follows:

O, mother, O mother,
Let me also come, O mother,
Don't come. It is raining
I will come by holding Yempāk.
Don't come. The road is slippery.
I will come by holding the stick.
O, lovely mother,
Let me also come, O mother
Don't come, dear daughter.
There is flood, Don't come.
Let me come by rowing the boat
O, lovely mother,
Let me also come
Stay with your elder brother
If I stay with my elder brother,
He will hit me with the handle of shānppā́i (a kind of dao).

In the Meitei society, this song is also sung as Phou su Ishei (song of husking the paddy).

The most popular nursery rhyme sung by the mother at the time of bathing her child is as follows:

"Ipä machum tāro/ Ipu machum tāro/
Numitnā Kāringei Kāhouro/ Thabinā wânglingei wânghouro/

This rhyme is still chanted by the māibi on the sixth day of the birth of a child. On this day, the māibi raises the child by chanting this rhyme after she had completed the symbolical feeding of the child. Moreover, this rhyme is recited by the mother or an elderly woman raising and holding the child just after its bath or during its bath. The theme of this rhyme is an expression of the wish of the nursing female for the child to grow up soon like the sun shinning in the sky and also to have the strength and quality of the father and the ancestors.

Another type of rhyme is traditionally recited by the children invoking sunlight and wishing away the shade when they get less sunlight during their bath in winter. It is said that in olden days mother used to sing this song when there was less sunlight while bathing the child. They sang it for wishing sunlight and also the strength of their child. Now-a-days, children sing it for only fun. The rhyme is as follows:

0, sun-shine come out
Goddess of shadow, get inside

42. Ibid.
Goddess of light come out,
The cotton basket is in the sun
At the estate of Haoreibi

Children sing some lines of Nonglao Ishei with certain modifications when it rains after a long interval during absence of rain. It is an expression of happiness over rainfall. The rhyme runs thus:

O, Rain, pour down
Submerge the peak of the Langjing Hill
Float down old man and old woman.

When the children fly kites, they chant a rhyme - "Nung-sitpudi Pāngkhoklānā ngami" (The leaves of arum win the wind) in the belief that the wind will blow more and more as the speed of the wind is found insufficient for flying kites.

Children sing another rhyme whenever they find a convenient place to ride on a springy branch of tree or anything else.

Nom nom sagāiton:
Chānābā leite takhenthāng

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43. H. Gourachandra Sharma, op.cit., pp. 31-32. This rhyme is also recited by the children with certain variations when they are playing Phoubi (Phi = cloth, phouba/phoubi = to sun or to make dry by the heat of the sun) and the rhyme is as follows:

Nungsā-o thoraklo, Urum leima changkharo, Kabo leite phireite, Konārāba ting ting. see also, R.K. Sanahal, op.cit., p. 10.
There are many rhymes which growing children recite while playing different game and the fun of such games consists as much in following and observing some procedures as in reciting the rhymes. These rhymes may be called children's game song. For example,

\textit{'Uchi chi chi khāngmeitat}
\textit{Kharungmapāl khousābā}
\textit{Sentāi laki frung'}\textsuperscript{44}

Here in the game song, children pinch the opposite part of the palm one upon other. All the hands are moved up and down together as the rhyme is recited by one of them. Just after the completion of the recitation with the word 'frung', each one of them loosens their hands. This game is termed as \textit{Uchi chi chi sānnabā} (\textit{uchi chi chi} game).

Another type of children's game rhyme is as follows:

\textit{'Tong tong tongdrumbi}
\textit{Chakrik nākrik chawāibī}
\textit{Thādoi temu temu}
\textit{Maton sānā chi chou}
\textit{Khat Khatgōk-c.'}\textsuperscript{45}

The above rhyme is recited by one of the children of a group when they play a game in which they sit in a circle.

\textsuperscript{44} Lalei Lathup Thilel (MS)
\textsuperscript{45} H. Courachandra Sharma, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 23.
place their hands on the surface of the ground. One of them recites in a rhythmic motion and strikes the palms one by one with his right fist. As a rule, the hand on which the last stroke falls is removed and this process is repeatedly continued until all the hands are removed.

Another kind of rhyme known as Kwâk Kwâk is generally sung by children as a game of fun in between the leader who acts as the mother of the children and the intruder (the crow). In such a rhyme, there are volleys of stock questions and answers. While reciting this rhyme the children form a row of single line holding on to the back of the loin-cloth of the other.

The first child who is the biggest one of all takes the role of the mother and the last one acts as the youngest child. Another child who stands facing the mother plays the role of kwâk (crow). In this way, the game starts by exchanging questions and answers. The aim of this game is that the mother will protect the youngest child at her best level even though the crow attempts his best either to catch or to eat the youngest child. The progression in the events leading to this pretended fight between the offensive crow and the mother protecting her children is really very attractive when the game assumes its full swing especially when the Kwâk Kwâk rhyme is enchanted by the mother and the crow:
Crow: 'Caw-caw?

Mother: What is the news?

Crow: It is Mayān (foreigner) news.

Crow: Let me have a mouthful of rice.

Mother: Don't eat.

Crow: Let me drink a drop of water.

Mother: Don't drink.

Crow: Let me go over your head.

Mother: Don't go your father Sorarel lives there.

Crow: Let me go to the right.

Mother: Don't go.

Crow: Let me go to the left.

Mother: Don't go.

Crow: Let me go through your two legs.

Mother: Don't creep through them either.

Crow: Is there your son Khomdon Meiroubi?

Mother: There is none.

Crow: Who is at the rear?

Mother: My youngest son.

Crow: Let me eat, then.

When the game starts, the crow tries to snatch away the smallest the last one. In the meantime, each member in the row tries not to break away from each other and at the same time the mother also tries to prevent the crow from attempting

46. R.K. Snahal Singh, op.cit., pp. 9-10; see also H. Gourachandra Sharma, op.cit., p. 22.
to catch the youngest child (the last one). When the crow overpowers the last one in the row, it endeavours again to do the same for the one after the last. Thus, one by one those children who had been snatched away become out and the game ends as soon as the child next to the mother is snatched by the crow. This game is generally played by girls.

One can very often come across another type of rhyme which children use while playing Seboti Kāonaba:

**Se Se Seboti**

Bhubani, the child of Laishram
Let us fight: you and I
Let us see who will win
I can uproot you like a kaunā (a kind of reed)
I can break you like a thambou (stalk of the lotus)
We should bid for the girls cloth
We should then bid for the bachelor’s cloth
We can try then to pick up a heitroi (Filocourtia Cataphracta (Bot.))
It has fallen at the foot of the tree (heitroi)
Swā

The rhyme is first recited in a very challenging mood before the start of the game among pairs. Just after finishing the chanting with the word Swā, they begin to stretch their

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legs alternately left and right in the squatting position. And as this goes on, they try to outlast each other, and the one who remains to the last in that exercise is declared the winner and those who stop earlier are defeated. Although boys sometimes play it, this is very popular among the girls.

Udari chāobā khongnāngni/ Manā mungbā heincumi/

... ... ... ... ...

Te te tanaa/ Keisāmpātīi tenawa/
Heincūnā mulla / Tenawānā harāol /

The above rhymes are also voiced by children when they play 00rāobi Tānabā - a game.

Here, children are divided into two groups of equal numbers. They take position facing one another and a line is drawn demarcating the two groups. One child of a group advances to touch the children belonging to its opposition reciting the above rhymes without any breathing stoppage. If the chaser touches any child, he is removed. Again, a child from the other group follows suit. However, the children of the opposing group touch the chaser when he breaks the rhyme and breathing before reaching the line drawn at the centre, he too, is also dismissed. That group which can eliminate all the players of the other group win the game. This game is very popular among the Meitei girls of Manipur valley.
C. BALLADS

'The ballad is a form of narrative folksong. This type of folksong varies considerably with time and place, but certain characteristics remain fairly constant and seemingly fundamental.' It is also a comparatively long, impersonal narrative song which depicts a single incident or incidents through the content, style and designation of the folk. However, ballad is primarily a tale in verse form, originally said to have been sung to the accompaniment of dance. The ballad is incomplete without excitement and repetitive music. The ballad is at present sung by the minstrel with the accompaniment of some musical instruments.

D. MEITEI BALLADS

In Manipuri 'ballad' is called 'Khullak Wäri Ishei'. The Meiteis are very much proud of their ballads as the ancient and medieval Manipuri literature is very rich in ballad. The ancient and medieval Manipuri literature is folk in content and style which may well pass for a ballad. There is a total derth of documented and printed volumes of these ballads, hence no such efforts seem to have been made to edit them coherently in Manipur. However, ballads are still found popular among the people of Manipur. The ballad has various functions in the Meitei society. Like folksongs, it provides

good recreation and amusement to the people. It molds the behaviours of the people in different ways suitable to the Meitei community. It is also closely related with devices of social control. It serves the functions of knowledge and belief. Ballads showing the life history of heroes present some moral and behavioural instances before the folk which cast lasting effects on their minds.

The ballads, as are popular among the Meitei folks of Manipur valley under the present study may be classified into four different groups according to their respective themes: (a) Mythological ballads, (b) Historical ballads, (c) Ballads concerning the flora and fauna and (d) Ballads based on legends, some of which are of epic nature --- episodes from epics and puranas.

(a) Mythological Ballads

The Meiteis have large numbers of different mythological ballads that tell about the creation of the earth and human beings, descent and other relevant stories concerning these. The legends about Sorarel, Sanamahi, Pakhangba, Konthoujam Lairembi, Panthoibi, etc. are still sung in the Meitei society to the accompaniment of a musical instrument called pena. This is an instrument used by Meitei minstrels and bards producing a sonorous and lilting sound. The origin of this instrument is also mythical with different versions. The pena is said to be
the symbol of the union of Atiya Sidabā and Ima Leimarel Sidabi whom Meiteis regard as the Supreme God and the Supreme Goddess and the sound of the pena seems to be the product from their union. It is a multiple stringed musical instrument played by a bow fitted with jingling anklet bells. The instrument is so important and plays such a vital role in this type of ballad singing that on later occasions any kind of folk music played with this instrument is called 'Pena Ishei'. The singers of Meitei ballads playing with this instrument -- pena are known as pena sakpa (sakpa means singer). During the hey days of royal power in Manipur, a separate institution for pena, known as Pena Lcisang came into existence and pena became an inseparable part of all the social and religious functions of the Meiteis. It became an indispensable instrument in the Lai-Harācbā dance festival of different sylvan deities of Manipur. True to its origin, the style of pena music is confined to only indigenous and local themes of mythological and legendary nature never straying in the field of ballad adopted from Indian sources. On August 1874, when Maharaja Chandrakirti heard the singing of some folk stories of Moirang from some pena-singers like Ojha Channamba on his way to Cachar Jila for his meeting with Lord North-Brook, the Governor General and Viceroy of India, he was so much impressed by the narration that he patronized and encouraged pena singers for its popularity even when Hinduism had its great influence. The real form of a ballad singing in the style and the tune of
Konthoujam Lairembi is a good example of Meitei mythological ballad. This can be read at different levels. There are different versions which vary in small details. Here is one such example:

Haorok Konthoujam had a beautiful daughter called Chingphuron Nahuinu. She was liked by Sorarel, the god of the sky. An oracle cautioned her parents not to allow her to go out of home in search of vegetables in the field and that she should remain pious since Sorarel would take her to the heavenly abode on the fifth day. On the appointed day, he descended on the earth sitting on his two-headed elephant, and thus Chingphuron Nahuinu was married to Lord Sorarel. After the marriage she went away to her husband's place. In return of her marriage, Sorarel promised to bestow immortality and prosperity on the Haorok Konthoujam clan. After many years, Haorok Konthoujam, one day, went on a hunting expedition with their dog. As luck would have it, the dog died of a snake bite. The Haorok Konthoujam cremated the dog ceremoniously as they had not performed such rites for long since the day they were granted immortality and prosperity by Lord Sorarel. Chingphuron Nahuinu saw smoke coming up in a visible quantity and apprehended that one of her relatives had died. Therefore, she complained to her husband Lord Sorarel that he had betrayed her by not granting immortality in her Konthoujam clan. She requested Him to allow her visit to her parents who were mourning for one
departed. Sorarel, who knew the whole episode, warned her not to be misled as there was no death in her clan and consolated her that the smoke that she had seen was not due to any cremation at all. However, on her insistence, Sorarel allowed her to visit her parents on the condition that she should not take food and drinks at her parent's if they offered any. She descended on earth with the help of a golden ladder. On her arrival here she learnt that it was only a plot engineered by her relatives with a view to calling her down in their midst for a happy get-together. Remorseful at her own failure to stick to the instructions of Lord Sorarel, she sought her parents permission for her return to Lord Sorarel. But, she shared pleasantries with her parents and relatives who persuaded her to share food and drinks prepared by them. She initially pleaded that she was prohibited by her husband to share any food and drinks in her paternal home, and if she could be found sharing with them, she would not be allowed to return to her husband's abode. Her parents then, put seven layers of cloth above her one after the other so that her husband, Sorarel would not see her taking food. Thus, she took food and drinks offered to her in the belief that Lord Sorarel would not notice it. But, Lord Sorarel, who, could see everything from above was furious and spat on her food. He sent his message that she would not be allowed to return His abode since she had broken the promise which she had made. She felt sorry for the mistake and spent her life in her parents' home remorsefully and in worshipping her Lord ceaselessly. A long time passed
and Lord Sorarel knew of the repentance of his consort and, ultimately, took her back to his abode through a strong storm. Then, the Haorok Konthoujam installed an image of Chingphuron Nahuinu in her paternal place and started worshipping her. Even to-day people believe in the presence of Konthoujam Lairembi (Chingphuron Nahuinu) in a spacious jungle standing in the middle of the Konthoujam village.

In the Meitei society, mythological ballads are usually sung by the bard to the accompaniment of pena. In Manipur, the term pena has two connotations: one for the instrument itself and the other to mean the performance for which accompaniment with the pena is basic character.

Now-a-days, the singing of the mythological ballads like the Creation of the Universe, the Creation of the Human Beings, etc., has become very popular in Manipur as there is a strong tendency of revivalism of the Sanamahi cult among the Meiteis of the present century.

(b) Historical Ballads

It appears that the singing of historical ballads in Manipur is closely associated with a new style of ballad singing now popular as Khongjom-parba. The term 'Khongjom-parba' is one of the singing styles of Meitei ballad existing at present. Khongjom is a place 35 Km to the south of Imphal on the Indo-Burma Road where the Manipuri fought their last
battle against the Britishers in the year 1891 but were defeated. It is claimed by scholars that a certain talented Dhobi Leinon also started singing in remembrance of historic and tragic war of Khongjom in 1891 on the accompaniment of some make-shift instrument and subsequently, it became gradually very popular in Manipur. This became a new technique of Meitei ballad singing to be known as Khongjom-parba. Khongjom is the name of a place and parba is some sort of a part or chapter say like Bhisma-parba of the Mahabharata. In such style of ballad singing the singer would use a north Indian percussion instrument called dholak in place of the penā. Thus, originally Khongjom-parba was the name of the songs sung on the historical importance characterizing the heroic activities of Manipur and other incidents of courage and bravery. In the Khongjom war many brave Manipuris fought valiantly against the British and such brave heroes like Paona Brajabashi, Chinglen sana, Heirangkhongjam, etc. died in this battle. Subsequently, Pir Tikendrajit and Thangal General were hanged for complicity.

In the Meitei society even if the ballad singers of Khongjom-parba take up the themes other than that of Khongjom episodes, it is also known as Khongjom-parba. Meitei historical ballads are also sung by the ballad singers of penā. They have taken up such themes after it was taken up at first by Khongjom-parba singers.

Some instances of historical ballads in Manipuri are episodes from the life of Charairongba, from the life of
Garibniwaz, the taming of a wild elephant by king Bhagyachandra, the death of Gambhir Singh, Jila Darbar (episodes of the meeting of Chandrakirti Maharaja with the Viceroy of India). One such example is as follows:

In 1874 Maharaja Chandrakirti of Manipur went for a Darbar at Cachar after the Rath Jatra festival. That Darbar was arranged under the unique circumstances of a visit by the then Viceroy and Governor General of India to farther eastern Bengal and Assam for the Maharaja of Manipur to meet his Excellency in Cachar.

The Maharaja of Manipur started his journey on Thursday and stayed the very night at a Sangāi machā (sangāi = house, machā = small). At the dawn of the following morning, he fell prostrate before the Lord Govindaji and prayed for a good outcome of his impending Darbar. He also prayed that he would build a golden temple if his mission of the proposed journey could be fulfilled by the blessings of the Lord. Kamalkant, a pāṇji Sanglākpa (head of the pāṇji (astrologer) performed the customary rites of the royal journey and the king stepped out nine steps as a mark of the start of his journey on the advice of this astrologer. The king with his two loving sons, Kulachandra (Wāngkheirākpā) and Jhalakirti (Phāijāobā Sāmu Hanjabā), several of his principal officers and Mr. Brown, the Political Agent in Manipur left for Cachar. Eight-gun-salutes were given in honour of the king. Moreover, pēnā singers sang in praise of His Majesty. When the king reached the Khwairamband
Keithel (market) he was warmly welcomed by the people of four panaś with fruits and flowers. The king told them that he would be out of the kingdom for only twenty days. He, further, asked them to pray to Lord Govindaji for the welfare and peace of the kingdom and also for his successful return from the Darbar. Then the king and his party went along the Sega Road and reached Bismupur via Kwakeithel, Khabi Nambol, the Mayu Khurairakpa panpham. At Bismupur, he prayed to Lord Vishnu waving a light before the idol (offering of 'arti'). He also listened to the stories of the Bhagavata. The king then marched on to Cachar by easy stages.

When the king reached the bank of Gwai (Zarak) river, he along with his courtiers halted the night at the spot. As it was raining heavily on that night, the water of the river's Gwai was also rising steadily. On the following morning, the king and his party found that the suspension bridge over the river had been swept away by the currents of the river. At this critical juncture, Laishang Jatra, one of his brave courtiers came forward courageously to repair the bridge. Therefore, he jumped into the river and started repairing of the bridge. While he was repairing the bridge, Bino Jatra and Yambiya Madhot Jatra with three other persons also helped him in repairing the bridge. Thus, the king and his party crossed the Gwai river and then, they marched to Cachar by easy stages. The king went through the forest of Jiri. After crossing the Jiri forests, he reached the place of Kalika and spent the night there. On the following
day, the king and his men crossed the big river of Jiri with the help of the elephants. The king's elephant dragged the big raft of the king against the current to the other bank of the river. They reached the foot hill of Phultor after having crossed the hill range of Aho-arang. Then, they halted at Lakhimpur. On the following morning, the king marched on with his two sons and two thousands army men guarded them left and right. The king was warmly greeted by the two political agents of the Viceroy on the bank of the river Bhadra.

A suitable camp had been provided in the station of Cachar (Silchar) for the Maharaja and his attendants by the Deputy Commissioner for the entire satisfaction of the former. The Darbar was duly held on the board of the Viceroy's yatch and it was of a very satisfactory nature. The presents were, as usual, exchanged, and the Maharaja with his two sons were also entertained fully at the evening reception. The Chief Commissioner of Assam who came with the Viceroy had an opportunity of seeing and conversing with the Maharaja. After the departure of His Excellency and the Chief Commissioner after the Darbar, the Maharaja rested for a few days. On the 14th August, 1874 A.D. the king left Cachar for Manipur.

(c) Ballads Concerning the Flora and Fauna

Many ballads on the flora and fauna are popularly sung by the Meitei ballad singers and magnificent imaginative exercises
are perceptable in such ballads. These ballads are sung in both the pena and the Khongjom-parba. style. The ballads on flora are mostly associated with orchids. In fact, it can be said with emphasis that the expert and talented singers often ramble into anecdotes and episodes which are connected with the origin, growth, naming, features and social utilities of many orchids that are found in the forests of Manipur. The ballad on orchids and flowers is popularly known as Leiron. The ballad on Kombirei, a kind of flower that blooms in summer and grows only at the place called Lamphelpat and the ballad on different orchids like kwâklei, Melei Leisanâ Hunjirân, Yerumlei, Khongummelei, Samjirei, etc. are good examples of this tradition. Although, the ballad on Kwâklei has some variations, one of them is as follows:

At the close of Lāngbachak erā (Kaliyug) a Soubon bird invited all the birds to a grand feast. On that occasion there arose a dispute among the birds who would sit at the head and at the end of the feast. It was a custom that the seniormost bird would sit in the first place and the other birds to be ranked in order of their respective seniority. The birds claiming the seniormost position were the crow, the owl, the crane and the swallow. The swallow claimed that he was entitled to sit in the first place as he had a good longevity. The crow was angry at the improper claim of the swallow and he, too, contested for the place. Thus, they started quarrelling in the feast of the Soubon bird. At this juncture, the owl and
the crane also came forward to stake the claims for the place. All birds began to discuss the situation. Finally, the vulture, the eagle, the Indian purple coot (Porphyrio poliocephalus poliocephalus) resolved to seek the help of the Tāibangpān Mapu (Supreme Lord) for resolving the dispute. The four birds agreed to the decision that they should go to the heavenly abode of the Tāibangpān Mapu. They put up their case for His judgment. The Lord Tāibangpān Mapu examined the birds one by one. The Lord first asked the crow in which era he was born and how he would justify his claim. The crow claimed that he was born in the Lāngbachak era and he had witnessed the battle of the Kurukshetra, fought between the Pandavas and the Kauravas from his nest built on a big banyan tree which was growing in the middle of the battle-field. Then, the Tāibangpān Mapu asked the crane and the owl to justify their claims. The two birds gave their explanations that they were born in the Hayāchak era (Treta yug), and narrated the story of king Ravana’s as having kidnapped Sita, the wife of prince Rama, which took place in that era. Then, the Lord asked the swallow to give his proper explanation of his claim. This bird, in turn, claimed that he was born in the Haye echak era (Satya yug). He told that he built his nest on the shore of the great sea and the forceful waves of the sea and swept away his wife, children and all his belongings to the sea. So with a vindictive motive he tried his best several times to dry up the sea by ingesting its water but there was no receding of the water level at all. When these...
attempts became futile, he repeatedly tried to dry up the sea
dipping his body into the water and drying his feathers in the
sun. Ultimately, being helpless he sought His guide and help.
The Lord Taibangpān Mapu came for His guide and even instructed
him to build his nest in the houses of the human beings at that
time. From the narration of the swallow, the Lord Taibangpān
Mapu came to know that the swallow bird was born in the
Hayeechak era and the owl and the crane were one era junior
to him. The crow was the youngest of all the four birds. The
owl and the crane were pardoned for they were born in the same
era. The juniormost birds the crow was fined for claiming the
first place of the feast. Therefore, the Lord asked the crow
to give his comb as fee. The crow presented his crest to the
Lord. Henceforth, all other crows had become combless. The
Lord planted the crest on a tree and blessed it to grow as
an orchid. Following year the orchid came of age and a purple
colour flower had nicely bloomed. The Lord Taibangpān Mapu
named the flower as Kwaklei (kwāk = crow, lei = flower; an
orchid born out of the comb of the crow) and thus Kwaklei
orchid came into being. Finally, the feast of the Soubon bird
was successfully conducted with the seniormost bird swallow
sitting in the first place.

And, another Manipuri ballad on Kombirei (a kind of
flower) about its origin is as follows:

49. Informants: Angom Khongnang Singh and H. Mangoljao
Singh, renowned Khongjom-parba singers in Manipur.

50. Kombirei - Wild flowers of dark-blue and pale yellow
colours respectively.
Yaithingleima, the youngest queen of the Lord Lainung Thongaren, one day, requested her husband to allow her to become a human being and to witness the human drama of the Lord Thangjing of Moirang in real human life. But her husband refused her request and warned that she would learn the sinful character of the human being in case she becomes a human being. However, Yaithingleima repeatedly persuaded him to comply with her request and promised that she would not change her character like that of a human being. Finally her husband Leinung Thongaren agreed to her request and instructed her to plant Pasotlei which bloomed in white colour in the land of Death. He told that the change of the colour of the flower would be the sign of the change of her character after transformation into human being. The colour of the flower if changed, he would come down to the earth for taking her back to the heavenly abode. Thus, his wife planted the flower pasotlei in the land of Death.

Yaithingleima, then was transformed into a human being and was born as a daughter of Pambil Araba of Moirang. Her mother's name was Nganuthembi. As years rolled by she came of age and she fell in deep love with Shamba Lamganba, the son of Saitreng Araba. They even promised to withstand the thick and thin of life when they attained manhood and womanhood. Yaithingleima was renamed as Yaithing Konu in her human life. But her change of character was clearly indicated by the gradual change of the colour of Pasot flower in the land of Leinung Thongaren, the god of Death. So Leinung Thongaren sent some of his disciples
to cut short the life of Yaithing Konu. When Yaithing Konu came out to her old father's courtyard for the collection of the clothes which were kept for drying in the sun she was caught and strangulated to death by the disciples of Leinung Thongaren. His disciples took away her soul to the abode of Leinung Thongaren.

On hearing the news of the death of Yaithing Konu, her dear lover Shamba Lamganba also committed suicide and his soul followed the soul of Khanmung Yaithing Konu. However, the soul of Konu crossed the river easily while the soul of Shamba Lamganba could not cross it and his soul remained crying on one side of the river. Leinung Thongaren explained the reasons for which Yaithingleima was killed in her human form. She agreed with her husband but narrated to him her story of love with Shamba Lamganba whose soul remained on the other bank of the river. At the story of his wife Leinung Thongaren felt sympathy for the soul of Shamba Lamganba and he sent his disciple to bring the soul of Shamba Lamganba to his abode. Shamba Lamganba and Yaithingleima fell prostrate before the Lord Leinung Thongaren and sought his mercy to forgive them and restore their lives as they had not been united on the earth. They also promised to serve him after their death. At last Leinung Thongaren was pleased to see their great longing for a happy union and he blessed them with the restoration of their lives. He told his wife that the flower which she had planted as a token to indicate her change of character had
changed its colour to a deep blue one and it would be named as Kombirei (komba = fickle mindedness, lei or rei = flower).

A few Meitei ballads centring round animals are also very popular. A ballad on Moirangsa, a tame and very sensible elephant of the royal palace killed under tragic circumstances, is the most popular Meitei ballad of this category. The story of this ballad runs thus:

Moirangsa the famous elephant of the Maharaja Chandrakirti, which created a legend of its own in Manipur, was thought to be a precious presentation from the Moirang given in the honour of Maharaja Kumar Tripoktaba, the son of the king Nara Singh. Maharaja Kumar Tripoktaba in turn later presented this elephant to his brother Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh. As the original place of the elephant was Moirang, it was popularly known as Moirangsa (Moirang means name of a place; Sa means animal).

During the time of king Chandrakirti there were three important chief elephants adorning the king's garrison. The elephants were Kondumba, Moirangsa and Heramot, and of these three the Maharaja was found of Moirangsa because of its valour, strength, plausible capacity to understand easily the human signs and talks.

51. Informant: A. Khongnang Singh, Wangoo Village. According to H. Mangoljao Singh, Kombirei was first planted at Moirang. This place of Moirang is still known as Kombirei-Kom. But, this view was not accepted by some scholar. According to them, it was first planted at Lamphelpat.
There existed in the kingdom a traditional custom that an elephant having the right trunk overlapping the other to be chosen Sāmyāishā (Chief of the elephant) from among the other elephants of the king. But, as the Moirangsa had a left trunk overlapping the right trunk thereby not fulfilling the traditional criteria of choosing him as Yāishā, the king Chandrakirti very reluctantly had to make Kondumba, the Yāishā (the chief of the elephants). However, the king also honoured Moirangsa by providing 8(eight) thākans (canopy) and giving four hectares of paddy field to the person who was in full charge of the animal. To be precise the king gave the same privilege and had the greatest care and love of Moirangsa more than the Sāmyāishā. In due course of time the king's favouritism and partiality sew the seed of jealousy in the heart of Kondumba. To add more fire to this jealousy the king preferred and used to accompany Moirangsa in almost all the royal occasions.

One day an old beggar woman came to the palace of the king Chandrakirti and saw the animal. The beggar woman was surprised to see the happy life of Moirangsa in spite of its being an animal. So she said, "Though born as an animal, you are living happily. But see, I am helpless, weak and keeping myself alive by begging alms from door to door." So saying the woman went away with tears in her eyes. Moirangsa really felt pity for the woman and as a mark of sympathy, the animal went on fast for three days together. The person in-charge of the animal was
taken aback at the attitude of the animal and ultimately the incident was brought to the notice of the king. So the king sent his subjects to every part of his kingdom in the hot pursuit of the old beggar woman. When the beggar was brought in, the king offered her a hearty meal with different delicious royal dishes with gifts in the presence of Moirangsa just to please the latter. As soon as the woman was satisfied herself with the offer, Moirangsa too, started taking the dry hey and the plantain tree as a token of pleasure and gratification.

Phaijaosana, the younger brother of the king Chandrakirti was the Samuhanjaba (Officer in-charge of the elephants). Once it so happened that the Maharaja did not like to accompany Moirangsa for Jila Darbar at Cachar. In annoyance to the king's decision, Moirangsa deliberately went away from the palace and stayed along the coast of the Ikop pât (lake). Samuhanjaba reported the sudden disappearance of the animal to the king in time. The king knew the intention of Moirangsa and sent his messengers in search of the animal with a special instruction to announce that the king wished and had to accompany Moirangsa to the Jila Darbar. When the elephant learnt of the news, he hurriedly returned to the palace with a dead tiger which he killed on his way to the palace. The elephant made a loud trumpet at the gate of the palace. On hearing it the king came out of his royal chamber to greet Moirangsa without any attendants. Moirangsa took down the dead tiger from his back and placed
before the king as a mark of presentation and bent down before the king. The king was very much pleased at the offer of a dead carnivorous on the eve of his Jila Darbar expedition. He thought himself that it would be a good sign of success. He took the elephant inside the royal campus and worshipped him there. How Moirangsa helped the king in the odds of the journey for Jila Darbar was another episode in the life history of this elephant.

After the death of the king Chandrakirti his son Surachandra became the king of Manipur. During his time the king sent his courtiers and Moirangsa along with Kondumba to the Thangal village to hunt and capture some wild elephants which had terrorized the village. The forces camped at the bank of the Ikou river and one dark night the courtiers kept Moirangsa locking one of its hind legs while Kondumba was set free. That night, a ferocious fight took place between Moirangsa and Kondumba. The helpless Moirangsa was killed in the fight. None of the king's soldiers could stop the fight as it was very dark and dangerous to go near them. Being afraid of the punishment of the king, the courtiers spread the news on the following morning that the Moirangsa had been killed by Koubru Leisha, (an elephant of the Koubru Hills). It is still believed that Koubru Leisha killed Moirangsa.

At the time of singing Moirangsa in the style of Khongjom-parba, the singers never sing on the theme of the
killing Moirangsa by Kondumba. But they sing on the theme that Moirangsa was killed by Koubru Leisha.52

(d) Ballads Based On Legends, Some Of Which Are Of Epic Nature —— Episodes From Epics and Puranas

Ballads based on legends are very popular among the people of Manipur. In such category of ballad, we may put ballads based on different incarnations of Moirang known as Moirāng Śāiyon. The love story of Khamba and Thoibi, which is the most popular legend having an epic nature, is woven round Khamba and Thoibi who are regarded as the last incarnations of Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi in the Moirāng Śāiyon chain of stories. The ballads on Moirāng Śāiyon are grand majestic saga of the eternal triangle in which generations after generations would find reflections of the various hopes, ideals and aspirations of each age. The story of each incarnation is fairly well known among the people of which Khamba and Thoibi story stands out in popularity. The story of Khamba and Thoibi is centred round Thoibi, the princess and heroine of the story, an embodiment of ideal maidenhood and Khamba, an orphan and hero of the story —— an embodiment of manhood. The story is rich in human sentiments. The characters are representatives. The story pays a premium to chastity and nobility. It ennobles the listeners, emboldens

52. Informant : Kh. Ibeni Devi, a renowned Khongjom-parba singer in Manipur.
the helpless, warns the easy going maidens, teaches moral lessons to these running after temporal and fleeting pleasures and benefits. It demonstrates the triumph of virtue over vice. Thus the story bears repetition but there is no monotony about it. And the story is blended with six sentiments — erotic, heroic, pathetic, mysterious, humorous and horror striking with motivated actions in man. The ballad on Khamba and Thoibi and other Saiyong (incarnation) have been elaborated and made longer through successive generations by addition of relevant episodes and incidents by bards distinctly and successfully. Some stories of Moirang Saiyong like Khamba and Thoibi, Tonu Laijing Lembi, Khuyol Haoba and Yaithing Konu, etc. may be seen in the preceding chapter V on Myths and Legends. Besides, Moirang Saiyong, there are also some other Meitei ballads based on legends.

Over and above, there are ballads on the incidents and the episodes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The characters present in these episodes are modified to look like characters in the social life of the people of Manipur by the ballad singers. From the Ramayana, the episodes of the exile of Sita into the jungle; the capture of Sita by Havana, etc., and from the Mahabharata, the episodes of the offering of golden leihao (Michelia champaca (Bot.) by Gandhari and Kunti, 53. As we have already observed in Chapter V Section B, pp. 163-164, a Meitei myth of legend is often in the verse of sung form and is then designated as Ishel, however, such a narrative in the prose form is termed wari.
the episodes of the exile of the Pandavas etc. are popularly sung by the ballad singers in the style of Khongjom-parba with dholaak or in the penā singing style.

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MANNERS OF PRESENTATION OF DIFFERENT BALLAD SINGING FORMS

In the preceding sections, we have already been acquainted with the two principal modes of Meitei ballad singing viz., the penā and the Khongjom-parba. There is a third form known as Moirang-sāi which does not enjoy the same kind of popularity with all classes of people as is done by the other two. Now below we are discussing some important features relating to the modes of presentation of these various ballad singing forms.

(a) Penā Singer

The penā singer is generally clad in white dhoti and put a turban of the same colour. However, if he is recognised and authorised by the king, he is allowed to put on Khāmen-chatphā dhoti in place of the white one. The penā singers put on gold bangles and gold ear-rings. Sometimes penā singers wear resham phurīt (resham = velvet; phurīt = shirt).

As described by Chandam Gopal,\(^5^4\) bhava, rasa, style and composition of pena singing may be divided into three categories,

Lairol is full of shanta and madhur rasā. It is a prayer to the gods and goddesses praising their qualities and their propitiation. Most of the penā singing in connection with the Lai-Harēoba is of this kind. The second category i.e., ṭāri-paring or Kābyā sakpa is the narration of the different clans of the Meiteis. Ballads sung by the penā singers on the theme of Khamba and Thcibi, Khuyol Haoba, etc. are in this category. It has karunā, srīngar and vīra rasā. Heirol-leirōl, the last category is a song singing about the description of fruits and flowers and their natural beauties. Besides, these three categories, penā singers now-a-days have taken up the episodes from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and other Hindu puranas.55

A penā singer is invited by a person or a group for a performance in a place arranged for the purpose. He is paid according to the number of days which he sang. The penā singers like solo performers sing in the outhouse or at the place arranged for the purpose. They are sometimes assisted by one or two of their disciples sitting behind them while the lead penā singer sits alone in the middle on a well decorated dais. A singer sings four to five hours in a day. He may sing for more than a month according to the desire of the person or a group who has invited him. He may be asked to start either from the

beginning to the middle or from the middle to the end as desired by the patron.

(b) Khongjom-parba Singer

The dress of a male Khongjom-parba singer is a white dhoti and a white shirt or kurta and for female singer, the phanek mayeknāiba and a chādar of singer's choice. At the very start of singing Khongjom-parba, as a tradition, a bandāna (prayer) to the Almighty, the reigning king, gurus; the assembling nobles, aged men and females, etc. is sung and it is sometimes in Sanskritised lyrics and sometimes in Manipuri language. The sabhā bandāna is followed by a lyrical composition depicting the beauty of the land of Manipur and then the actual ballad narration of the theme asked for is continued. The singing may take place at the out-house or at a place arranged for this purpose where a mat sometimes covered with white cloth is kept in the middle in a position to be seen by the audience/spectator from three directions if the wall is there at the back of the singer. Khongjom-parba is actually one man's show in a sitting position. But now-a-days two persons also sing at the same time and this type of performance is called Khongjom-parba phāibok means Khongjom-parba double. The melodic structure of Khongjom-parba, it may be said, is a mixture of nat sangit and pena singing of the Meiteis. 56 The male or female Khongjom-parba singer

56. Ch. Gopal, loc.cit.
generally bends down and hits the dholak from time to time in conformity with the speed and tune of the words. At the time of narration, after the end of a chapter or one incident and a new chapter or stage is to be taken up, the voice of the singer becomes a little lower signifying the shifting from one to another.

(c) Moirang-sai Singer

This is another style of singing ballad only on the theme of Moirang Saiyon (different incarnations of Moirang) particularly on Khamba and Thoibi. This style which came in the later period is known as Moirang-sai. It was introduced by a gentleman named Maibam Shamumacha Singh during the reign of Maharaja Churachand Singh, and also sang on the episode of Thoibi's going to and coming back from her exile at Kabow (Burma). The style of the song Moirang-sai, a mixture of the pena and the Khongjom-parba comes from Moirang Ishei which means the song of Moirang. Moirang is the name of a place situated at 65 Km to the south of Imphal but about the meaning of the word 'sai', there are different views. One of the views is that sai is derived from Manohar Sai or Mano Sai, a kind of Kirtan singing which came to Manipur during the time of Maharaja Chandrakirti. Another opinion is that Moirang-sai is the

57. Suruchand Sharma, Loikum Loikā, Imphal, 1965, Preface
shortened form of Moirāng Sāiyon which indicates all the legendary stories of Moirang.

This type of ballad singing is also performed in the villages and towns seasonally. This type is liked particularly by the younger generation. The people of the older generation normally avoid it because of the highly erotic nature of the text and the manner of its presentation. An important feature of Moirāng-sāi is that all its participants are females (except the dhcak player (male). Normally four to six females sing the songs in two groups facing each other in the arena north and south in a standing position. Their dance movements are broad and has a wider sweep than other refined dances. The chorus leader sings and acts out in fine style with a few occasional dialogues and plenty of dances. No musical instrument is played by the singer but is assisted by a male drummer with a dhcak sitting in the eastern side facing the deity. The chorus leader normally stands slightly ahead of the group facing to the north. The costumes of the singers are Phanek Mayek Nāibā, blouse and Innaphi with plenty of gold ornaments. The singing of Moirang-sai generally takes place in the middle or at the end of the performance of Khubāk Ishei, a song with the clapping hands which is seen during the Rath Jatra festival only. To invite them to sing Moirāng-sāi only is very rare. A huge amount of money is earned by the singers from the interested audience. If the audience is satisfied by the performance, the singers of the performers get much money and
if not, they are laughed at. In this style of singing, both beauty and melodious voice are necessary to satisfy the audience. Like Khongjom-barba and penā singing, Moiráng-sei singing is also a profession for earning livelihood in the Meitei society.
TRADITIONAL MEITEI CHILDREN'S GAMES

UCHI CHI CHI

TONG TONG TONGDRUMBI

OO- RAOBI

SEBOTI

KWAK KWAK

KWAK KWAK
BALLAD SINGING

KHONGJOM-PARBA SINGING

MOIRANG-SAI PERFORMANCE

PENA SINGER WITH PENA

PENA SINGING

FLOWERS — THEMES OF BALLADS