A. PROVERBS

Proverbs are 'the terse didactic and metaphorical statements containing concise homely truths on various aspects of life.' They are the wisdom of a community. They are also the 'essence of thoughts and philosophy that a group of people acquire through the ages.' Cervantes said that a proverb is 'a short sentence founded on long experience.' Lord John Russell described proverb as 'the wisdom of many and the wit of one.' They are, in effect 'the capsuled wisdom, the distilled knowledge of the people. They are also based on observation, experience or without either of these being first-hand accepted as useful truisms on a hand-me-down basis from the past.'

Proverbs are also learnt and transmitted spontaneously through oral tradition from people to people and from generation to generation.

Proverbs serve as good guide for standards of social behaviour and also sometimes for socio-economic reforms. It is a fact that they play a more effective role in the judicial system of certain communities. As for instance, in a Nigerian

judicial system in the tribal areas of Africa, the role of proverbs is worth mentioning. It has been analysed in detail by John Messenger. He remarks that "proverbs are by far the most numerous and the most frequently employed of these forms of verbal art and are used in all manner of situations as a means of amusement, --- as a method of gaining favour in courts, in performing religious rituals and association ceremonies, and to give point and add colour to ordinary conversation." Proverbs sometimes may serve as impersonal vehicle for personal communication and also integrate the community which produces it. Proverbs educate the folk in various ways. They play an effective role in exercising social control in the villages. Sometimes, proverbs serve as a vehicle for social protest. The common people generally feel hesitation in making complaints directly against exploitation, oppression and injustices, but they will find some solace in folklore through proverbs as they may show their anger at the difficulties caused by injustices, exploitations, etc. of the ruling power. They also play an important role in serving the communication of knowledge. Those proverbs related to weather droughting, mannuring, weeding, irrigation, harvesting


and omens provide good knowledge to the folk. They give the richest material for the reconstruction of archaic beliefs and opinions. They also give advice on the conduct of life and social intercourse, and so on.

B. MEITEI PROVERBS

Proverbs in Manipuri are known as Pâorou: the first element 'Pâo' means news or information or statement, and the second one rou or lou means to take or to accept, (most probably comes from 'louba*'). Thus, pâorou means information taken, or communicated or a statement that is acceptable. In the Meitei society proverbs have manifold functions. Some proverbs have two layers of meaning. Such proverbs or proverbial phrases are used for recording historical events in the Meitei Royal Chronicles in rare cases. The common people of the Meitei society are mostly accustomed to the use of proverbs during their day-to-day or normal conversation. Proverbs are more frequently used by the elderly members or those who have enough and varied experiences of life. They use the proverbs specially in offering suggestions on relative values of things or for the purpose of criticism. Some of the

commonly used Meitei proverbs are metaphors drawn from daily life, or are terse comments based on experience. Besides, many proverbs which have varied meanings are also found using in the Lai-Harāobā, one of the most important and oldest festival of Manipur. As for the instances:

(i) Ngāprumnā Ukābā utol lomnidā
(When an eel climbs the tree, it reaches the top or apex).

(ii) Tharoina michikpā chikthoktana chikpanā saru phang-nglidā
(A snail bites to the extent of bone as it seldom bites).

These proverbs used in the Lai-Harāobā are exchanged between the māibi and the women in order to please the deity. Even some witticism are also exchanged between the māibi and the women during the rituals of this festival to please the presiding god and goddess. 10

Again, in Manipur there are many proverbs that use musical instruments for metaphor. As for example, some of the Meitei proverbs are closely associated with one of the oldest musical instruments called 'penā'. One such Meitei proverb, 'penā semlingeidā 'Samurou'11 you-i', the sense being, it took a considerable time to repair penā that the very purpose of repairing it had little value, has been using since ancient days. The creation of this proverb was also mentioned in the

11. Samurou: A place some 14 Km away from Imphal in the south.
book Namit Kāpoā. There are another two Meitei proverbs connected with the 'penā'. For examples, Penāmīk lài (as easy as the penā) and Sāmu mathun penā khongbā (to play penā behind the elephant). The first one is the most popular proverb used even by a lay-man. If anything to do is very easy and simple, it is said that it is as easy as the penā playing. It is used in an ironical way. The idea of the second proverb is when somebody tries either to please or to disturb another, the latter pays no heed. The music of penā actually sounds nothing to an elephant, it neither pleases nor disturbs. So when somebody's speech or action does not serve the purpose, it is said that it is just like playing the penā at the rear of the elephant. It resembles in meaning the English proverb, 'Let the dog bark the caravan goes.'

Some proverbs are concerned with relationships among the members of the family. For example, respect of a bride's duties and responsibilities to the family. Here are some commonly used proverbs to illustrate this point:

(i) Thabak phabadā mou ancubigummi
    (As hard-working as a newly married bride)
    cf. A new broom sweeps clean.

(ii) Mou ancubi numit ninidā khangnai
    (A newly married bride is known within two days)
    cf. Visitors and fish smell within three days.
(iii) *Maikubokki ohāk totōiba*

(A new bride does to the extent of mixing curry with the rice for her father-in-law).

The first proverb describes that in the Meitei family a newly married bride works very hard in order to show her obedience as well as her efficiency to the other members of the family and to the neighbours or the locality. She has to get up early in the morning for doing all the house-hold works of the family such as cleaning of utensils, keeping of *yāthin payā*¹² with water for the elderly members of the family as well as her husband etc. This proverb also indicates that the Meitei women are generally hard-working. The second proverb depicts that whatever the new bride does in the family, her inefficiency or defect will be known within a short period by the elderly members of the family. In the Meitei society, the daughter-in-law generally keeps apart from the elderly members of the groom's family. However, the third proverb denotes that the daughter-in-law does to the extent of mixing curry with the rice for her father-in-law, which is not a part of her duty, in order to show her efficiency.

Proverbs also play an important role in exercising social control in the Meitei society. They are used to express a veiled warning or threat where a blunt command might offend;

they may also arouse a person to action through irony. For instance, when a man indulges himself in evil deeds, the Meitei people warn him through a proverb like the following:

Linnā makhun changlamdāidā chumbagum.

(A snake goes straight at the time of entering its hole).

This proverb means that a person who has been doing many evil deeds in the past would not like to do those on his dying bed. Here, the person is compared to a snake which never goes straight on the ground. However, at the time of going inside its hole, it goes straight. Likewise, 'truth sits upon the lips of the dying man'. Some specimens are as follows:

(i) Hurānbāgi tarāni mapugi nongmā

(Ten times for the thief but one time for the master)

(ii) Ningthou sembā vāoganu ningthou kanbā vāo

( Participate in king-saving but not in king-making)

(iii) Wātonnā wānglagā kwākna phamdeki

(If the apex of the bamboo is high, the crow sits on it)

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Some of the Meitei proverbs express several important cultural values concerning the education of children. As for instance, the given proverb is used:

Thoubāldong chaphubu kāinanabā yeibara
(The potter of Thoubāldong never beats in order to break the earthen-pot).

In the Meitei society, when a child is beaten or punished by any elderly person of the family, the parents of the child sometimes are mentally hurt. But, the child is beaten in order to train him up. This proverb implies that the potter of 'Thoubāldong' never beats the pot to break it, he beats it in order to give it a good shape. Similarly, the child may be punished in order to mould his character in the right way.

In the Meitei society, several proverbs refer to the character of the woman as well as to the duties of a husband and a wife. The following are some of the Meitei proverbs to illustrate this point:

(i) Nupī mawā lougānu
(Don't yield to the words of a woman).

cf. "Women's advice leads to disaster"¹⁵

(ii) Nupibu sānapotkumā khangānu
(Don't take the woman as toy)

¹⁴ Thoubāldong - name of a place famous for earthen-pot in Manipur.

¹⁵ P.C. Borua, Assamese Proverbs, Gauhati, 1962, p. 243; Normally women are supposed to be jealous and inconsistent, hence their advice leads to unfavourable consequences as meant in Assamese proverb.
(iii) Heininglagā keimāng hippi heiningdrāga keining:

hippi

(If desired, a woman sleeps even before tiger but not sleeps behind it (tiger).

The first proverb refers to the character of the woman and the relation between husband and wife and also its impact on the Meitei society. In the Meitei society, the system of joint family is prevalent. The woman generally reports at random to her husband what she has had in the family. If the husband is over confident in her advice, the existence of a happy and peaceful joint family will be disturbed. Therefore, in order to exist a peaceful joint family, the parents generally say this proverb to their married sons. The second proverb is a protest of the woman against some men who look down the woman in the society. Some men are having more than one wife in the Meitei society. Sometimes, they look down the women in the sense that they can get a new wife. In such cases, the elderly members of the family particularly women-folk warn them by saying this proverb. The third proverb indicates the character and the attitude of the woman. If a woman desires and determines to do something, she does not care anybody, say, not even afraid of sleeping before the tiger. But, if she does not desire or determine, she cannot be forced to do it, like, 'taking a horse to the water but cannot make him to drink.'
There are many proverbs related to an incident or a story. Such type of proverbs sometimes may be originated from a story. Although there are many of such types, two of such kind of proverbs are given below with the relevant story or incident:

In Manipur the proverb, 'Sirabamaktadā marunā yubā' (sticking with one's bone even after one's death) has links with two stories. One of the stories is an extract from the story of pilgrimage of Hindu Baldev while the other story was the story of a wicked person born at the Heirok village during the reign of king Charairongba of Manipur.

The story of the pilgrimage of Baldev was that a daughter of a man was destined to die of snake-bite during her marriage. Knowing that his daughter was destined so, the father guarded the ceremony with a sword in hand in full preparation of the impending danger. He killed the snake as soon as it appeared on the scene. He buried the snake at his gate. When his daughter came to her residence for the Chakaoba (feast ceremony) she pointed out the spot where the snake was last buried to her friends. She rubbed over the site with her legs. But her legs got injured with a piece of the snake bone. Instantaneously, she died of the snake poison. Thus a bone of a dead poisonous snake could cause the death of a person.

Once upon a time there lived a villain called Sagolmei Shilhing in Heirok village of Manipur. From birth to death, he
had never done any good either of his village or of his own. So none of the villagers looked at him with love for a single moment. He was at dagger's drawn with all the villagers and he did not know himself that he was a wicked man. Gradually his character turned worse and he grew old. When he was on his deathbed, he thought of torturing his villagers in the wrong notion that they had done much harm to him. So he called his sons at his bed side and said, "My sons, I have something to tell you before my death." His sons were ready to accept whatever their father said to them. But their father insisted them on promising before he said his last wishes to them. His sons finally agreed to it. Then their father said, "You shall not burn my dead body. You must pierce through my body from head to toe with a khok bamboo and throw cut by the side of road. You must go and inform the king of your father's murder by the villagers."

Soon after the death of their father the sons carried out the last wishes of their father. The courtiers came to the spot to witness the scene. They found that the sons were true in their statement. As all the villagers could not be hanged to death, they were kept under the hot sun shine for seven days together from dawn to dusk irrespective of the old and the young. Thus, the proverb 'Sirabamaktadā marunā yubā' was originated.

Another example of the origin of a Meitei proverb —-
'Imei natte taorāni, taorā natte imeini' (It is not my tail but
a root of a reed, it is not a root of a reed but my tail) from a story is that :

Once upon a time, there lived a fox called Kundopa. One day he sang a song by the side of the Naga river. His oo ... oo ... the beginning rhythm of his song had entered into the depth of the water and disturbed the sound sleep of Lairen Naga Ningthou. The king was enchanted at his sweet voice and therefore he wanted to send his sons to the fox for learning the music. So Naga Ningthou came out of his den to meet the fox and they introduced themselves to each other. When Naga Ningthou came to know that Kundopa was a good teacher and a great lover of music, he firmly expressed his desire of sending his sons to the fox as students for learning the music. The fox replied that he was fortunate to get the opportunity of teaching the sons of Lairen Naga Ningthou, the art which he adorned much. In fact, his mouth watered to think that he would get the chance of eating the young pythons (sons of Lairen Naga Ningthou).

On the following day, Naga Ningthou came with his two sons to Kundopa and entrusted the children to him to keep them as his students. As soon as Lairen Naga Ningthou left the place, they three --- Kundopa, Kundoma and his son, Kundo pounced on the two sons of Lairen Naga Ningthou and ate them up.
Lairen Naga Ningthou came back after about ten days to see his sons. Kundo, Kundoma and Kundopa remained hiding themselves in their burrow. Lairen Naga Ningthou was sad in not finding his sons and Kundopa's family. He felt that his sons would have been killed and eaten up by Kundopa. So he determined to take revenge upon the fox. He waited for the fox in the bushes of the reed without taking food and drink. But, one day while Kundopa was loitering along the bank of the river Naga, he happened to see the Lairen waiting in ambush in the bushes of the reeds. In order to escape, the fox ran away through the bushes of the reeds. Lairen Naga also ran after the fox. At last the fox entered inside the hole formed by the roots of the reeds. However, Lairen Naga Ningthou caught the tail of the fox which remained protruding outside his hiding place. Being helpless the cunning fox said, "It is not my tail but it's the root of a reed." Lairen Naga Ningthou lost thought for a moment in the belief that the fox was true in his remark and so he released the tail of the fox. But as soon as he released the tail the fox went further inside the hole and said, "You fool, It is my tail and not the root of the reed." Thus, a cunning fox had used his wits in time to deceive a wise king.

Thus, the proverb of the above was in vogue in Manipur.

In Manipur many proverbs are complete sentences and many are also incomplete sentences with or without verbs. Some specimens are given thus:
(i) Ikaï khangdabag i hidāk leite (complete sentence)  
(There is no medicine for shamelessness) 

(ii) Wakchinggi nong (Incomplete sentence without verb)  
(Rain of Wakching) 

(iii) Chin amatanā lei ani longbā (Incomplete sentence with verb).  
(A mouth having two tongues) 

Various kinds of proverbs are found in the Manipuri oral literature. They are given below with example:

(a) Proverbs similar with other lands and the people in forms words, and meanings:  
Linsu sinabā cheisuso tektenabā  
(To kill the snake but not to break the stick)  
cf. To kill two birds with one stone. 

(b) Peculiar type of the Meitei proverbs:  
Thoubalōng chaphu kāinanabā veibarā  
(Is the earthen pot of Thoubalōng beaten for breaking?) 

(c) Proverbs related to the customs and manners:  
Mou(Nupi) thibadā manā vengco  
(To see the mother for choosing the bride) 

(d) Proverbs for only a particular area or village or locality:  
Charāng pāttā kāngjei shānurārā Pechinā ishing thaki  
(Kāngjei is playing at the Charang-pat, Pechi (name of a village) drinks water)
(e) Proverbs for a section of people or a small group of people, say Manipuri Muslims:

Khunu munsil houbagā shagol hawārā thongbadā houbungā khotpā tāde

(When horse bean is cooked with chicken, nobody knows even if the cat scratches on them)\(^{17}\)

(f) Proverbs from other languages:

Khumdrabadi yārabenī

(Silence is consent)

Tingkhanmā tingkhang hallī

(A thorn is removed by a thorn)

That some of the Meitei proverbs have parallels in other lands of the world is not surprising because in proverbs 'a certain phase of human existence or a certain characteristic of human being is dealt with which is the same the world over.'\(^{18}\) The Meitei proverb, "Iroi Leidringeida houdeng hātpā" (To kill the cat before the buffalo has not been pursued) has a parallel in Italy, "Do not sell the bird on the bough", and "Do not part with the bear-skin before you have caught the bear." The Norwegian has it thus, "You cannot climb a mountain by a level road", the Frenchman observes, "You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs." In

\(^{17}\) This proverb is only used by Manipuri Muslims.

Holland, it is said as "Don't count your chickens before they are hatched", and "Don't count your-herrings before they are in the net." 19 The Japanese says it as, "counting the skins before one has caught any badgers". Even W. Shakespeare described that "the man once did sell the lion's skin while the beast liv'd was killed with hunting him." 20 Another example of the Meitei proverb which describes the mischief brought about a careless tongue is "Minā sibānā chindā  gānā sibānā khongulākā" (A man dies because of his words, a beast dies because of its foot-prints). It has a parallel in Japan, "The mouth is the front gate to all misfortunes." The Norwegian says, "The tongue works death to the head", and "One is rewarded for his speech, his speech may lead him to death as well", becomes in Assamese while the Englishman observes, "Let not your tongue cut your throat." The Meitei proverb, "Luhongbā matungh kabēk thunglābā" (After marriage (ceremony), the sweets were brought by the bride-groom party) has a parallel in Bengali, "While salt is being fetched, boiled rice soaked overnight is eaten up", and in Marathi, "When the cold weather was over, he made himself a coat." Another proverb, "U(co) leitābā lamdā kegenā rumi ol" (In a treeless country, the caster-oil plant becomes a "silver") has the Greek parallel : "Where there are no learned men even a man of little wit is held esteem" The Meitei proverb, "Linn phinā kurtunā thambā vādābagum (The spark cannot be kept

19. C.S. Burne, loc. cit., p. 281

(hidden) inside a cloth) again has a parallel in Assamese, "Ashes cannot conceal a fire." In this connection, it may be noted that some Meitei proverbs are also found in one or other of the tribal languages of Manipur. For instance, "Charlu kāirasa kwāk harāoi" (when the earthen pot is broken, the crow becomes glad (pleased) has a parallel in the Kuki dialects, "When the earthen pot is broken, the dog becomes pleased". Again when the Meiteis say, 'Lamgī sannā machi sāng-i' (The horns of a wild bull are long), the same is said in the Kuki dialect. Some Meitei proverbs have Bible parables. For example, the Meitei proverb, 'Mamittā pakpa mitāsāngi udaradunā meegi mamittā pakpa mitāsāngi ubāgun' (you see the dirt in another man's eye, but do not see the dirt in your own eye) is like the Bible parable of 'the man who sees the mote in his brother's eye, but fails to see the beam in his own eye.'21 This type of proverb is generally used in order to advise the persons speaking ill of others without knowing their own drawbacks. There are some more proverbs having the same meaning in the Meitei society. "Henggi sumāng sittanā mīgi sumāng sitpā" or 'Nasumāng sittanā misumāng sitnā' (Sweeping on others court-yard without sweeping his own) is like that of the English proverb, "Let everyone soap his beard" while the Bengali says, "nijer charkay tel dac" (Oil your own wheel).

In the Meitei Royal Chronicles which deal with day-to-day political and historical events, an excellent use of the Meitei proverb is found. In the palace, there was a loisang (department) for the purpose of writing it. The members of this loisang recorded only the correct and fact of the events in the chronicles. As such, they are called wachumsuba (writer of correct words). The king could not resist even the recording of any historical event which may tarnish the royal lineage, but, in rare cases on the request of the king, they may write in the form of the proverbs or popular saying in order to explain such grave matters. For instance, chingda sato ingelle chinnadan kenkhiba kallaki (O, flower ingellei on the lofty hill, how I regret its falling without use). This proverb deals with special reference to Charairongba (Pamheiba) - Nunghil Chaibi relations.

In Manipuri, proverbs are nearly always stated in the form of either a single sentence or more than a single sentence or an incomplete sentence or a stanza. They are among the shortest forms of traditional expressions that call attention to themselves as formal artistic entities. Repetition of sounds also play a vast role in Meitei proverbs. The proverbs in Manipuri with end rhymes and assonances at the end of a line or half line, and the syntactical structure reinforced by the rhythmic symmetry can get support in the correspondence of sounds. Moreover, proverbs use all of the devices we commonly associate

22. Ph. Mandalal Sharma, loc.cit.; see also Chapter VII.
with poetry in Manipuri viz., binary construction and balanced phrasing, rhyme, assonance and alliteration, metaphor, simile, etc. etc. Such proverbs have their own distinct functions in the total scheme of the Meitei language and form the intelligent part of the traditional oral literature. Some specimens of these types are appended below:

It is primarily the pronounced effect of balance that produces the witty effect of the proverb, and this balance arises most notably from a binary composition. The proverb generally of a sentence is perceptibly broken in the middle and that break is called a caesura. As for example:

**Xúmbông toirā / lairā tāllī**

(One gets poor, if one leaves home frequently)

or, (One gets poor, if one changes one's profession frequently)

cf. A rolling stone gathers no moss.

2. **Phambā kāllā / phamēl phām-lī**

(Patient sitting gets (sits) phamēl)

or, (Bearing of patience sits phamēl).

cf. Patience is bitter but its fruit is sweet.

The length of the above two proverbs similarly conform to the common length of the line of folk-verse. In these two proverbs, there are a set of number of syllables but each sentence may be broken into two parts having the same stresses. Such types of Meitei proverbs are found in large numbers in the Meitei society.
There are many Meitei proverbs with end rhymes and assonances:

(i) Ichā, michā, yonglei, melei nāibā
   (To treat my son, other's son as yonglei melei)
or, (To take his, theirs yonglei melei)

(ii) Chāminuabāgā tumminnabāgā tumminnabanā hēlli
   (Sleeping together is worth more than eating together).

(iii) Sīgi oirāgā phabā, nīgi oirāgā phattubā
   (It is good for me but bad for others);

(iv) Ayukki numit oi, numidāngi thā oi
   (It is like the sun of the morning and the moon of the night).

In the first and second proverbs, there are assonances and the third and fourth have end rhymes. The use of end rhymes and assonances in Meitei proverbs can get support the correspondence of sound.

Some of the proverbs in Manipuri illustrate some of the other poetic techniques noted specially the use of alliteration:

(i) Khumit khudāngdagi houbā
   (To grow from the ankle joint and wrist).

(ii) Phamme phamsisi chatle chatsisi
   (If you sit, you die in sitting, if you go, you die in going).
cf. Death keeps no time.

(iii) Maheidani māngdaba landi
(Knowledge is immovable property).

The above proverbs have the repetition of the first sound or letter of a succession of words. In the first proverb, it has the repetition of the first sound khu, khu, the second has pham, pham, chai, chai and the third one has also alliteration -- ma, ma. The excellence of the proverbs in Manipuri increases in the use of alliteration.

C. RIDDLES

A riddle is defined as ingenious question, expressed usually in the form of a metaphor, or in the form of a direct question, without any figurative meaning of the words which enter into it. The concisely formed metaphorical question of a riddle is more difficult to answer and gives a different meaning than what is actually incorporates if it is apparently interpreted. According to Aristotle, 'a riddle is also a well composed metaphor'. It describes 'a person or a thing in more obscure metaphor, calculated to exercise the intellectual skill to any who attempt to solve it.' It also incorporates 'a

question primarily in which a fact is concealed in the form of a metaphor, and an answer secondarily to which the hidden meaning or the real content of the implied sense is fully revealed or expressed. Concealment thus becomes the most vital one. The riddle proper is brief and precise, often achieving its effect with the help of alliteration and rhyme. In Manipur riddles are questions that are framed with the purpose of confusing or testing the wits in the pretext of those who do not know the answer. Like proverbs, riddles are also transmitted spontaneously from people to people through oral tradition.

Riddles have many diverse functions. Riddle plays a vital role in educating the younger generation of the society. They educate the folk in various ways. They are used not only as a form of amusement, but also as a means of education, a kind of 'mental gymnastics'. They also sharpen wit and stretch thought power of the children. To some extent, it is a part of their education. The primary function of the riddles in the Dudh Kharia of Chotanagpur is to exercise the train, providing some sort of intelligence test. At the same time they are employed for making oral education to the children or younger people about their important cultural materials and contributed to the socialization process of an individual.

answer the hidden meaning is revealed. Hence, one of the practical purposes of the riddle is educative like that of proverb. The roots of this educative device, that is, riddles are deeply sunk in antiquity. Sometimes riddles also serve the function of communication of knowledge and beliefs. Riddles serve as a good device for memory testing. Though some of the riddles have educative role, some are also used for joking. Riddles are also exchanged on some occasions and ceremonies. In Tartar stories, the ability to answer riddles is a test frequently applied to a suitor who asks for the hand of a lady in marriage. Riddling is also an aspect of courting in parts of the rural Philippines. Riddling is most commonly associated with evening gatherings. However, the use of riddles has no supernatural function. They have been associated with Samson and Oedipus in Europe and horse-sacrifice rituals in ancient India. They have also influence popular imagination both to the philosophers and to the literary critics from ancient times more than any other oral tradition of traditional literary form.

D. MEITEI RIDDLES

The use of riddles in the Meitei society has had a long history. In Manipuri riddle means 'pāokhong'. Most probably the


term pāokhong is inflected from pāophong, pāo means statement; phong means solve which means solving a statement. Riddling means 'pāokhong chanbā' and solving a riddle means 'pāokhong phongbā'. In the Meitei society, riddles have many varied functions. They play an important role in educating children. Not only education, they are also used for amusement in Manipur. Though some riddles are used in the education of young children, some are also used for joking. In the Meitei society, the riddles are sometimes employed in making relation between boys and girls. They play a vital role in the social life of the Meiteis. The riddles were found associating with the Meitei legend, Ningthou Mabu Thiba.29 Riddles are sometimes used for courtship.

Riddling in the Meitei society is associated with variety of occasions. It may be held at any time of the day or night, whenever there is a group of people during their marrier moments, in play and in work, before going to bed or during any activity in the day. Children are exchanging riddles when tired of their play. Riddling is the sport of children and young people of the Meitei society. It is also a favourite past-time for the Meitei children. They sit round the hearth or in the rural playground at late evening and a boy flings a riddle into the group expecting anyone to reply, sometimes pointing or addressing the riddle at one of them. They may

29. For details see Chapter V, pp. 239-241.
give various answers, if the correct answer is not found, the answer is given by the boy who asked it. In the Meitei society, it is a convention that the answer of the riddle is given by the person who possess it, if the correct answer is not found. Sometimes, there is a lot of arguments among them for finding the suitability of the answer. The herdboys sometimes exchange riddles among themselves with a condition that the person who cannot give the correct answer should look after the cattle. Therefore, if a boy does not know the answer to a riddle posed by another boy, he has to tend the cattle for a while and then he will again ask a riddle to another boy, if he also cannot give the answer, he has also to tend the cattle. Even very small children are usually quite adept to asking and answering riddles. Sometimes, they exchange riddles with their parents. They learn the riddles by observation and practice from their elders. In the Meitei society, even the old Meitei folk exchange riddles. However, riddles are for the young folk in Manipur. In the Burmese society, 'the survival of riddling depends utmost entirely on children, for riddles have been"out of fashion" with adults for years. In Bengal, riddles are transmitted solely among children. In Manipur, riddling is an activity mainly of children and young people of both sexes. Riddles are also used during planting or wood-cutting or harvesting to lighten the burden of the works. When rowing or travelling on

foot, during rice-pounding or husking the paddy or when women assemble either for ginning the raw cotton or the eating the kabok one hears them enjoying each other's riddles. As regards popularity and usages of riddles we know that in a performance of a religious ritual, in a marriage ceremony, a gathering of fun-loving youngsters, and in many other occasions and activities of Meitei life riddles have always found associating with them. Riddles play a vital role in the social life of the Meitei people.

In the past riddles were very much used in Manipur. Some of these riddles are survived till now. However, the practice of replying to the riddles is gradually disappearing in the Meitei society. It seems related to the changing intellectual climate and partly the younger generation could no longer carry on the past convincingly. But, according to the themes of the riddles available in Manipur, they may broadly be divided into several categories viz., (a) The articles of daily use, e.g., door, lock and key, broom, etc., (b) The riddles on vegetables, roots, fruits and flowers, for instance, maize, plantain, pineapple, ginger, jack-fruit, etc., (c) The riddles of the animals and birds, worms and insects, e.g., elephants, crow, etc.; (d) The riddles of the organs of human body and its functions, e.g., hand, tongue, fingers, etc.; (e) The objects of nature, e.g., the sun, the stars, etc. and (f) The miscellaneous items, e.g., the road, the boat, etc.
Riddling is held on different occasions in the Meitei society. There are certain peculiar customs in which the exchange of riddling between the boys and the girls or boys and the women is generally done. The male used to go to the residence of the girls for courtship in the evening. Whenever they go, they take off their foot-wears just at the entrance of the court-yard as a mark of respect of the parents or the elderly members of the family of the girl. The girl or the sister of the girl or the sister-in-law of the girl, if any, receives them and also puts a kounā phak at the mānggol for their seat. The girl serves them a prepared 'hidāk' either with a 'sārei' or with a piece of plantain leaf for making it. On such occasions, riddles are exchanged between the boys and girl or the boys and the siter-in-law, if any, but not compulsorily. In such situations, riddles are used as substitutes for direct words as they are especially employed in making their relation.

Again there are some other peculiar social institutions where riddles are exchanged among the Meitei folk. The Meiteis did not use the mill cloths in ancient Manipur and therefore the Meitei society had a social institution known as 'sinnāiphām' for every leikāl where the married or unmarried

31. Hidak : Prepared with tobacco leaves and maple-sugar used as a substitute of cigarette in the Meitei society.
32. Sarei : Made of a piece of plantain leaf for smoking hidāk as the shape of the smoking-pipe.
33. Sinnāiphām : A place for the work of ginning the raw cotton and this place may be changed according to the convenient of the women-folk. sin = work, nāi (naiba) = ginning; pham (mapham) = place.
females worked together. The married women, generally, in the day and the girls, in the night used to come at one of the particular selected residences for ginning the raw-cotton. It may also be noted that in some areas of Manipur the married women are also working in the night. When they are at work, one hears them enjoying in each other's riddles. Sometimes, men or boys used to come to such places and riddles may also be exchanged among them. The Meitei women are also very much fond of get-together or eating together even 'kabok' at a particular selected residence. Even on such occasions, men may come and join them and riddling may also be exchanged among them. The boys may team up against the girls. There are no team leaders or precedence in asking riddles. The riddles on flowers, fruits, vegetables and articles of daily use, etc. are generally used on such occasions.

In Manipur, the young children sitting around the hearth of the house go on posing and solving riddles among themselves. In other gatherings on festive occasions also the old and the young sit together and solve riddles. The riddles on the articles of daily use, vegetables, fruits and flowers, etc. are generally very common on such situations, as for instance.

(i) Paithok pāisin thong karino?
   (What is to hold out and to hold in?) Door

(ii) Kāchin lāimu karino?
   (What is the black deity of the corner?)

Black earthen ware
(iii) Angāng oiringeidanā asangbā setpā chaouraklagā salungāng setpā karino?
(During Childhood, it wears green and in old age, it wears red. What is it?) Chilli

(iv) Nākan chābokpā karino?
(Giving delivery by the side of the body) Maize plant

(v) Mamit chāmā pānbā makoktasu manā pānbā kari heino?
(It has one hundred eyes. It has leaves on its head. What is that fruit?) Pineapple

(vi) Leinung morok karino?
(What is the chilli of the underground?) Ginger

(vii) Leinung sanā karino?
(What is the gold of the underground?) Turmeric (Curcuma domestica (Bot.))

(viii) Mamā namthibina machā Rādhikā pokpā karinā?
(The mother having bad smell borns a child like that of Radha) Chingonglei (Acacia arabica (Bot.))

(ix) Mamādagi machānā hānnā pokpā karino?
(What is that child who is born earlier than its own mother?) Leipāklei (a kind of flower which bears flower before germinating the leaves and trunk.)
(x) Angāngnā tourāgā changbā ahānā tourāgā changdabā karīno?

(If the child does, it can be inserted, but the old man does, it can't be. What is that?) Hole of a needle.

Again, in the Meitei society, parts of human body, animals and birds and worms and insects are also popular themes of the riddles. In order to illustrate this point, some of such types of riddles are as under:

(i) Leimung amadā uku taret phatpā karīno?

(What is that mound having seven holes) Head

(ii) Khwāidagī chāobā sā karīno?

(What is the largest animal?) Elephant

(iii) Masāgi maming maśānā koujabā karīno?

(Which bird calls its own name?) Crow

(iv) Makokṣu mathunsu chap mānabā karīno?

(What worm has the same tail like that of its head) Earth-worm

And, riddles on the objects of nature are also prevalent in Manipur. As for example:

(i) Phengubā sengubā yāodānā matam pumbadā langdunatā leibā karīno?

(What is that always remains bright without cleaning and washing it?) The sun
(ii) *Pukhrī jāgar amā leibā thambāl kāyārum sātpā thambāl*
_ sing adu numidāngdādā sātpā nungthildā sāttabā karino?

(There is a big pond. Many lotus are blooming only in the night but not in the day. What is that?) Stars.

Also, there are many riddles on the miscellaneous items. Some of them are as follows thus:

(1) *Eigi khong tekle khwāngjet amattā lāksanbiyu nongthaktā kājakhrage karino?*

(My leg is broken, wrap with something on my waist and allow me to go up. What is it?) Thatch

This is a kind of reed grown wildly both in the hills and the plain. When it is grown up fully, it is cut with a sickle. When it is dried up in the sun, it is used as substitute of modern corrugated sheet for roofing. It is wrapped and thrown up on the roof for roofing purposes.

(ii) *Numit tāragā khāromdā chatkhība, nongngāllagā awānglondā hallakpā karino?*

(When the sun sets, it goes to the south, when the sun rises, it comes back to the north, What is it?) Pouron

**Pouron** is a wooden shutter fixed on the door for closing and opening the door. At the time of closing, it moves to the south and at the time of opening to the north. In Maniūrī it is called Pouron.
(iii) **Asibana ahingba phāba karino ?**

(A death catches a living thing. What is that? Angling)

(iv) **Wu oi am akhakjīia phisaba aduga tingthekpabi vāba adugā konsinbadī yādabā karino ?**

(A woman weaves a cloth, it can be spread but can't be folded. What is it?). The road.

(v) **Aukangbina charā upā karino ?**

(A pregnant woman wears a chara on her head). Laser hycinth.

In Manipur sometimes the parents or the elderly members of the family of a house where they assemble, join the children in riddling. Those riddles serve an important role for the mental education of the children and also a good device for memory testing. Some of them are as follows thus:

1. **Tombi gā ma Jāna mācha ahum pokī mācha ani gi māminnā Tingtheukā, Leipākoopā - ahursa mācha adugā maning karino ?**

   ("Tombi's father has three children, the names of the two are Monday and Tuesday. What is the name of the third child?") Tombi

2. **Pakhri amadā thambāl kharā sātli khoimu kharā rāipīkā amanu tongbadānā khoimu anā lemi, anī anī tongbadānā khoimu anā khoimu thambāl amata lemā khoimu kayānc thambāl kayano ?**
(In a pond there bloom some lotus, when one black bee on each lotus, there is an exceed of one black bee but the two each on the lotus, there is no remaining of the lotus and the black bee. What are the numbers of lotus and the black bee ?)

Lotus 1 and Black bee 2

(iii) Englandagi siphāi nippānhāk Imphāl yourakpadā siphāi marita ngāibā karino ?

(When eight sepoys from England reached Imphal, the number reduced to four. What is it ?) Numerical number 8.

The English numerical number eight is equivalent to the Bengali numerical number four. In Manipur as the Bengali script is in practice; the eight (8) becomes four (8).

In Manipur there are many riddles which emphasized on unconditional norms in many ways. As for example, 'Piklingidā phanek setpā, chaoragā phanek thokpā' (During childhood, it wears but during young it stays naked) "Bamboo", Again, there are riddles, the construction of which are in negative nature. As for instance, 'Ngā oiragā makok yādabā, uchek oiragā marum koktabā kari karino.' (A fish which has no head, a bird which does not lay eggs. What are they ?) "Crab and Bet", "Meigi machā mei nattabā, isingnā yokpā adugā isingdi nattabā, meidā amuk hanjandunā sibā karino ?" (It is the
child of fire who is not fire, it is brought up by water but it is not water, at last it dies of fire. What is it?) Tikki.

These negative constructions eliminate one possible answer to the riddle.

In the Meitei society, the effectiveness of the folk riddle frequently rests on its alliteration and rhyme. It is hard to convey in English though the excellence of the use of alliteration and rhyme is found in Meitei riddles. The following are the examples:

(i) Asibenā ahingbā phābā karino?
  (A death catches a living thing. What is that?) Angling.

(ii) Chāre tenggot than, chādre tenggot than karino?
  (What is that - whether you eat or not the content of the pot remains the same?) Snail's curry.

The Meitei eat only the flesh of the snails not the shell when it is cooked as curry. Therefore, even after eating the flesh, the shell of the snails remain as it is.

In the above two riddles, the first riddle has the repetition of the letter 'A' in a succession of words. The second riddle has also the end rhymes, i.e., than, than.

Therefore, the excellence of the riddles in Manipuri increases in the use of alliteration and end rhymes.

In Manipur largest amount of material for riddle has been given by nature as well as from the perennial source:
of power, mystery, beauty and life itself. Some objects are more often mentioned in riddles than others perhaps because of their usefulness and utility in the day-to-day life of the Meitei people. As for example, Kārā nānthā kārā nānthā karino? (What is it to climb and to slip a soon) Plantain or, Lawāiluten chabokpā karino? (Giving delivery of child at the crown of the head. What is it ?) A compound spadix of banana (Plantain having flower) or, Tharo imādi nahāk pokpadagi punsi loirado (Tharo your mother is undone by your birth. What is it ?) plantain.

The popularity of the bananas as a riddle subject can be explained in the following ways. It is found in most backyards because of the many uses of them. After the bananas are harvested the stalk or the bud may be boiled or eaten as a vegetable. The wide leaf serves, in the Meitei society as a sun-shade or umbrella, to wrap fish or various cakes or bulses before cooking to line the inside of the earthen-ware or cooking pots, to use as plates (discs) and pots or as a small tāngā (plate) on any occasion, to use the stalk as alkaline, etc. etc. The use of the banana leaves is indispensable in the Meitei society till to-day both from the religious and the social functions.

In the Lāi-Harāobā festival a ritual song known as Paosa Ishei34 was sung. This song is really with erotic riddles.

34. For details see Chapter VII, pp. 337-338.
In the Meitei society, there are many riddles of which the answers depict the obscenity. As for example:

(i) Ching ani kāraktā meitbung khongbok karino?
    (To conch between the two hillocks, what is it?).
    To break wind.

(ii) Tuminā chāragā phongnā phāibā karino?
    (To eat secretly but produce openly, what is it?)
    Delivery of a child.

In the Meitei society the use of riddle can be traced back from ancient times as it was found associating with legends. As for example, in the legend of 'Ningthou Mabu Thiba', there was a riddle context between the sun and the two daughters of Ningthou Mabu Thiba. The nature of the riddle used in this legend is like that of a cryptic statement. And solving a riddle as a means for winning a bride or something is one of the ancient folklore themes in the Meitei society.

35. For details see Chapter V, pp. 239-241.