CHAPTER - TWO

MANIPURI SOCIETY AND CULTURE
IN THE BARAK VALLEY
2.1. A brief history of Manipuri migration and settlement in the Barak Valley:

There are about 186 Manipuri villages in Barak Valley. They are scattered in various parts of the valley. To trace the origin of the Manipuris in the valley one is invited to look back to the past. Historians opined that these people originally belonged to Manipur, who have migrated from their homeland in the remote past due to various reasons. The matter of their migration is clearly evident from the use of the epithet ‘Manipuri’ as their identity.

Migration is the periodic movement of population by breaking social and cultural ties with the original place of living. However, there are various theories about the human migration. On the basis of its type migration may be casual or minor, temporary, semi-permanent and permanent which can be occurred international, inter-regional, inter-urban, rural-urban and inter-urban. With regard, to the causes of human migration,
it is evident that in different period of history, the process of natural changes, political, socio-cultural and economy of a country involves. Like wise, Manipuri migration in Barak Valley also took place at different period of history and number of causes and circumstances were involved in it. However, the ancient Manipuri literary sources, various myths and legends indicates the transborder ‘Manipuri migration in the past and the emergence of Manipuri diaspora’ It is a historical fact that, the event of Burmese invasion on Manipur during 1819 to 1826 (Chahi Taret Khuntakpa as known by the Manipuris) caused the large scale migration and settlement of the Manipuris in Barak Valley. But, if we look forward the pages of history, it reveals that, Manipuri migration and settlement was started much earlier period. Moreover, it also involved number of factors which resulted to the Manipuri immigration into Barak Valley. Therefore, the causes of Manipuri migration cannot be restricted to marginalised in a particular event. An ancient ‘Puya’ which was written during the period of king Khagemba of Manipur (1597-1652) mentioned “One day the Manipuris settled in the west will return back to this land and they will restore the old customs and traditions of the Manipuris.” The above mentioned statement suggests that the Manipuri settlement in the west of Manipur i.e. Cachar, Assam and Bangladesh had started prior to the reign

2. Th. Thoukachampa Meitei (Compl.): Lalei Lathup Thelel Amasung Matamgi Khonglei, Imphal, 1961;
of Khagemba in Manipur. However, several scholars have suggested divergent opinions regarding the earliest evident of the Manipuri migration in Barak Valley. Therefore, no definite answer to the question is available yet.

The geo-physical feature of the region indicates that Manipur's connection with Barak Valley must have been established through land routes. During the long course of the history of Manipur reveals that, her area as well as political boundary changed times without number; but Cachar (Barak Valley) has been the gateway of Manipur towards the west. In the past, there existed trade routes and innumerable foot tracts in the dense forest adjoining Manipur and Cachar, and that served the inter communication between the two regions. In the context of India's trade with South-East Asia, Dr. R. C. Majumder stated that, in ancient times, Indians proceeded to the Far-East by land routes through Bengal, Manipur and Assam. In the 11th century, there was a route from Pattikara kingdom of East Bengal to Central Burma through Cachar, Mizo Hills and Manipur. The Barak Valley has a close relation with Manipur since the time immemorial. Being a neighbouring kingdom it had close political, cultural connection and trade affairs. Therefore, scholars often remarks that, without

4. **Manipuri Sahitya Parishad (Compl.)** : *Historical and Cultural relations between Manipur, Assam and Bengal*, Imphal, 1986; p. 43.
Manipur, writing the history of Barak Valley remains incomplete. In the ancient Manipuri folklore the area has been referred to as 'Mayang Leipak'. In this context Dr. M. Kirti suggested that, in the older a days Cachar (Barak Valley) was the place of shelter for Manipuri, a preparatory ground for revolt against the throne, a valley for settlement and the gateway of Manipur to the west.

The ancient Manipuri literary sources indicate the transborder Manipuri migration in the early days. 'Poireiton Khunthok' is one of such precious chronicles of the Manipuri. In the process of settlement undertaken by Chingkhong Poireiton in Manipur, his progeny had been advised to spread over in the neighbouring countries of Manipur. Further, it has been recorded in the book 'Poireiton Khunthok' -

"You who desire to be a Mayang should carry the sword at your left side, take betelnut, bear a pair of conch, carry a bag of cowrie shells and reach out like to be a Takhel (Tippera) should wear white dhoti, carry the sword at the left and visit the land ... ... ...

(translation quoted from N. Sanajaoba, Manipur Past and Present, Vol.-IV).

5 The word Mayang denotes to the Non-Manipuri people by the Maniopuri and Mayang Leipak means the land of the Non-Manipuri people.
Reviewing the various historical facts regarding the Manipuri dispersion in past, it reveals that one of the principal reasons for that could be attributed to the matrimonial alliances, which had been materialised between the Manipuri and the contemporary neighbouring other ruling houses. However, it is very difficult to trace the exact information regarding Manipuri matrimonial alliances beyond 12th century. A Manipuri king who ruled in only 12th century had married a ‘Mayang’ princess named Chinkhurembi. According to R. K. Jhaljit, the Manipuri king Ngathelingkhong married the Mayang princess Chinkhurembi. On the contrary, Mutum Jhulon opines that, Thawanthaba ascended to the throne of Manipur in 1121 A.D. and married a Mayang lady called Chingkhurembi, the daughter of Thongnang. The Thongnang were Kachari’s. In the year 1536 A.D. Kabomba, the king of Manipur sent a Manipuri girl in marriage to Ahom king Suhungmung and the Ahom king reciprocated by sending a few Ahom girls as the wives of the king of Manipur. The historians also referred to the fact that, two Manipuri kings namely Chalamba (1544-1561) and Mungyemba (1561-1579) married Kamrupi princess. But it is not clear whether the Kamrupi princess were the daughters of Koch or Ahom. The Manipuri Royal chronicle ‘Cheitharol

Kumbaba', one Manipuri lady Monsambi was married to the Kachari king. But the chronicle is not clear about the name of the Kachari king who married Monsambi. However, the contemporary Kachari ruler of the period was Durlavnarayan. In the year 1566 A.D. Mayang Leima Tarungambi left Manipur for Mayang Leipak in relation to the matrimonial alliance with the Kachari king. During the same period of Mungyamba’s rule in Manipur another Manipuri lady, Koirembi, was married to the Kachari king in 1585 A. D. However, the name of Kachari rulers were not recorded in the Chaitharol Kumbaba. But the rulers of Kachari kingdom during these were Meghanarayan (1566-1580) and Yasonarayan (1586-1610). Khagemba (1597-1652) had matrimonial alliances with Kabo (Burma) and Kachar. In 1603 Mayang Leima Tonsenu was married to Kachari Kingdom. Again in 1630, a Manipuri lady Ponchembi left Manipur for Mayang Leibak. During that period Cachar was ruled by the king Bhimdarpa Narayan (1620-1637).

Regarding the matrimonial relation of Manipur with her western neighbours, the Manipuri Royal Chronicle Chaitharol Kumbaba provides the basic information, though the chronicle is not very clear in the sense of historical sequence and the name

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13. Cheitharol Kumbaba, Ibid. 27.
14. Cheitharol Kumbaba, Ibid. 27.
15. Cheitharol Kumbaba, Ibid. 28.
of ruler who married the Manipuri princess. However, of its certain limitations, particularly with the beginning of the 18th century and onwards it provides valuable information in this regard.

On the other hand, Chaitharol Kumbaba also recorded the names of several Mayang princess who had been married to Manipur. In the year 1602, Sanongba, the younger brother of King Khagemba had married a Tripuri princess from Tripura. The chronicle also recorded that in 1609 Akoijam Chanu Yangnu was married to Tripura.

The above discussion clearly reveals that the Manipuri Royal families had maintained the matrimonial relations with the neighbouring kingdoms right from the early days. Referring to the Manipuri folk traditions, various ancient Manipuri literary texts and the royal chronicles, Cheitharol Kumbaba and Ningthourol Lambuba, it can be safely concluded that Manipur had matrimonial alliance with the Barak Valley from the very early period. However, the royal chronicles are not so much specific about the ruling of its immediate western neighbour and the matrimonial alliances of the Manipuris prior to the 18th century. Prof. J.B. Bhattacharjee opined that in the 13th century, Barak Valley was ruled by the Tipperahas, whose territory covered a considerable portion of Sylhet and Comilla districts of present Bangladesh in addition to Tripura. He also mentioned that once
they established their capital at ‘Khalangsha’ which has been identified as Rajghat situated on the bank of Rukmini river in the southern part of modern Cachar district, where old roads tanks and brick built plinths are still present. On the other hand, we are yet to come across an evidence of an independent principality formation in Cachar before the establishment of Tripuri state in the 13th century. In fact, later on, in the 16th century, the ‘Dehans’ (Koch) wrested the territory from the Tripuris and the Dehan principality eventually merged into the Dimasha state in the 18th century following the marriage of the Koch princess, Kanchani to Lakshmichandra the Dimasa Raja.

Prof. J.B. Bhattacharjee has a speculation that, the Barak Plain must have been included in the ‘Srihattadesha’ prior to the Tripuri rule in Cachar. It is evident that after establishing their permanent capital at Khaspur, the Dimasa Royal house maintained matrimonial ties with the Manipuri people. In 1740 Prajavati Devi (Haripriya), the Manipuri princess was married to Kachari prince Ramachandra Narayan Sandhikari, the elected son of the Kachari king Kirtichandra Narayan on the other hand in the year 1803, Mandhuchandra the king of Manipur was dethroned by his brother, Chourjit and Marjit. Consequently,

Madhuchandra took shelter in the Kachari kingdom with his followers. He concluded an alliance by giving his daughter, Induprabha, in marriage to the Kachari king, Krishnachandra, in 1806.²¹ Here mention should be made of the fact that, during those days when a Manipuri princess was married to any other kingdom, a sizeable member of her retinue and followers also accompanied her and settled there. It is stated that, while princess Induprabha was married to the Kachari Raja. She was escorted by prince Phairaba, the son of Labanyachandra and Haobam Nongthomba and a large number of her retinue.²² Since than, a large number of Manipuri families began to settle in Khaspur. In this context, Upendra Chandra Guha, in his book ‘Kacharer Itibritta’, recorded that the mother and two brothers of Induprabha and a large number of Manipuri people had come in Cachar during the reign of Govinda Chandra and they permanently settled down in Cachar.²³ Thus from the above mentioned facts, it is clear that, the Manipuri matrimonial alliances in the various periods of the history the resulted to the migration and settlement of a sizeable number of Manipuri population in Barak Valley in the early period and consequently it also paved the way for the migration of the Manipuris in the valley during later period of the history.

²² Chaitharol Kumbaba; Opct p. 172.
Prof. J. B. Bhattacharjee in his book ‘Cachar under British Rule in North-East India’, mentioned that, Mohung-Dijva and Rangarung were important trade centres, where the Ahoms, the Nagas, the Kacharis and the Manipuris exchanged their goods. Moreover Surya Kumar Bhuyan referred in his ‘Tripurar Buranji’, that during the period between 1709 and 1715, Ratna Kandali Sharma and Arjun Das Kakati, the messenger of Ahom King visited Tipperah court and they had seen on their Tipperah Rule, many Manipuri people selling gold, bellmetal, utensils and clothes to the Kacharis and the Tripuris. Thus, it reveals that the distance of the trade routes and growth of flourishing trade centres in the valley where the Manipuri people were selling commodities lead to the conclusion that the Manipuri people frequented the valley and a few of them settled down for commercial purpose.

Another most important reason for the migration and settlement of the Manipuri people in Barak Valley may be attributed to the introduction of Vaishnav religion in Manipur. During the reign of king Garibniwaj (1709-1748), Vaishnavism was declared as the state religion and he applied force to his subjects to accept it. Subsequently, those who who opposed were fined and driven away from the kingdom. The fact remains

24. J. B. Bhattacharjee : Cachar Under British Rule in North-East India. New Delhi, 1977; p. 15
that a large number of people, who had the different opinions, had to leave Manipur and migrated to Barak Valley and settled down there.\textsuperscript{27} It is also evident that, during the reign of Garibniwaj, Manipur maintained a good relation with the neighbouring areas of Sylhet.\textsuperscript{28} Therefore, there was possibility of Manipuri penetration into the valley of Barak and Surma rivers during those days.

The above discussion clearly reveals that till the middle of 18th century A.D., Manipuri migration and settlement due to compulsive reasons like war and political dissidence, outside Manipur particularly in Barak Valley had been occasional and sporadic. However, in the second half of the 18th century, due to various reasons (primarily political), the intensity of Manipuri migration had been increased rapidly and it became a regular feature till the year 1891. It is apparent that, during these days, in every occasion of the change of ruler in the throne Manipur, there had been a war and consequently those who opposed the king were compelled to fly away to Barak Valley. The internecine wars among the descendents of king Garibniwas gave the opportunity to Burmese people to invade into Manipur. As a result nearly most of the princess with the exception of a few, who ascended the throne of Manipur after Garibniwaj took

\textsuperscript{27} Th. Babachandra Singh: \textit{Manipuris in Barak Valley}, A chronological investigation on migration and settlement proceeding, Vol.-17; p. 208.

\textsuperscript{28} J. Roy: \textit{History of Manipur}, Calcutta, 1999; p. 35.
occasional refuge in Barak Valley. Eventually, Barak Valley became the political asylum of the Manipuri prince. As a matter of fact, from 1758 to 1826 A.D. Manipur was conquered by the Burmese times out of numbers. Consequently, large scale migration of the Manipuris into Barak Valley took place during these period and a number of colonies of Manipuri immigrants grow up rapidly in the different parts of barak Valley, Sylhet and Tripura, and of them went as far as Dacca.  

According to Capt. E. W. Dun, in 1755 A.D. when Moramba alias Gourshyam was on the throne of Manipur, the Burmese ruler Alongpaya invaded and committed every kind of devastation which is known in the history of Manipur as the First Burmese devastation.  

Gourashyam was succeeded by Jai Singh. During his rule, in 1765, Burmese again invaded Manipur and Jai Singh failed to save his country and fled to Cachar.  

However, with the help of Ramchandra Narayana, the Kachari king and Ahom Rajeshwar Singh, Jai Singh could reign throne of Manipur in 1768 to 1782. Jai Singh was expelled not less than four times by the Burmese and on each occasion he was compelled to take shelter in Cachar  

In the year 1798 Jai Singh abdicated the throne and his son Labanya Chandra succeeded him, but in 1801 he was dethroned by Madhuchandra. However, he also

31. Chaitharol Kumbaba; *Obcit* p. 125.
32. R. B. Pemberton: *The Eastern Frontier of India*, Delhi, 1979; p. 43.
could not remain on the throne for a long time. In the year 1802 his brother Chourjit revolted against him, but, he was defeated and fled to Cachar. In 1806 Chourjit again came back with a large number of army from Cachar and defeated Madhuchandra. Being defeated by Chourjit, Madhuchandra fled to Cachar. During his refuge in Cachar, he gave his daughter Induprabha to Krishnachandra, the Kachari king (discussed earlier in this chapter). Subsequently, he made an attempt to capture the lost throne with the help of his son-in-law Krishnachandra but he was defeated and killed in the battle-field. Chourjit ascended the throne and made his brother Marjit as Jubaraj. But very soon, Marjit was very much dissatisfied and aggrieved with the activities of his brother Chourjit. Marjit made an attempt to overthrow Chourjit, Marjit and bound to take shelter into Cachar for seeking help from the Kachari king. But the kachari king refused to extend any assistance. Marjit, then went to Rangoon and solicited the Burmise king Badapaya (1779 to 1819) to help him in getting the throne of Manipur. In 1812, Marjit attacked on Manipur with a large number of Burmise army. After being defeated by his brother Chourjit and Gambhir Singh he took shelter in Cachar with a large number of followers. In the mean time, the Kachari king, Krishnachandra died in 1813 and he was succeeded by his brother Govindachandra. After assuming the throne Govindachandra

married Induprabha, the widow of brother Krishnachandra, which made from unpopular. On the other hand, Chourjit made an alliance with Ram Singh, the Raja of Jaintia and Tularam, the two rivals of Govindachandra. At their time, Gambhir Singh remained in Cachar as the commander-in-chief of the Kachari army at a monthly Salary of Rs. 50.\(^\text{35}\) On the other hand Marjit in 1817, feeling confident of his position in Manipur marched against Cachar with a large force composing of about 10,000 soldiers. Entering the territory of Cachar an engagement took at Rongpur, on right bank of river Barak.\(^\text{36}\) Under these circumstances Govindachandra requested for help to Chourjit who was then in Jaintia. Chourjit came from Jaintia and Gambhir Singh also stood by his side and the two brothers responded to fight against Marjit. The combined forces of Chourjit, Gambhir Singh and Govindachandra repelled the invader. But, as soon as the invaders had left a fresh spell of disturbances broke out in Cachar. Realising the weakness of the Kachari king, Chourjit dissuaded his brother Gambhir Singh to desert the Kachari king. The Manipuri brothers, joining hands with Tularam, the Hill-chief, resumed atrocities in the Kachari king’s territory. They set fire to the villagers in plains and looted or destroyed the properties.\(^\text{37}\) In June 1818 at night they attacked at Govindachandra’s residence and forced him to escape in


Sylhet, and two Manipuri brothers took the possession of Cachar plains, while Tularam became the master of the Northern Hills.\textsuperscript{38}

In the meantime, Marjit who was ruling Manipur as a vassal of the Burmese titelage had seen an opportunity to throw off the yoke of Burmese suzerainty. So without taking any authority from the Burmese ruler, he set his subjects to cut down trees in Kabo Valley. But old Badopaya, the Burmese ruler, never allowed a vassal ruler to assert his independence in this manner. But in the meantime Badopaya died in 1819 and he was succeeded by his grandson Baggidow (1819-1837). The news Burmese king summoned the Manipuri king Marjit to attend at the Burmese Court at Ava, but refused to attened on the plea that he apprehended troubles from his brother, Chourjit and Gambhir Singh. As a result, the Burmese king sent a big force under the command of General Maha Bandula in 1819. Marjit was defeated and fled to Cachar. The Burmese overrun Manipur for seven years, from 1819-1826, which is known as \textquoteleft Chahi Taret Khuntakpa' (Seven Years Devastation) in the history of Manipur.\textsuperscript{39} Chourjit and Gambhir Singh received Marjit. The three Manipuri brothers occupied the whole Barak Valley and repartitioned the valley amongst themselves. Barak Valley appeared to be an extended Manipur at least for some

\textsuperscript{38} ibid: p. 43.
\textsuperscript{39} J. Roy: Op.cit; p. 60.
years. Chourjit ruled the east of Tilain hills from Sonaimukh, Gambhir Singh got the western track of Tilain hills and wade his capital at Gumrah; and Marjit got Hailakandi plain staying at Japhirbond.\textsuperscript{40}

The above discussion reveals that, the internal strife and sissession dessention; and precisely the Burmese imperialism were mainly responsible for the large scale migration of the Manipuri people into Barak Valley. It is that, when Marjit fled to Cachar nearly one-third of the population of Manipur Valley went along with him to escape from the Burmese torture.\textsuperscript{41} Subsequently, even after Gambhir Singh was restored as the ruler of Manipur after the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, most of the Manipuris who had fled from their country during Burmese aggression had permanently settled in Barak Valley. The reason for their settlement in Barak Valley was mainly the economic factor. During the seven years devastation of the Burmese occupation, agriculture and industries of Manipur were completely ruined.\textsuperscript{42} Most of them (who migrated to Barak Valley) were reluctant to return, because they felt that, if they returned, they had to initiate from scratch. Above all, the fear psychosis of the Burmese demoralised them to return. Moreover, throne, who were advirse to the system of government in their native country had also decided not to

\textsuperscript{40} R. Brown : Op.cit; p. 62.
\textsuperscript{41} R. B. Pemberton : Op.cit; p. 46.
\textsuperscript{42} J. Roy : Op.cit; p. 72.
return and had obtained grants of land in Cachar.\textsuperscript{43}

The immigration of the Manipuri people did not stop ever after the annexation of Cachar in 1832 by the British. As a result internal strife and dissension several scions of Manipuri royal family along with their followers came to Barak Valley on every occasion of change in person on the throne of Manipur. In 1834, with the death of Gambhir Singh, the war of succession among the Manipuri princes again started in the history of Manipur. In fact the infant son of Gambhir Singh, Chandrakirti ascended the throne of Manipur. Accordingly, Nar Singh, another brother of Gambhir Singh became the regent and took over the administration of the country. During these days, there were a number of aspirants on the throne who did not allow him to rule peacefully. However, they were defeated and dispersed by Nar Singh. Consequently, many Manipuri princes took shelter in Cachar and their immigration in the valley of Cachar grew up. It is a fact that, during these days, Cachar became a place for the preparatory ground of troops to invade Manipur by the Manipuri princes. Meanwhile, in 1844, Maharani Kumudini Devi, the mother of the infant king, Chandrakirti Singh, after making an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the regent Nar Singh, left Manipur with her five sons and five hundred followers and took shelter in Cachar.\textsuperscript{44} Captain Lyons,

\textsuperscript{44} D. Dutta : Cachar District Records, Silchar, 1969; p. 123.
the Superintendent of Cachar provided necessary accommodation for them and sent a Havildar’s party for the protection of the Manipuri prince and his mother at Cachar.\(^{45}\) On April 11, 1850, Nar Singh, the Raja of Manipur died. He was succeeded by his brother Debendra Singh but Nar Singh, before his death, was not in favour of his succession and desired the restoration of Gambhir Singh’s son Chandrakirti. Therefore, soon after the death of Nar Singh, his three sons fled to Cachar and joined hands with Chandrakirti Singh. In the meantime Chandrakirti was under house arrest at Silchar and preparations were being made for his removal to Dacca by the British Government. But, he made successful attempt of escape and in July 1850, he attacked Manipur with a large number of followers. Many of the subjects of Debendra Singh also took the side of Chandrakirti. Debendra Singh failed to resist and fled to Cachar with his five sons and followers.\(^{46}\) Chandrakirti regained his lost throne. This state of affairs continued till the British occupation of Manipur in 1891. There were many Manipuri princes who took shelter in the plain of Cachar and who were waiting for chance and expecting to capture the throne of Manipur.

The first British Superintendent of Cachar, Captain Fisher, took various steps to accommodate the fugitive Manipuri

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princes and made arrangement for their settlement. He established a number of Manipuri Villages in the eastern part of Cachar. Infact, the Manipuri people were encouraged to settle down in the frontiers to create a barrier to the turmoil of tribes of the hill areas. W. W. Hunter observed that, the early Manipuri settlers in Barak Valley obtained grants of Jungle land to be held revenue free for a thousand days, and after that period it was subjected to assessment. They used to clear the jungle, and cultivate the land until the first demand for revenue was made. Then they abandoned the land and took another piece of land of jungle. The land which they had made valuable was later occupied by the others. But some years later they could understand that such type of business was not profitable at all, and then they started to settle down permanently on their grants in the various parts of the valley.

R. B. Pemberton observed ... ...

"... ... and the Munneepoorees, ranking amongst the most valuable of those settlers, whose enterprising industry has already produced so marked an improvement in the country of their adoption. Adverse to the system of government observed in their native

valley, they have obtained grants of land in Kachar; and some of the most flourishing villages of the district have been brought to their present prosperous condition, by the employment of those funds, which, as sepoys, non-commissioned and commissioned officers in the Sylhet Light Infantry, the Munneepurees had succeeded in accumulating."^{49}

Thus, according to Dr. Sujit Kumar Ghose, one of the largest and most flourished of the villages, was founded by the Manipuri people on the bank of Madhura Nalla; and its inhabitants mainly consisted of the Manipuri sepoys from the Sylhet Light Infantry, who have resigned to their services and invested their little capital in the soil.\textsuperscript{50} According to the census done in 1872, the number of Manipuri population was shown to be 6,095 (approx) in Barak Valley. But the Census Report of 1881 said that about a considerable increase of the population has taken place. It numbers the Manipuri population in Barak Valley to be about 26,745. Like wise, the Census Report of 1891 showed the increasing trends of Manipuri population which is numbers around 40,830.\textsuperscript{51} However, the Census Report of 1971

published the total number of Manipuri population in Barak Valley is approximately 72,270.

Therefore, the Manipuri people in Barak Valley migrated from their mainland, Manipur, due to a number of factors and settled in this valley in the historical periods. The history of their migration is not an isolated particular event, it has long history itself, of course, they had been playing an important role in the socio-culture, economic and political lives in the Valley.

2.2. Society and Religion:

Society is group, composed of men and women and children, that has established patterns of co-operation by means of which to members are able to survive and reproduce. In its simplest form, it provides its members with a great variety of their needs. Therefore, a society is a group of individuals who live more or less together in a certain place or region in an organised manner to continue through succeeding generations, and its members must be dependent on one another and exist independently of other groups. The people in the society develop their own culture or ways of acting and thinking and feeling.

2.2.1. Yek-Salai:

In Barak Valley, the Manipuris have well-coordinated social system since early times. They has seven patrilineal divisions known as Yek-Salai. And, each of it is again divided into Yumnak or Sagei. The seven Yeks are namely – (i) Ningthouja, (ii) Angom, (iii) Luwang, (iv) Khuman, (v) Moirang, (vi) Khaba-Nganba and (vii) Chenglei. Notably, the last two division are now-a-days either mixed or assimilated with other fives.

It is mentioned that Yeks to be seven and Salai to be nine in number. But the common people can not differentiate the Salai from Yek. Therefore, they use both the term as a synonym. In fact, Yek-Salai division is an exogamous division in the Manipuri society in Barak Valley. The people trace their descent through the male line. Every Yek-Salai believe that all the members within the group are related through blood. So, marriage within the same Yek-Salai is prohibited in Barak Valley. They believe each Yek-Salai has a common ancestor.

2.2.2 Yumnak-Sagei:

Every Yek-Salai are divided into various Yumnak-Sagei. It is a popular believe of the Manipuris that each Yumnak or Sagei was created by a single person whether he was a superman or human being. Thus, the descendents of such a being has become the member of a particular Yumnak.

The Manipuris in Barak Valley still maintain the tradition
of mentioning the Yumnak with their name. When a Manipuri is referred to someone, his or her Yumnak gets special emphasis in any letter of introduction. But it is also observed that, in some occasion, they do not include the Yumnaks in official records with their names. Pandit N. Khelchandra has mentioned that each of these Yumnak had its respective occupations. Of course, he primarily based on Loiyumba Silyen, the first written constitution of the Manipuri, which was written during the reign of king Loiyumba (1074-1112). But, it is learnt that, with the introduction of Vaishnavism Manipur, this system was abolished. Hizam Mani Singh explained the naming of the Yumnaks in his book ‘Meihouron Salai Sakok Puya Amasung Salai Taretmakki Yumnak Mingthon Puya’ According to him Yumnaks were named after any of the following characteristics i.e. (i) the nature of the creation of a Yumnak, (ii) occupation, (iii) the title given by the king, (iv) the service alloted to the creator of the Yumnak, (v) Types of service rendered to the king, (vi) any special characteristics of the creator of the Yumnak.

2.2.3 Sagei:

Every Yumnak is divided into many segments called Sagei. Actually, when Yumnaks became large and its members began to spread over the valley, regular contact with each other

become difficult. Trouble arose regarding the communication of the news of birth and death to follow by the members of the Yumnak which observing customary rites and rituals. This is one of the reasons of dividing some of Yumnaks into segments. It any person is asked, what is his or her Yumnak ans Sagei, the answer will be the same. So, the Yumnak and Sagei have become synonymous to the common people. But the difference is that Yumnak is a corporate group while Sagei is the smaller segment, it is recognised through their respective ‘Pibaren’, who is the eldest living person of the Sagei. The members of the same Sagei have to observed ‘Yum-mangba’ or pollution during the time of birth and death.

On the eve of the Vaishnava movement in Manipur, the Brahmin priests brought the Manipuri Yek-Salai system under the perview of the Hindu ‘Gotra’ system. The hinduized clan or Gotra names are concocted by linguistic alteration in the following manner -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yek (Name)</th>
<th>Gotra (Name)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ningthouja</td>
<td>Sandilya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angom</td>
<td>Gautam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moirang</td>
<td>Atriya Angira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luwang</td>
<td>Kashyap</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2.4 Village Social Organisation:

Social organisation is the network of relations existing among individuals and group in society. In it, mutual relations, obligations, elements of ideal behaviour, anticipated behaviour are all included. In Barak Valley, Manipuris are basically settled down in the rural areas and semi urban areas. However, a Manipuri village in Barak Valley is by nature, much more compact in comparing to the neighbouring village of other community. They built their house more closely to each other and sometimes they share a common courtyard by two or three families. Seven or eight families constitute a 'Leikai' (known as Para in Bengali); five or six Leikai constitute a 'Khun' or village; five or six Manipuri inhabited constitute a 'Leipak'. The Leipak is the highest social organisation of the Manipuris in Barak Valley.

There are about 184 Manipuri inhabited village in Barak Valley (see Appendix-II). One of most distinctive characteristics of the Manipuri village is that, every village have a temple of Lord Jagannatha and its adjacent Mandapa, called Mandop by the Manipuri people. Infact, Mandop is the epicentre of the Manipuri people.

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socio-religion and cultural activities of Barak valley. Above all, Mandop plays very important role in Village social organisation of the Manipuri people in Barak Valley. A village or a Khun ceased to be a village if it do not has a Mandop and a Jagannath Temple. Therefore, contemporary structural development of a Manipuri village in Barak Valley greatly influence by the Vaishnava faith. Further, the existance of Mandop culture is the typical pattern of Manipuri village in Barak Valley. Another basic characteristics of Manipuri village in the institution of 'Singlup'. It is an unique example of mutual co-operation and solidarity of Manipuri society in Barak Valley. 'Shinglup' is basically a regulation of membership of a family in a village community. A Shinlup member have to contribute either kind or in cash or both in some cases to the functions of death rituals of the deceased family. Apart from that, a Singlup member have to be present in function and have to give 'Potyeng' (kind of cash-gift).

The institution of Leibak has certain institutional and socio-cultural functionaries. The head of the 'Leibak' is called 'Leibak Mapu'. The main function of the organisation is look after the social regulations and social customs to present and maintain the social values.

2.3 Religion :

In the Chapter-II (2.1) of the present work discussed about
the history of Manipuri migration and settlement and reveals that, they have migrated from their original homeland due to various reasons and settle down in Barak Valley in the past. However, Manipuri immigration in Barak Valley had been increased rapidly in second half of the 18th century due to diversified reasons and it became a regular feature till the year 1891. Apparently, during these period Manipur Valley was under the sway of various Vaishnava Schools. More appropriately, Vaishnavism established its firm footing in the valley of Manipur with its diversified manifestation. Therefore, the Manipuris who have migrated and settled down in Barak Valley during this period accompanied the Vaishnava culture and traditions. So far the religious life of the Manipuris in Barak Valley is concerned, they are pre-dominantly the followers of *Gauria School of Vaishnavism*. However, they also observe their traditional beliefs. Perhaps it may be the reason that S. N. Parrott mentioned that Manipuri Vaishnavism differ from the mainstream of classical Hinduism.\(^6\) Rather, it is the synthesised form of traditionalism and Hinduism. In this context, Suniti Kr. Chatterjee observed that, "Manipuri Hinduism gradually became a synthesis of their old religion with its Gods and Goddesses and myths, its own legends and socio customs and usages and of Brahmanical Hinduism with its special worship of Radha and Krishna".\(^7\)

The Manipuris in Barak Valley are no exception to mainstream Manipuri Vaishnavism of Manipur. Predominantly, their religious life is marked by the fusion of pre-vaishnavite traditional beliefs and Gauria Vaishnavism. It is also the fact that, Manipuri Vaishnavas still worshipped their traditional deities like Sanamahi, Leimarel, Phunga Lairu, Umanglai, Imoinu etc. along with the incarnations of Vishnu i.e. Rama, Krishna and also the other hindu pantheons Shiva, Garura, Hanuman, Ganesh, Durga, Kali etc. Another common feature of the religious life of the Manipuris of Barak Valley is that, in each of the village, there are numerous temples of Lord Jagannatha as a replica of the temple at Puri alongside of the village Mandopa. And it is also observed that, in each Jagannatha temple there is Shiva-linga. According to the Manipuri Vaishnava Sri Chaitanya is not merely a prophet but a incarnation of Lord Krishna Himself. Rather manifestation of Jugolmurti etc. both Radha and Krishna into one. Therefore, in every Jagannatha temple in the Manipuri village in Barak Valley an image of Mahaprabhu i.e. Sri Chaitanya is installed and worshipped.

2.4 Calendaric Festivals of the Manipuris in Barak Valley:

Festivals form an essential aspect of all cultures. In, almost all societies of the world, festivals are celebrated in form or other since time immemorial. The calenderic festivals which are
consistently observed by the Manipuri people of Barak valley can be grouped into two broad divisions, i.e. Festivals of Hindu religion origin and the traditional Manipuri festivals. In fact, it can not be an absolute division, because most of the traditional pre-hindu festivals which are being observed, had been influenced a lot of the Vaishnava and Sakta-Saiva faiths; and on the other hand the Hindu festivals are also designed and synthesised with the traditional forms. However, according to Saroj Nalini Parrott, there are seven main festivals which were introduced into Manipur under the influence of Hinduism. But, in Barak Valley number is larger in practice. In this chapter only the major festivals are being taken for discussion.

### 2.4.1 Kang (Rathayatra):

The famous Hindu festival 'Rathayatra' is popularly known as 'Kang-Chingba' in Manipuri. This popular festival was introduced during the reign of king Gambhir Singh in Manipur (1825-34). In Barak Valley, in every village Kang festivals is observed with enthusiasm. On the day of Rathayatra, Kang (cart) is suitably decorated and the image of Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra are placed on the cart and devotees pull the cart by rope throughout the area, and the devotees follow the cart

58. Singh M. Kirti: Religious Development in Manipur in the 18th & 19th Century, Imphal, 1980; p. 262
60. Parrott, S. Nalini: Religion of Manipur, Calcutta, 1980; p. 39
by singing various Kirtan with Pung ans jhal. One such example is given below -

(i) Jagannatha lengthoklakle,
    Singhason Thanamle
Subhadrasu loinarakle,
    Balaramsu tungille -
Semsaribasingdo yengle,
    Phajei ngangnarakle -
Phajaba ngaktana thalle,
    Ubada pukning pelle -
Chuthek mari shatra yungle,
    Phiral kaya leitengle -
Numitlei, thambalna yomle,
    Heinam leinamna sumhatle -
Jagannatha lengkhatle,
    Numit kayagum ngalle -
Balabhadrana yet thangle,
    Subhadrana mayaida ngalle. 61 (Manipuri)

In the evening the devotees gather in the Mandop and take part in the singing of Geet-Govinda of Joydev. Manipuris in Barak Valley called it ‘Joydev-Chongba’ (a song of Jaydev’s Dashavatar has been incorporated in Chapter V). Apart from this ‘Khubak-Ishei’ a king of kirtana is also performed by the ladies and children assembled in the Mandop.

2.4.2 Krishnajanma (Janmasthami):

‘Krishna-janma’ is one of the most popular festivals of the Manipuris in Barak Valley. It is celebrated on the eight-day of the new-moon of Thawan (Bhadra) Hindu calendar in July-August. The Manipuri Vaishnavas observe fasting up to the mid-night, the time when the Lord Krishna was born. In the earlier days during the time fasting young boys and girls used to play Likkon Sannaba, a kind of chess play.

2.4.3. Jhulon Purnima:

Jhulon Purnima festival is held from the eleventh to the fifteenth day of the month of Thawan July/August. The images of Radha-Krishna is placed in a do and swang to and fro. This festival was specially marked by Nupi-pala and Sankirtana in early village Mandop. Now-a-days the festival has lost its earlier charms and enthusiasm though it is to be found in some villages in Barak Valley.

2.4.4 Mera-Wayungba; Mera-pali; Mera-Waphukpa:

In the fullmoon day (Purnima) of Mera (a month of
Manipuri calendar) October-November, the Manipuri families in Barak Valley erect a bamboo pole near Tulsibong (near Tulsi plant) and illuminate it with lamps, till the next fullmoon day. The first day is called *Mera-Wayungba* and the last day is called *Mera-Waphukpa*. This festival is a fusion traditional Manipuri belief and Hindu festivals. Manipuri Vaishnava believe that, the ancestral spirits return to their households to receive homage from their surviving members and to bless. So, during these days, the Manipuri Vaishnavas in Barak Valley obtain taking fish and organised the recitation of *Srimad Bhagawad, Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* etc. in every village, this is called *Mera-pali* in Manipuri. The recitation of story of the Holi Books is known as *Wari-leeba*. It is said that, this tradition was started during the rule of king Bhagyachandra, by inviting a Brahmin from Ahom Kingdom, named Jairam Sharma. In this *Nam Sankirtana* plays an important role (see chapter 4.2)

### 2.4.5 Yaoshang (Holi):

Krishnaite festival ‘Holi’ is one of the most popular hindu festival of India. It is generally marked as the festivals of colours and joy in the various parts of India. Manipuri name of this festival is *Yaoshang*. Apart from the *puranic* legends about the origin of *Holi*, the Manipuri way of observation of this festival is closely connected with the coming of spring. While the

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63. Ibid p. 267.
64. Singh, E. Nilkanta: *Fragments of Manipuri Culture*, New Delhi, 1993; p. 60.
Manipuris observed this festival as the commemoration of Chaitanya's birth-day, it also incorporated a number of traditional pre-Vaishnavite, customs. The important features of the festival is that, the boys collected bamboos and thatches and constructed a small hut called Yaoshang in the field or near the roadsides. The images of Chaitanya is brought into the shed by the priest followed by the devotees including male, female and children in the evening. After completing the prayer a Kirtana is performed. After this, the image is taken out and the hut is set on fire. While it is burning the devotees present in the occasion shouts of Haribola and Jai Hari are exchanged. The burning of Yaoshang is the signal for children to begin collecting small gifts of money from houses. This kind of celebration continued for following five days. During this the devotees performs Holi Kirtana and collect gifts.

The performance of Thabal Chongba is another aspects of the Yaoshang festival. The literary meaning of Thabal Chongba is dancing in moonlight. Both young male and female join hands in an ever increasing circle as more and more participants join in. The lead singer in the circle, often with musicians and sometimes a western style band. The songs describe the creation, famous legends and love stories. Each phrase is first sung by the leader and then repeated by the dancers. The dancing programme continues until the early hours of the morning. Therefore, the combination of these diverse elements
i.e. *Puranic Hindu, the Gauria faith* and the traditional Manipuri patterns help to account for the wide popularity of the *Yaoshang* festival in Barak Valley Manipuri society.

2.4.6 Durga Puja:

*Durga Puja* is another important Hindu festival, much popularly observed by the Manipuris in Barak Valley. However, Manipuri way of worship is slight different from the other communities in the valley. Infact, the Manipuris worship *Devi Durga* as a *Param Vaishnavi* (ancient follower of Lord Vishnu). In Barak Valley Manipuris observe a detail *Nat Sankirtana* during these day Durga Puja Ceremony. Above all, a special kind of *Nat Sankirtana* known as *Lairembi Dhrumel* is performed which is exclusively attributed to *Doddess Durga*. It reveals that, Manipuri people synthesed the hindu beliefs with traditional pattern and enriched the culture by adding certain traditional rites and rituals. That is how, the festival remain as popular Manipuri festival in Barak Valley.

2.4.7 The Traditional Manipuri Festivals:

In Barak Valley, the Manipuris observe several numbers of traditional Manipuri festivals namely – *Cheiraoba, Ningol-chakkouba, Imoinu Iratpa* and *Lai Haraoba* etc.

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