CHAPTER-1

Introduction

Religion has been one of the greatest uplifting and unifying forces of human history. The word itself is derived from an ancient Latin term, ‘religio’ meaning “to bind together” and the religions of the world have often brought diverse groups together in pursuit of higher moral and spiritual goals. In this way religion has not only strengthened the bonds of community but also provided many of the basic moral principles on which societies have been built. Religion is a major concern of man. There is no society in human history which does not believe in religion in one form or the other. There is hardly a phase of human activity on which religion had not its impact. It is one of the earliest and the deepest interests of the human beings. Religion is universal, permanent, pervasive and perennial in the history of mankind. Man not only has biological, economic and social needs but also what is known as a religious need. Religion alone can satisfy our spiritual cravings. The progress of culture in general is accompanied by a gradual refinement and spiritualization of religious and ethical concepts as well as of ceremony.\(^1\)

In the past it was religion which controlled human society and brought discipline in it. In the name of religion several wars were fought and that the institution of religion which preaches love for all in its name also created

hatred in many communities. Religion pervades practically in all the societies but there is an endless diversity of the forms of religious beliefs and practices. The form which it assumes in a society is determined by a host of complex factors. Different societies emphasize different elements of religion. Religions have their own central themes which are determined by the life and interests of the people. The central theme of western religions has been altered because of the change from an agricultural economy to an industrial one and the consequent modifications in man’s outlook upon life. In fact, religion by its very nature develops in time a cult which zealously perpetuates older usages long since obsolete in daily life and in the performance of its religious rites, such as sacrifice and circumcision; it still frequently makes use of instruments deriving from a past era of culture. Religious groups increase their numbers both through conversion and the induction of generations by alluring families into the faith.²

**Meaning of Religion**

Different writers have defined religion in various ways. It is not an easy task to give a definition of religion which will satisfy everyone. The principal difficulty is that many people take the word to mean their own religion and regard all other forms as non-religion, irreligion, superstition or anti-religion. A few attempts to describe or define religion may here be mentioned.

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According to Durkheim religion is a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden.” And to Ogburn, “Religion is an attitude towards superhuman powers.”

The anthropologist, Anthony F.C. Wallace defined religion as “a set of rituals, rationalized by myth, which mobilizes supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving or preventing transformation of state in man and nature.”

MacIver and Page write, “Religion as we understand the term implies a relationship not merely between man and man but also between man and some higher power.” In 1871 E. B. Tylor offered as a “minimum definition of Religion, the belief in Spiritual Beings.” To this “deep-lying doctrine”, he applied the term animism. He says that it is habitually found that the theory of animism divides into two great dogmas, forming parts of one consistent doctrine; first, concerning souls of individual creatures, capable of continued existence after death or destruction of the body; second, concerning other spirits, upward to the rank of powerful deities. Thus, animism, in its full development includes the belief in souls and in a future state and in controlling deities and subordinate spirits these doctrines practically result in some kind of active worship.

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Further the simpler descriptions of religion by some anthropologists broadly define “Religion as any system of beliefs in supernatural forces, symbols, and rituals that serve to make life meaningful and intelligible.”\(^6\)

James G. Frazer, in his “The Golden Bough” considered religion as a belief in “powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life.”\(^7\)

According to The World Book Encyclopedia, for many people, religions are an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and practices and worship that centre on one supreme God, or the Deity.\(^8\)

Religions vary so widely in doctrine, practices and organization and religious feelings are so personal and difficult to describe objectively that any definition of religion will necessarily seem inadequate. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary religion means “the belief in the existence of a god or gods, and that activities that are connected with the worship of them. It is one of the systems of faith that are based on the belief in the existence of a particular god and gods.”\(^9\)

From these definitions and descriptions it becomes clear that there is some superior and super-natural power in which every religion believes.

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**Origin of Religion**

Religion is not a new invention. It is, if not as old as the world, at least as old as the world we know. As soon almost as we know anything of the thoughts and feelings of man, we find him in possession of religion, or rather possessed by religion. The oldest literary documents are almost everywhere tinged with religion. Even if we go beyond the age of literature and explore the deepest levels of human thought, we can discover, in the crude ore which was made to supply the earliest coins or counters of the human mind, the presence of religious ingredients.  

The question of the origin of religion was not scientifically studied until modern times. Before we come to consider some modern theories it may be well to refer briefly to two views which were once widely prevalent, but now obsolescent as has been mentioned by D. Mail Edwards in his book “The Philosophy of Religion”. He thereby explains his two views about the origin of religion, first he traces religion back to a primitive or a special divine revelation. This view occupied a prominent place among Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan theologists. It has usually taken the form of a belief in a primeval monotheism of divine origin. The second view is that of the so-called English deists of the eighteenth century. These thinkers rejected the idea of revelation and found the origin of religion in human reason. The fundamental truths of religion, such as the being of God, the immortality of the soul, the

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authority of the moral law, are truths of reason which can be established with the certainty of mathematical truth and which constitute the natural religion which is the common element in all the varied religions of the world.\textsuperscript{11} But, in The Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions, it is mentioned that the quest for the origin of religion was a popular academic enterprise at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. A critical account is to be seen in the works of the sociologist, Emile Durkheim and the psychologist, Sigmund Freud. This quest is directly related to the quest for the meaning of religion, that is, if we can determine the origin of religion we might be able to determine its meaning. For Freud, in the beginning was “the deed” – religion grew out of experience surrounding certain primal actions. For the anthropologist, Sir Edward Burnett Taylor, the origin of religion was to be found in the first human attempts to explain experience. For other scholars, mysticism was the origin, indeed the very essence of religion.\textsuperscript{12}

In the 19\textsuperscript{th} century the sociology of religion was concerned with two main questions, “How did religion begin?” and “How did religion evolve?” This evolutionary approach was influenced by Darwin’s “On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection” (1859). It is an attempt to explain the origin and evolution of species. Then the sociologists tried to explain the origin and evolution of social institutions and society. In terms of religion, two main theories-animism and naturalism were advanced to account for its origin. Animism means the belief in spirits. To make sense of these events, early

philosophers invented the idea of the soul. The soul is a spiritual being which leaves the body temporarily during dreams and visions, and permanently at the time of death. The idea of spirits was applied not simply to man but also to many aspects of the natural and social environment. Thus animals were invested with a spirit, as were man-made objects such as the bullroarer of the Australian aborigines. Taylor argues that religion in the form of animism originated to satisfy man’s intellectual nature, to meet his need, to make sense of death, dreams and visions. Naturalism is the belief that the forces of nature have supernatural powers. F. Max Muller believes this to be the earliest form of religion. He argues that naturalism arose from man’s experience of nature, in particular the effect of nature upon man’s emotions. Nature contains surprise, terror, marvels and miracles, such as volcanoes, thunder and lightning. Awed by the power and wonder of nature, early man transformed abstract forces into personal agents. Man personified natures. The force of the wind became the spirit of the wind, the power of the sun became the spirit of the sun. Where animism seeks the origin of religion in man’s intellectual needs, naturism seeks it in his emotional needs. Naturalism is man’s response to the effect of the power and wonder of nature upon his emotions. When did religion first appear among men? No definite answer can be given to the question. The origin of religion is veiled in mystery. There is a great deal of disagreement among thinkers on the subject. Some writers like David Hume, Max Muller and

Giddings claimed that religion as a creation of man was based on an illusions and that fear accounted for its origin. Other thinkers, notable among whom like Spencer and Taylor contended that religion originated primarily in ghost fear and that animism lies at the very basis of all religions. Religion has evolved through the sequence of animism, polytheism and monotheism. According to the noted British anthropologist Robert Ronulph Marett, animism i.e. belief in impersonal power designated as “mana” which preceded animism should be regarded as underlying all religion. W. Robertson Smith maintained that ancient religions consisted primarily of institutions and practices i.e. of rites and ceremonies which are to be regarded the most elementary forms of religion. The origin of religion cannot be traced to a single source. It cannot be placed on any single element- fear, belief in impersonal power, rites and ceremonies or response to a definite need. Neither will nor can emotion alone explain its origin. The beginning of religion is as old as the human consciousness. There is no primitive society which was without a religion. Thus, whether we descend to the lowest roots of our own intellectual growth, or ascend to the loftiest heights of modern speculation, everywhere we find religion as a power that conquers, and conquers even those who think that they have conquered it.14

In the study of religion there are uniqueness and similarities in the different religions of the world. In practice, a religion is a particular system, or

a set of systems, in which doctrines, myths, rituals, sentiments, institutions, and other similar elements are interconnected. Thus, in order to understand a given belief that occurs in such a system, it is necessary to look at its particular context—that is, other beliefs held in the system, rituals and other aspects. Belief in the lordship of Christ in the early Christian church, for example, has to be seen in the context of a belief in the creator and of the sacramental life of the community. The systematic character of a religion has been referred to by the 20th century Dutch theologian, Hendrick Kraemer as “Totalitarian,” but a better term would be “organic”. Thus there arises the problem of whether or not one belief or practice embedded in an organic system can properly be compared to a similar item in another organic system. To put the matter in another way, every religion has its unique properties, and attempts to make interreligious comparisons may hide these unique aspects.  

The above writers have given their opinions to mention the elements of the origin of religion like, nature worship-heaven, earth, sun, moon, fire, water, stars, mountains etc.; animism-belief in the spirit; totemism-belief in an object, such as an animal or plant that serves as the emblem or symbol of a kinship of a group; ancestor worship—a variety of religious belief and practices concerned with the spirit of dead persons regarded as relatives. In the world great religions like Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, there is

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a belief in one of the elements of the origin of religion. Thus the different religions of the world have uniqueness and similarities.

In India, Hinduism as a religion had its origin in a somewhat similar way. Hinduism is the name applied to that form of religion which prevails among the vast majority of the present population of India. “Brahmanism” is a term generally used to designate the higher and more philosophical form of modern Hinduism. It is more properly restricted to the development of that faith which, under Brahmín influence succeeded to Vedism, or the animistic worship of the greater powers of nature. Similarly, the Meetei also started to worship natural objects as gods and goddesses, like the sun, water, sky, mountains, rivers etc. So, the Meeteis regarded Sanamahi, the son of Chingngu Khoiyum Yaibirel Shidaba as their supreme Deity. Sanamahi religion is one of the oldest religions of South-East Asia. It developed in Manipur and followed by the Meeteis who are inhabiting in different parts of the world. The study of Sanamahi religion may be termed as “Sanamahism” and the follower as “Sanamahist.”

Theories of Origin of Religion

Religion seeks to interpret and control man’s relation with the forces of physical and social environment. These forces are thought to be under the control of some supernatural power. But we do not know when exactly, how

exactly and in which form religion came into being. The evolution of religion cannot be precisely determined owing to the lack of clearly distinguishable stages.\textsuperscript{17} Still sociologists, social anthropologists and social scientists in general have made lot of effort to explain the origin of religion. Hence there is a great deal of disagreement among the thinkers regarding the origin of religion. In their attempts they have given birth to a number of theories some of which are more plausible than the scientific ones. Some are not susceptible to any scientific proof, while some others remain either as only logical assumptions or as figments of imagination. But they do agree that religion, like other social institutions arose in response to certain needs of man. A brief explanation of these forms is necessary in order to clarify the theories of origin of relation.

**Animism**

Animism propounds the existence of some supra physical being within the body of every living being. This supra physical being is believed to survive the death of the physical body in which it is always present. After the death of a person the supra physical being is freed from the physical limitations and can wander irrespective of time and space. Thus animism is a belief in the spirits of the dead. It is a name given to the theory of spirits which are supposed to be indwelling in certain places or things so that they can communicate with men. Very commonly the view is held that spirit visits a man when he is asleep. Sometimes a man is said to have heard the spirit speak from a corner of the

house. If Hindus do not feed their ancestors, it is generally believed that their spirits will not feel happy in the other world. After the death of a man, a ceremony called “Shradh” is solemnized among the Hindus. But except when used in the loosest fashion, the term ‘animistic’ cannot be applied to the total system of belief of any people. To characterize a religion in such terms is so broad as to be meaningless. Christianity is animistic in that the belief in the human soul is an integral part of it, but Christians do not officially believe that automobiles have spirits. Thus, animism lies at the basis of all religions.

The characteristic feature of Animism is a belief in the reality of soul or spirit. The sun, the moon, the star, the hill, the lake, fire, water, wind, river etc. are all supposed to be endorsed with some soul or spirit. The performance of religious rites and rituals is also a characteristic feature. Religious rites were performed for the dead forefathers’ souls or spirits with fright and care. They believed that their dead forefathers’ souls or spirits gave the good or bad things in the life of the human beings. So they worshipped the souls of their forefathers with rites and rituals for the satisfaction of the departed souls or spirits. Animistic images are spirits of deceased ancestors, the souls of living people and the personification of the forces of nature. The host of spirits from nature is particularly numerous and varied. The spirits of the elements could be benevolent, or on the other hand, they could threaten the well-being of mankind. This is why small sacrifices were offered to them, when it was

deemed necessary. As belief in spirits and souls developed there emerged a generalized concept for the designation of the supernatural properties attributed to things (or people) such as mana, grace (in Christianity). Elements of animism are still to be found in different religions of the world.¹⁹

**Totemism**

Totemism consists in the fact that a tribe is supposed to be related to an object-mainly animal or plant towards which the people of the tribe behave in a reverent manner by adopting its name and offering sacrifices or adoring it. A totem is generally an animal, rarely a plant which gives its name to a clan or may be otherwise associated with it. The relation of the clan to that particular animal is explained by bonds of descent the clan considering itself the descent from that species. The Iroquois clans were called turtle, bear, wolf, hawk etc. They curved out the representation of these animals over the doors of their houses. The people of the clan do not kill or eat that animal with whose name they are linked. They attach to it super-empirical meaning. In Ruanda, for example, the Buffalo people will not eat buffalo. Only when the clan worships the animal or offers sacrifices to it, totemism may be associated with religion, although it is now generally acknowledged mostly as a social phenomenon associated with magic or superstition. Totem-groups naturally owe their unity to the implicit or explicit recognition of principles and ideas which make unity.

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The totem is the emblem, symbol, badge or link; it is more than mere animal or plant species, and its value lies in the meaning that it has for the group, in the system of beliefs and practices of which it is the centre.\textsuperscript{20}

**Fetishism**

Fetishism is one of the forms of religious practice. Fetishism means belief in the existence of non-living things like stone, mud, tree any other material etc., which have the power like jewel of shining objects and these objects are worshipped very carefully with fright.

Fetishism, veneration of inanimate objects, supposed to be possessing supernatural properties is one of the elements of religious picture of the world, an ingredient of virtually all early forms of religion and also advanced religious systems. Fetishes or the inanimate objects of such veneration may include stones, sticks, trees or any kind of object. They can be natural or man made.\textsuperscript{21}

Fetishism is probably the most elementary form of religion. The lowest form of what can be called religion is fetishism, and it is impossible to imagine anything lower that would still deserve that name. Therefore fetishism may safely be considered as the very beginning of all religions. The word fetishism was never used before the year 1760.\textsuperscript{22} Fetishism is the adoration of material things because of their supposed mysterious powers. The word “Fetish” comes

\textsuperscript{20} Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. 10, n. 16, pp. 672-673.
\textsuperscript{21} Judelson Catherine, A Dictionary of Believers and Non-Believer, n. 19, pp. 199-200.
\textsuperscript{22} F. Max Muller, Origin and Growth of Religion, n. 10, pp. 3-4.
from the Portuguese explorer, who first applied it to wooden images of the West African Negroes. But the essential thing is not that they are artificial. A leaf or stone of unusual shape may be adored in the same way as a carved figure. The essence of a fetish is that it has attributed to it a mysterious power for good or evil which some preliterate people call ‘mana’. The fetish is adored or insulted accordingly as to whether it fulfills or does not fulfill its possessor’s wishes.23

The Fear Theory

Fear, a psychological phenomenon is often said to be the cause for the emergence of religion. This view is quite as old as the ancient Greeks and Romans. Ancient Roman philosopher and poet, Lucretius contended that the belief in the gods was based on an illusion and that fear was at the root of every religion.

David Hume, a British philosopher of the 18th century, in his “Natural History of Religion” pointed out that the fear of natural forces led man to believe in gods who manipulated nature. Hence man felt and believed that gods would intervene in his behalf if he tried to please them. German Scholar, Max Muller also supported this theory. According to him, the basis of religion is to be found in man’s awe in the presence of extraordinary and terrifying natural phenomena. According to Prof. Giddings, the awe and fear of the “Great

23. Ibid.
Dreadful” and of the mysterious forces have been responsible for the genesis of religion.  

**The Functional Theory**

Modern Sociologists have been making scientific effort to understand and explain the non-scientific social phenomenon that consists of beliefs and practices. In their attempts to do so, they have laid the foundation of some social theories of religion. The functional theory of religion is basically a sociological theory which has been developed by thinkers, such as, William Robertson Smith, Emile Durkheim, A.R. Radcliffe- Brown, B. Malinowski, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, and their followers. The basic assumption of the functionalist approach to religion is that religion is universally found because it has a vital function in maintaining the social system as a whole. Religion is thus essentially a social phenomenon. The main social requirement that religion is deemed to fulfil has been the necessity of ideological and sentimental cohesion or solidarity.

**The Theory of the Aleatory Element**

In their Book “The Science of Society” Summer and Keller have stated that the ever present element of chance or what they call “aleatory element”, has been the main factor for the rise of religion. According to them, the primitive man is very much perturbed by the problem of bad luck. He is always

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concerned with the question of avoiding the misfortunes and securing good luck. In his attempts to find out an explanation for the occurrence of fortunes and misfortunes, the primitive man has pictured this “aleatory element” as being controlled and manipulated by supernatural force. Hence, Summer and Keller have argued that human beings at all times attempted to devise means of insuring themselves against misfortune. They thus stressed the fact that religion arose in response to a definite need—adjustment to the supernatural or imaginary environment which has the capacity for causing fortunes or misfortunes.26

Function of Religion

Every religion, even the most imperfect and degraded, has something that ought to be sacred to us, for there is in all religions a secret yearning after the true though unknown God.27 Religion, since unknown times has remained with the human society. Its influence has been in one word omnipotent. There is hardly a phase of human activity on which religion had not its impact. Religious beliefs, rituals and practice have had the great stabilizing impact. Religion has remained with us for its goodness. The good it generated, and the good it encouraged, has provided the strength to civilization and culture. This in turn has humanized the animal in man. The universality of religion is not based upon the forms of belief and practice, but upon the social functions which religion universally fulfils. These functions are of great individual as

well as social significance. According to Arnol W. Green, religion has three universal functions. Firstly, it rationalizes and makes bearable individual suffering in the known world. Secondly it enhances self-importance. And thirdly, it helps to knit the social values of a society into a cohesive whole.

The Social function of religion is its role in the maintenance of social solidarity. The individuals provide focal points of interest thus supplying one ingredient of assistance for maintaining group unity. In addition, common participation in rituals, coupled with a basic uniformity of beliefs, helps to bind people together and reinforce their identification with their group. Religion upholds and validates the traditional ways of the life. More than that it unites peoples. It is known that a common faith, common value-judgments, common sentiments, common worship are significant factors in unifying people. By their participation in religious rituals and worship, people try to identify themselves as having something in common. Religion affects an individual’s understanding of who they are (people) and what they are. Religion gives the individual a sense of identity with the distant past and the limitless future. In periods of rapid social change and large scale social mobility, the contribution of religion to bring the sense of identity may become greatly enhanced. Religion is the supremely integrating and unifying force in human society.  

Religion is one of the forms of informal means of social control. It regulates the activities of people in its own way. It prescribes rules of conduct for people to follow. The conception of spirits, ghosts, taboos, souls,  

commandments, sermons, etc., control human actions and enforce discipline. Ideas of hell and heaven have strong effect on the behaviour of people. Thus religion has a great disciplinary value. Religion has its own methods to deal with those individuals who violate its norms. It has its own ways to re integrate the disobedient into the social group. Further religious sanctions are widely made use of to support the ethical codes and moral practices among many peoples. To a certain type of social behaviour, religion imparts a sacred quality, reinforcing the idea of the desirability of such behaviour. It gives courage for the survival. Religion has played a significant role in the formation of the societies. Religion has provided the unifying principles to every society. Religion involves consensus and agreement between groups, and between individuals. Durkheim emphasized the role of religion in social order as one that reinforces the sense of community. Religion emphasizes, in one form or another, the consequences resulting from behaviour. Rewards or punishments follow approved or disapproved actions. Religions support the folkways and customs by placing the powerful sanctions of the supernatural behind them. They make certain acts not only offences against society but against God as well. Disobedience brings condemnation from the spiritual forces. In its positive form religion provides a model for living. It upholds certain ideals and values. The believer imbibes these ideals and values in his life. Religion can help our youth to become moral, disciplined and socialized citizens of society.

Religion expands the self to an infinite proportion. Religious belief relates the self to the infinite or cosmic design. Through unity with the infinite

the self is ennobled, made majestic. Man considers himself the noblest work of God with whom he shall be united. His self thus becomes grand and elevated. Society also gains from the self-flattery provided by religious belief Religion assures a greater reward in the after-life to worldly failures than to the successful. Such kind of assurance drains off much discontent and members are encouraged to continue to play their part in society. So religious devotion as the ultimate power of activity has contributed to the development of human society.30

Religion renders service to the people and promotes their welfare. It appeals to the people to be sympathetic, merciful and co-operative. It rouses in them the spirit of mutual help and co-operation. It promotes art, culture and provides means for the development of character on the right lines. Religion has served humanity through the spreading of education. The scriptures are great literary works and storehouse of knowledge. It has also emphasized benevolence and forbearance. It also created the habit of charity among the people who opened many charitable institutions like hospitals, rest-houses, temples to help the needy and the poor.

Religion is the ultimate source of social cohesion. The primary requirement of society is the common possession of social values by which individuals control their actions through which society is perpetuated. These social values are never scientifically demonstrated but they emanate from

religious faith. Religion is the foundation upon which these values rest. Science and technology cannot create these values. As a matter of fact these values are more effective if they are not critically examined. Children should obey their parents, should not tell a lie or cheat, women should be faithful to men, people should be honest and virtuous. These are some of the social values which maintain social cohesion. It is religion that asks man to renounce unsocial activities and requires him to accept limitations upon his wants and desires. Love and service are two great teachings of religion. All religions have preached them. Religion has always generated a sense of belongingness in society. Perhaps the most important function of religion is the inculcation discipline. It was religion alone which was responsible for subordinating barbaric anarchy and for teaching reverence and obedience.

Man does not live by knowledge alone. He is an emotional creature as well. Religion serves to soothe the emotions of man in times of his sufferings and disappointments and contributes to the integration of his personality. In this world man often suffers disappointment and frustration even in the midst of all hopes and achievements. The things for which he strives are in some measure always denied to him. When human hopes are blighted, when all that was planned and striven for has been swept away, man naturally wants something to console and compensate him. The fortitude and equanimity with which deeply religious people are known to endure the most colossal misfortune and suffering constitute one of the principal exhibits of the power of religious
beliefs and practices. When a son dies man seeks to assuage his grief in ritualistic exchanges of condolence. On God he puts faith and entertains the belief that some unseen power moves in mysterious ways to make even his loss meaningful. Faith in God compensates him and sustains his interests in life and makes it bearable. There is a limit to which society can go, guided by sheer rationality. In this way religion gives release from sorrow and release from fear. It enables the individual to interpret any catastrophe as intermediate and secondary. It helps man to bear his frustrations and integrate his personality.

Religion also controls and affects economic life. Karl Marx and other social analysts have seen religious belief as the product of socio-economic forces.\(^\text{31}\) Max Weber was of the view that religion also influences the economic system of the believers. Thus, according to him, capitalism grew in the protestant nations like England, U.S.A. and Holland. It did not grow in Italy and Spain where the people are Catholics. The Hindus lay great stress on spiritual progress than on material progress. Hence materialism could not grow in India.

Besides, religion has also contributed to the growth of literature, art and music. The desire to land and please gods has led people to extol them in song, sculpture, painting and architecture. Some of the world’s most beautiful monuments are buildings erected to the glory of the gods. Vast temples, mosques, cathedrals and artistic images express man’s desire to portray his

conceptions of the supernatural in aesthetic and inspiring ways. The sacred writings stimulate an appreciation of beautiful prose and poetry. Religious themes are the inspiration for some of man’s finest paintings, and the desire to sing praises has led to the creation of some of the world’s fine music.

Religion also provides a good opportunity for friendship. The religious congregations serve as a place for men to find their mates and for friendly association. This friendship function of religion is a vital service to adults and youths as well.

One of the most powerful and enduring aspects of the influence of religion upon human society lies in the sphere of ethics. The process is one of interaction rather than of unilateral causation, cultural progress by stimulating the introduction of ethical standards in society. Contributions to the development of an ethical conception of God and the more exalted idea of God in turn intensify the social concern for morality. The more anthropomorphic the conception of God, the more man will be constrained to pattern his life on the model of deity. So, religious experience is the basic function of religion. Prayer, worship and meditation are the summary of religious experience. Through these means man expresses awe, reverence, gratitude and allegiance to the almighty or God, or the Supernatural Force. When an individual comes into contact with the supernatural he undergoes some sort of peculiar inexplicable experience. He converses with the divine through prayers. He forgets the

worldly life and its problems. This religion experience ennobles the human desires, ideals and values. It facilitates the development of personality, sociability and creativeness.

Religion provides for the individual the most desired peace of mind. At every crisis, personal or collective, religion is called in for consolation and peace of mind. It promotes goodness and helps the development of character. In a world full of uncertainties, indefiniteness, dangers, insecurities and unhappiness, the need for safety and security is really great. Religion here acts as the healer of the ills of life. It reduces one’s grievances to some extent. It gives the individuals emotional support in the face of uncertainty. It consoles them when they are disappointed. It reconciles them when they are estranged from the goals and norms of society. In doing this it supports established values and goals and reinforces the morale. It offers man inspiration, hope, faith, optimism and courage.

Religion is an effective means of preserving the values of life. Religion defines and redefines the value. Moral, spiritual and social values are greatly supported by religion. It exercises a tremendous influence over the younger ones and their behavior. According to Harald Hoffding, the essence of religion is a belief in the persistency of value in the world.\textsuperscript{33} Through such agencies like the family and the church, religion inculcates the values of life in the minds of

the growing children. It maintains the dominance of group goals over individual impulses.

By performing its priestly function religion contributes to the stability and order of the society. Religion offers a kind of relationship with the beyond through different kinds of worship and beliefs. By this it provides the emotional ground for a new security. Through its authoritative teaching of beliefs and values, it provides similar points of opinion and avoids conflicts. It contributes to the maintenance of the status quo.

Religion promotes recreation through religious lectures, kirtanas, dramas, dance, music, dhayanas, puranas, harikathas, fairs, festivals, musical concerts, art exhibitions and so on. It tries to make men’s sorrow less and fearless. Various religious festivals and rituals can provide relief to the disturbed mind.

**Religion in Indian Society**

Indian society is pluralistic from religious point of view. Here, we have the followers of all the great religious systems. In Indian society the hold of religion on the people has been very strong and still continues to be so. Hold of religion over the masses in so tight that none can boldly challenge religious institutions. Dharma as the ethics and the content of religion rolled into one. Our concept of the worship of mother earth began with the early dawn of civilization. It appears to have been the popular religion of the Indus valley
people. One important feature of religion in India has been religious toleration. At no stage in ancient India ever a person was forced to embrace a particular religion. It was always left to the will of the people to accept and follow a religion of their own choice. Toleration is also reflected from the fact that criticism of one religion by the other has never been suppressed. Then another feature of religion in India has been its universality. Religions in India have always talked of the betterment of the whole humanity and mankind. They talk of the world as a whole and not of particularly this or that area of community or section of society. God in some form or other is always the corner stone of all religions. He is above us all. He is indivisible and fountain head of the universe. He has created universe and can alone destroy it. He is omnipresent and omnipotent. He is believed to be everywhere and the witness of all our actions. Every religion in India believes that the sole aim of human activity is to try for moksa or salvation. Every individual should try to get that. It can be possible only when there is purity of soul. The freedom of expression and belief has been an essential aspect of the Indian way of life. There came up in course of time several religious cults, but they remained in agreement in regard to the fundamentals. 34

Indian society remains Hindu in temper and texture. Hindus are divided into various systems and sects, such as Shaivities and Vaishnavities, Jains and Buddhists, Sikhs and Arya Samajists. The difference between them are of

ritualistic nature and in our religious systems, ritual has been a constant changing phenomenon. Though these differences sometimes come into prominence, rupture is rare. No importance is attached to it, unless, it is otherwise motivated. Hindus have a common ethics based on Dharma. This stands supreme and above the sectarian belief and consideration. Since, Hindus constitute the bulk of population, they inhabit all parts of the country.\textsuperscript{35}

Some of the salient features of some selected religions of India are briefly analyzed below.

**Hinduism**

Hinduism is the ancient-most religion of India, and for that matter that of the whole world. The most characteristic feature of Hinduism is the doctrine of an eternal soul and its rebirth. The proponents of Hindu philosophy all derive its conceptual stock from the categories and principles of Advaita-Vedanta.\textsuperscript{36} Hinduism recognizes the myriad levels of divinity. Hindus have the vedas and sastras on the one hand and Ramayana and Mahabharta on the other as their religious books. They worship Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Rama and Krishna and accept the existence of Almighty God. They have faith in worshipping in the temples. There is great diversity in ritual and methods of worship but in spite of all that there is great unity in the religion. Basic and

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

fundamental traits of Hindu religion like the concepts of salvation, karma and
the theory of the transmigration of the soul are the same. The religion has great
capacity to absorb and thus is very flexible.\(^{37}\) In Hinduism, the purohit, the
Brahaman priest spread Dharma, meaning the order that stabilizes, moves all
over the country without causing offence to those who were being assimilated.
They gave them the comfort of retaining their totem, or fetishes; ceremony or
ritual. This process Dr. Srinivas has described as Sanskritization. Sanskritisation
is the process of cultural and social mobility. The specific sense
of Sanskritization lies in the historicity of its meaning based on the Hindu
tradition. In this respect, Sanskritization is a unique historical expression of the
general process of acculturation as a means of vertical mobility of group. The
entire process that covers a couple of thousand years, unveils the majesty of
this Brahman-priest, his ingenuity, dedication and humanism. He surrendered
everything to this noble cause. The Upanishad preaches: “May all be happy.
May all be free from desire. May all realize what is good. May none be subject
to misery.” Towards the close of the early Vedic Age (Rig vedic 1550 A.D.)
there had been evolved the social structure and social stratification in the form
of Varnashramadharma and the concept of Divija.\(^{38}\) Along with it developed
the concept of Purusarthas –artha, kama, dharma and moksa; the Rina – to
gods, to rishis, to ancestors and to the fellow beings; and the Sanskaras-the
purificatory rites beginning with conception of the child (garbhadhana), naming

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\(^{38}\) J. L. Kachroo & Vijay Kachroo, Society in India, n. 29, p. 271.
ceremony (namakarana), the commencement of education (upanaya), the finishing of education (samavaratana), marriage (vivaha) and the death ceremony (antyesti). This is the religion in its original finished form. In this the purohita, who generally came from the learned verna, the Brahman, had the central place. For this, it has come to be called “Brahaminism.” Hinduism holds together in a creative tension both theism and monism, though often it appears that in conceptual foundations and philosophical discussion the theistic strand predominates. In its present form it is known as Hinduism—the religion of the Hindus. The word ‘Hindu’ is not of Sanskrit origin. The Turks called this country “Indh” or “Hindh” from the word sindhu, the river. The people of Hindh, thus came to be called “Hindu, and the land of Hindus as Hindustan. From this approach everybody living in this country is a Hindu, just as people of ‘Ind’ are ‘Indians’. The word “Hindu” has acquired religious meaning, it now includes all those people who believe in the religious systems and sects of Indian origin. The Hindu way of life is not theocratic though the Hindus constitute the 85% of the local population.39

Islamism

Islam was founded in Arabia by Mohammed in the seventh century A. D. Every Muslim must have faith in God and Hazaral Mohammed. Quran is the holy book of Islam and no Muslims should in any way doubt what has been written in it. He is expected to have prayers five times in a day. The Koran and

the literature connected with it afford information regarding a Semitic religion, the doctrines of Mohammed. Muslims do not believe in idol worship and prefer to pray in the mosques together. Each one is required to give a part of his income in charity and is known as Zakat. It is the duty of everyone to go to pilgrimage to Mecca and Madina at least once in one’s life time. He should observe rozas in the month of Ramzan. The Indian Muslims are a substantial minority accounting for 11.67% of India’s population numbering over 95 million. Although there are about three dozen Muslim majority nation states in the world, India has the third largest Muslim population. Muslims are widely dispersed in India. While states such as Assam, Bihar, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh have a substantial Muslim population, there are only two Muslim majority pockets in India: Jammu and Kashmir, (66%) and Laksadive and Minicoy Islands (94%). Islam is here for a thousand years and more. The foreign settlers-the Turks, Afghans and Mughals used it more as a political weapon than as an instrument of social service. They observed distinction between themselves and the converts. They called themselves Ashraf or nobles. And they were Saiyed and Sheikh ‘men of pen’ and ‘men of sword’ and the rest were Hindu converts with whom they had hardly any social intercourse. They remained divided into numerous groups on caste lines. The leadership throughout remained in the hands of the religious and the political elites, who were generally of the alien origin or owned the central Asian tradition in ethics.

and morality, language and literature, culture and communication. It caused alienation and brought about the partition of the country. The Islam in our country are very much Indian in many of its features. Such a worship of saints differentiates it from the Islam of Arabia and other countries. The followers of Islam are progressive and have a strong influence of conservation who hinder all sorts of progressive reforms. While the freedoms are guaranteed under the constitution, there is the need for a purposeful political merger and polarization of politics for the betterment of the society.\footnote{Encyclopaedia Asiatica, Vol. VII, n. 27, p. 381.}

**Christianity**

Christianity is still another important religion of India. The Christians believe in human equality and thus are opposed to caste system. They do not believe in costly marriage systems and thus condemn the idea of dowry. They also believe in the philosophy of equality of both the sexes and thus the women enjoy the highest regard for them. They prefer single family to joint family system. In Christianity, the obstacles are sin and its effects. They have faith in Lord Christ and the Bible is their holy book. They worship in the churches. They believe in simple religious ceremonies. Christianity has a long standing in this country. Portuguese made it a compelling religion in Goa. Akbar and his son, Jahangir extended patronage to it. During the eighteenth century the Christian missionaries with the political backing of their respective territorial companies, the British and the French carried out large scale conversions. With
the ascendancy of the East India Company this work was carried out more effectively in Bengal and in the south India especially. The Indian Christians are divided into Roman Catholics and Protestants and into many denominational churches. The distribution of Christian population unfolds an interesting pattern. The three southern states-Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala together account for nearly sixty percent of the Christian population in India. Further among the states, Kerala has the highest proportion of Christians. The total population is twenty one percent and with the presence of the Syrian Christians, they are also a dominant community. However, there are few small states, with a larger population of Christian population. Nagaland has sixty seven percent, Meghalaya sixty seven percent and Goa thirty two.\textsuperscript{42}

**Buddhism**

Buddhism, the doctrine of Gautama Buddha, arose as a clarification and reform movement of Hinduism. Gautama Buddha avoided, however giving even the barest name to that which is ultimately real, both in its universal aspect as Brahman and in its human aspect as man’s deepest self, or Atman. He felt that such terms were too easily turned into ideas and forms of that they would detract from direct experience. His teaching was that men suffer because of avidya or ignorance, of the total relatively of the world of things and events.\textsuperscript{43}

Buddhism was in the past a very popular religion in India and still is quite popular in some parts of the country and abroad. Of the various religions of the world, Buddhism, with its nihilistic world view and ethical passivity has been conspicuously free from intolerance, although on rare occasions in the course of its protean evolution its very adoptability has enabled it to become involved in a program of persecution. It believes in non-violence, eight fold path of truth and the five great vows (panca-mahavrata) i.e. the vow of ahimsa, or non-injury to life, the vow of satya or truthfulness consists in speaking what is true, as well as pleasant and good, the vow of asteya or non-stealing is based on the idea of the sanctity of property, the vow of brahmacarya consists in abstaining from all forms of self-indulgence, the vow of aparigraha consists in abstaining from all attachment to sense-object. It is divided into two sects namely Mahayana and Hinyana but both believe in the purity of soul. The Buddhists believe in the equality of men and are thus opposed to castism. They also have faith in religious toleration. Buddhism is a missionary religion and its followers spread this religion by moving around. Monasteries are the places in which Buddhists are trained for the spread of Buddhism as a religion. Buddhists constitute 77 percent of the total population. Overwhelming majority of Buddhist in India-the Neo-Buddhists are recent converts from the scheduled castes. Among the Buddhists the largest number is concentrated in Maharashtra. Eighty-five percent of India’s Buddhist belong to Maharashtra, but they constitute only 6.5% of the population of the state. They do not constitute a speech community or form a substantial proportion of the population in any state or region.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{44} Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, Vol.13, Part-1, n. 1, p. 240.
Sikhism

Sikhism is an important religion of India. The Sikhs prefer to worship in the Gurudwaras. Guru Grant Sahib is their religious book. They have faith in ten Gurus. They believe in purity and simplicity in marriages. They prefer to perform their marriage ceremonies during day time.

Moksha is the aim of Sikhism. The Sikhs also believe in the philosophy of Karma and the transmigration of the soul. Sikhs constitute 1.99% of India’s population. Though dispersed all over the country, they are in majority in Punjab. Though Sikhism is a synthesizing religion that emphasizes egalitarianism, it has not been able to undo some of the less wholesome aspects of the “ caste” system. For example, the lower jats converted to Sikhism are known as Mazhahirs; they live in separate hamlets. In their own villages and nearby villages they are not addressed with the common title “Sardar”. But they do pray, with the others in the Sikh Temple (Gurudwara) and join the longer (serving food to all in Temple precinct). Their touch is not considered polluting. The Jat, the Kshetriya, the Brahman and the artisan castes continue to have separate identities and are still endogamous i.e. they do not generally marry their girls outside their Jate.45

Jainism

The Jains recount the names of twenty-four teachers (tirthankaras) through whom their faith is believed to have come down from unknown

45. Ibid., p. 256
antiquity. The first of these teachers was Rsabhadeva. The last was Vardhamana, also styled Mahavira (the great hero). He is said to have lived in the sixth century B.C. during the time of Gotama Buddha. The teacher who immediately preceded Vardhmana was Parsvanatha, who lived in the ninth century B.C. The other twenty-two teachers belong to pre-historic ages. The word ‘Jina’ etymologically means a conqueror. It is the common name applied to the twenty-four teachers, because they have conquered all passions (raga and dvesa) and have attained liberation. The Jainas do not believe in God. They adore the Tirthankaras or the founders of the faith. These are the liberated souls who were once in bondage, but became, through their own efforts, free, perfect, omniscient, omnipotent and all-blissful. The Jainas believe that every spirit (jiva), that is in bondage now can follow the example set by the Jainas and attain, like them, perfect knowledge, power and joy. This is the great element of optimism that inspires every true Jaina with absolute self-confidence. The possibility of the realization of absolute perfection, through personal effort, is for him not a mere speculation but a promise repeated by the life of every liberated saint. Knowledge, faith and conduct are inseparably bound up and the progress and degeneration of the one react on the other two. Perfection of conduct goes hand in hand with the perfection of knowledge and faith. When a person, through the harmonious development of these three, succeeds in overcoming the forces of all passions and karmas, old and new, the soul becomes free from the obstacles of matter, the soul realizes its inherent
potentiality. It attains the fourfold perfection (ananta catustaya), namely infinite knowledge, infinite faith, infinite power and infinite bliss.  

The Jains which constitute .41% of India’s population, are largely urbanized, widely dispersed and do not identify with any particular language or territory.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism is the religion of the Parses of India and a small group of Iranians. It originated in Persia from the teachings of Zoroaster, who is believed to have lived sometime between 1000 B. C. and 500 B.C. There are less than a million followers of Zoroastrianism in India, they are an urban middle class-highly literate professionally distinguished, economically well-to-do community. They never encouraged proselytization and vigorously participated in the anti-colonial struggle, they were readily accepted in India. However, Zoroastrians are socially insulated. They practise rigorous endogamy and are virtually isolated culturally.

Religion in Manipur

From time immemorial the Meeteis had their own religion and religious practices. Till today the life of human being and religion are inseparable. The religious belief of custom and tradition of the early period has been felt to

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48. J. L. Kachroo & Vijay Kachroo, Society in India, n. 29, p. 274.
almost all the races of the world. The same is with Meeteis. The religion of Manipur just like the great religions of the world i.e. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism etc. had been developed gradually. Religion in Manipur may be studied under the following heads:

**Animism**

The features of animism can be found mostly in the primitive religion of Manipur specially in the Meetei society. The early form of religious faith of the Meetei was animism itself. The examples of this point are to be found in the early books like Puya. Early written books like “Ogree” and “Numit Kappa” had depicted the songs that chanted the power and glory of the sun. The early people of Manipur worshipped natural phenomena like the sun, fire, sky, and wind as the gods of the homestead, etc.

The Manipuris worshipped the sun as God. He was believed to travel across the sky everyday on a winged horse.49

The Meeteis worship the sun as God with awe and dedication and fright and sing the following devotional song:

Yoimnai taodanaba taoroinai anganba

Sana khomdon atonba thabi senkoiren apanba

Paima lilkoigi palem pithang linna naoyokpa

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Sana lilkoigi charangsen khoibu senba
Awang nongphu mahum nungi humlen yaibi tonningthou
Punsi yelbu tongliba wangba ningthou panchumba
Malemda khing khing khedaorak o
Koirou nangna nganbasum nganje
Lajik nangna lubasum lujage
Thabi nangna sengbasum lengjge
Khaba nangna panbagum panjge kubi o. 50

(O! Sun God, thou art the light and the golden
beauty with all your brilliance and (you are) nurtured
by the mother, the Charangsen Khoiabusenba of
Sana Lilko Awang nongphu matum nungi humlen
yaibi Punshi yelbu tongliba wangba ningthou
panchanba, come down sprightly on the earth.)

The Meeteis had also worshipped fire like the sun God. Fire was
worshipped in every home. The Manipuri dwelling house invariably faced the
east. The fire-place was located at the centre of the house. There fire was kept
constantly burning day and night by burning husk. The Manipuris addressed
the brightly burning fire as the substitute of the sun. 51

50. Sarangthem Boramani Singh, Meiteigee Laining Laisol (Imphal: Sarangthem Boramani Singh,
ynm), p. 6.
Regarding the worship of the fire in every house of the Meetei, M. Kirti in his book “The Religious Development in Manipur in the 18th & 19th Centuries,” writes:

“The fire was worshipped in every dwelling house. The ancient Meitei had a belief to the effect that a place must be set apart at the centre of every house for preserving fire. An iron tripod called ‘yotsabi’ is placed on the hearth (Phunga). Fire is to be kept burning day and night with husks, fuels and other materials round the fire. Orthodox people used to offer to fire whatever they have to eat before they eat”.  

In the religious way of the Meetei Nation in the early period, the sky God named Soraren was also worshipped by the Meetei as a custom. As regards the worship of the sky god, Soraren some scholars like Kirti adds:

“The people of Manipur during this period used to worship the God of rain and thunder under the name of Soraren which means the chief of gods”. (Sora-God and ren-the chief or the highest)  

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53. Ibid., p. 46.
In the book, “A Short History of Manipur,” R.K. Jhalajit Singh also writes about the worship of Soraren by Manipuris in the following way:

“The ancient Manipuris believed in a god of rain. He was also the king of gods. His abode was in the azure sky far, far above the earth and his weapon was the thunder bolt. His name is Soraren”.  

The belief that Soraren (the sky god) as very important in the Meetei Nation was mentioned or written in early many books.

We find mention of Chingngu Ningthou Soraren in many episodes and narratives in the archaic writings of the Meetei Phurup. In the Loiyumba Singyen which is an ancient book and which assigns the occupations and professions of Yumnaks (surname) it has been written that Sorenshangbam (name of a surname) should guard Soraren. This is found in writings of the Loiyumba Laikhai.

The worship of the sky God from the early time by many people of the world was almost the same as Meetei.

What has been written in Konthoujam Nongkarol and Khongchom Nupi Nongkaron and also the various references about Soraren in Naethingkhong Phambal Kaba, Ningthouna Phambal kaba amasung Shiba and episodes of counseling Chingu Ningthou Soraren by playing on Kori tharaocchi about Kasa along with Loiyumba Singyen, Loiyumba Laikhai etc. wherein references of Soraren Sangba are found, show that since very early period of history the Meeteis also believed and worshipped Soraren.\(^56\)

With a firm belief the Meeteis worship many natural phenomena. The worship of natural objects by the ancient Manipuris was simple. There was no icon. When they worshipped the sun, they worshipped the visible orb of the sun. When they worshipped fire, they worshipped the brightly burning fire. Likewise, when they worshipped Soraren, they spread a seat, say a piece of clean cloth, for the god to sit on and after invocation, they believed that he had come to their midst to accept their simple offerings. In ancient times there was no icon of the god of the homestead.\(^57\)

**Fetishism**

In the society of the Meetei community also fetishism was prevalent.

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56. Ibid., p. 65.
In the old manuscripts of Meeteis like Nunglol, Nunglen laihu, Nunglou Thambal, Sating Sakok etc., detailed references are found about the places where the divine-like stones are available and the godly qualities they possess and also about what results were forthcoming to the lives of the peoples, the king and the person who performs the ritual.\textsuperscript{58}

Thus, the ancient books of Meeteis have described the power of some stones and this shows the Meeteis religious way of worship in non-living material existed from the earlier times.

**Ancestor Worship**

From the ancient time, the Meeties had worshipped their forefathers as gods with respect as a custom in the religious way of ancestor worship. An example of this of is that the Meeteis have performed worship of the forefathers of their yek or clan every year. The worship of the forefathers is different in every clan of the Meeteis. T.C. Hodson gave his opinion about the ancestor worship of the Meetei when he writes:

“If the definition of ancestor-worship is strictly narrowed, we have in Manipur, among the Meitei only, the form of ancestor-worship which is practiced by all Hindus, but if

it be enlarged as in the circumstances it ought to be, we find several curious phenomena to which attention should be given. The worship of the clans which, seven in number, compose the Meitei nation or confederacy, clearly consists in the adoration and propitiation of the eponymous ancestors of the clan…”

The Meitei have seven yek or clans and have different seven ancestors as gods and have worshiped them with deep respect T.C. Hodson further mentioned:

“The name of the tribal deities is given as Luang Pokpa or ancestor of the Luangs, Khuman Pokpa, ancestor of the Khumans, apparent exceptions to this being the tribal Deities of the Ningthouja and Angom clans, which are called Nongpok Ningthou, or the king of the east, alies Pakhangba, whom we know from other sources to be the reputed ancestor of the clan in question (the Ningthaja), and Purairomba. The aliases of the other tribal Deities are Poiraiton, for the Luangs; Khamdingou, for the Khabananbas, Thangaren, for the Khumans and Ngangningsing, for the Moirangs; and Nungaoyumthangba for the Chenglies.”

Then seven yeks or clans of the Meetei are Mangang (Ningthouja), Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Moirang, Kha-Nganba, Sarang Leishangthem (Chenglei). They all have different times and norms or customs to perform the worship of ancestors. Each yek or clan has different deep detailed hymn words to be recited at the time of the worship of ancestors. The hymns are not to be missed in worship. For example, detailed words of the worship of Mangang (Ningthouja) yek or clan are written in the “Khunung Lichat Sajat.” A portion of the hymn is as follows:


(Mabudhou Pakhangba of Ningthouja Salai is worshipped on the 15th lunar day. The hymns and the words of worship should be that Leikak Leiyaron Chanu gives birth to Numit Koklen Pakhanba. It was at about noontime of Thursday, the 15th day of Enga month. Yabirok is the Naoribi and the colour is a red one. The star is Thayai. The water is the one that washed the stones, the flower is the red lotus, and the plantain leaf is the thamna Khenjong. Thamchet represents the fruit. Sayee represents the fire-wood, the sword is the Chak Thang. Urum is the naheiba. The red Sareng represents the fish. Seven Meithangs represent fire. The three trees of Nungpat are the Nungjeng Hei.)

The Meeteis believed as a custom to worship the forefathers of their clan as it well protect their children or family from misfortunes and shower with a prosperous life. Thus the Meeteis observed from earlier times the worship of their forefathers with fright and respect.

The Meeteis also categorized two different types of deities, namely, Umang Lai and Emung Lai. Umang means forest, Lai means God or deity, Emung means household, Lai mean God or deity. The Umang Lai (forest God) is the God residing outside of the house and this God known as Maikei Ngakpa Lai or side protection God. He is fondly worshipped with fright and care. For
this above mentioned point Saroj Nalini Parratt gave her opinion in the book “The Religion of Manipur” that certain of the Umang Lais are associated with a particular place. The most important of these are known as Maikei Ngakpa, i.e. Guardians of the Directions. There are four of these Lais each associated with a particular geographical direction. Thangjing, especially associated with Moirang, was the guardian of the South-west, Marjing of the North-east, Wangbaren (or Wangpurel) of the South-east and Koubru of the North-west. The authors of the Census Report of 1961 regard the function of the Tutelary duties as to protect the land against sickness and death entering the state from without.62

The views given by different scholars regarding umanglai were analysed in a book entitled, “A Critical Study of Religious Philosophy of the Meiteis before the Advent of Vaishnavism in Manipur” written by L. Bhagyachandra in this connection. Here it will be proper to refer to the following passage from the book:

“The Meeteis use the term “Umang Lai” to denote deities of different categories. However there are various interpretations of the term “Umang Lai” as expressed by different scholars. Hudson gives the meaning of the term umanglai as deities of the forest, K.B. Singh regards the term as indicating tree deities. Shakespear also subscribed

to the view of Hudson. Or Saroj Nalini Parratt says that Umang Lais were never regarded as limited to particular forest areas. While disagreeing with the interpretation of Umang Lai as forest deities or tree deities, she thinks that the term “Umang Lai” is used generally to cover all categories of Gods, although it also has a narrow meaning when applied specifically to the first of these groups.\(^{63}\)

Thus, Meeteis have worshipped the Umang Lai (forest God) with custom and belief very carefully along with Emung Lai (household deity) which is also worshipped with deep faith and custom. In the Meetei religion there are also important household deities. It includes Lainingthou Sanamahi, Leimarel Sidhabi, Phunga (the fire place) Imoinu Ahong Achaobi, Salailel, Thongarel, etc.

The Manipuris also believed in a god of the homestead. He was the king of the dwelling house. He protects the family from evil spirits and diseases. No burglar could enter the house except with his connivance. Burglars before sneaking into a house first prayed to the god of the homestead to allow him to enter the house and carry out his work undetected. Householders on the otherhand before going to bed prayed to the god to protect them from thieves and evil spirits.\(^{64}\)

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Thus, the Meeteis believed that the worship of Emung Lai (as household deities) with deep faith can protect from all the trouble and thereby they can live very well with prosperity. So, Sanamahi and Leimarel are regarded as the most important deities of Meetei community.

Lainingthou Sanamahi is the most revered deity. Each dwelling house of the Meitei has a place for this deity in the south-western corner. While worshipping this deity daily by the housewives at the sunset is a normal routine affair, this Lainingthou Sanamahi is worshipped by the Meeteis at critical hours of their life and also on the first day of every New Year i.e. on the day of Cheiraoba.  

So, the religion in Manipur is very comprehensive. Some of the important religions of Manipur are also taken up and discussed further in the thesis.

Sanamahism does not mean only the worship of God Lainingthou Sanamahi. In this religion a number of other deities who are connected with Meetei cosmogony, namely 1) Tengbanba Mapu, 2) Ima Leimarel Sidabi 3) Atiya Sidaba, 4) Konjil Tengthokpa Pakhangba, 5) Nongthang Leima, 6) Laikhurembi (Another incarnation of Ima Leimarel Sidabi) and a number of deities who are regarded as the Laion Laichats (incarnations) of the Deities in the cosmogony were also worshipped. Most of the Laion Laichats were

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worshipped as Umang lais in the form of Umang Lai Haraoba which was an integral part of Sanamahism.  

**Sanamahism**

Before the starting of countable period or historical period, Nongdalairen Pakhangba ascended the throne as a king of the Kangleipak (Manipur) Kingdom in 33 A.D. The pre-historical period or uncountable period had four chaks namely, Hayi chak, Haya chak, Khunung chak, Langba (Kona) chak. The first king of the Hayi chak, king Kangba started to worship Sanamahi in a temple on the top of a hill. God Sanamahi was the king of all deities. Lainingthou Sanamahi religion is one of the oldest religions of south-east Asia. It developed in Manipur and was mainly worshipped by the Meeteis who inhabit in Manipur, Assam, Tripura, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. In the ancient times Sanamahi was worshipped by small ethnic groups of Manipur like the Tangkhul, the Kukis, the Koms, the Purum etc.  

The worship of Lainingthou Sanamahi does not depend on any other religion of the world. From the ancient period Lainingthou Sanamahi was worshipped by the seven yeks or clans of the Meetei in each and every

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67. Ibid., p. 6.
68. Ibid., p. 1.
The place of Lainingthou Sanamahi is in the south-western corner in every house. He is worshipped as a household deity as a protector of all the members of the house and controller of birth and death. His mother Ima Laimarel Sidabi is also with him inside the house at the northern side of the Laphel ka.

The Meeteis worship a number of gods and goddesses, the most prominent God directly connected with the happiness and unhappiness in the life of man was God Lainingthou Sanamahi, who is also regarded as the king of all deities. He is the creator and controller of the universe. Sanamahi religion is basically based on the worship of God Sanamahi, which is a socially and legally recognized form of religion.

Islamism

The Muslims inhabiting in Manipur are known as “Pangal.” The word Pangal has been derived from the word “Bangal”. The Muslims of Manipur mainly came from Sylhet, now in Bangladesh.

The Manipur Muslim Samaj known as Mohamaddan Samaj or Musamal was first established in 1606 during the reign of king Khagemba (1597-1652).

72. Ibid., p. 1.
The migration of Muslim in Manipur started from the period of king Khagemba and continued till the reign of king Chandrakirti (1850-1886).75

At the age of 21, Khagemba ascended the throne as a king of the Meetei Kingdom. His two brothers Chingsomba and Shanongba were appointed as Khurai Lakpa and Yaiskul Lakpa respectively to help the king in administration.76

In the Meetei customs and traditions “Hiyangei Kumyanba” a day in the month of Hiyangei (October/November), 1603 was celebrated with a boat race. The race was performed at Leishangkhong Khonglen at Langthabal between king Khagenba and his brother Chingsomba; Khurai Lakpa participated in the boat race as Tengmai Leppa. Chingsomba had no boat of his own. A boat named “Kabongamba Choukhongphaba” used by the late father Mungyanba had been given to the youngest brother Shanongba, the Yaiskul Lakpa. The king had landed the boat to his brother, Chingsomba, the Khurai Lakpa from his youngest brother Shanongba, the Yaiskul Lakpa. He sends his faithful servant named Modhu to take the boat. The type of boat race was to bump and block each other. In the race the boat “Kabongamba Choukhongphaba” was partially damaged. Chingsomba, the Khurai Lakpa had said to the youngest brother Shanongba, the Yaiskul Lakpa that the boat was broken in the race. He further asked Shanongba if he would be allowed to repair the partially damaged

boat or to bring a new one or to give the price of the boat. But Shanongba, the Yaiskul Lakpa had demanded that he wanted the same original unbroken boat. “Kabongamba Choukongphaba”. The argument of Shanongba, the Yaiskul Lakpa was the instruction of his mother Chanpombi who once quarreled with his brother, Chingsomba, the Khurai Lakpa and faced humiliation.

Shanongba, the Yaiskul Lakpa consequently demanded the same original boat “Kabongamba Choukongphaba” and told his brother Chingsomba, the Khurai Lakpa that provided the same original boat was not returned, the person who had brought the damaged boat would be killed. The case was put-up against his elder brother, king Khagemba. Khagemba tried to settle the case as an elder brother and to tame the youngest brother Shanongba, the Yaiskul Lakpa, but he failed. The elder brother, king Khagemba had ordered Shanongba, the Yaiskul Lakpa to leave the country or kingdom because of the latter’s malafide intention to return the undamaged boat.77

After the judgment of king Khagemba, Shanongba and his mother Chanpombi with servants Soraisamcha Takhomba, Oinam Pakchao, Thokchom Muba, secretly discussed and went to Cachar and took their shelter from the king of Cachar ‘Prathaphinan’. Then Chanpombi had told king Prathaphinan that the Meetei Kingdom had different opinions and disunited, the people wanted invasion over the Meetei king and Chanpombi requested to king of Cachar to invade Meetei Kingdom (Manipur) and defeat the king of

Manipur so that her son Shanongba would be made the ruler or king of Manipur. The king of Cachar agreed and made a plan to invade the Meetei Kingdom. He sent his army under the leadership of Bhimbal and Yakharek in 1603 and 1608. In this war Meetei soldiers were defeated and the arrested soldiers were kept under the control of Cachar. King Khangemba got the news of the Meetei defeat. Then Khangemba with strong soldiers of Meetei Yumnam Kiyamba, Haobam Aroi, Elangbam Khungam and Pala Koireng fought against the Cachar army in the Langjing Chingkhong of Meetei kingdom and defected and arrested the Cachar army and their leader Bhimbal and Yakharek along with Shanongba and the others fled to Cachar.

Chanpombi had requested king Prathaphinan again to attack the Meetei kingdom and to make Shanongba the king of the Meetei Kingdom. The king of Cachar agreed and thought that his army could not defeat the Meetei counterpart. The king of Cachar had requested his neighbouring Pasa Musalman king Mohammed Nazir of Taraf for the help in invading the kingdom of Meetei.

The Taraf king Muhammad Nazir honoured the request of the king of Cachar Prathaphinan. The king of Taraf had ordered and sent a Nawab Muhammad Shani to help the Cachar king in invading the Meitei Kingdom. In the month of Mera (September), 1605, a troop called Dholi consisting 1007

78. Ibid., p.18.
79. M.Irabot & S. Ibemhal Devi, Thainagee Manipur Amasung Mayang Thorakpa, n. 73, p. 139.
soldiers under the leadership of Muhammad Shani along with great 16 (Sixteen) leaders named Munon Khan, Monai, Akon, Aluf, Chuleiya, Namfa, Faitong, Tumiya, Khamaya, Aman, Khento, Aqya, Sepra Muhammad/Khamba, Lammimyanba/Miyamba, Punot/Puna and Kashra arrived at Cachar for the invasion of the Meetei kingdom.80

For the invasion of the Meetei Kingdom, the king of Cachar had formed two contingents. (i) Muslim contingent and (ii) Cachar contingent.81

But in the Book “Meitei Pangal Hourakpham” it is clearly mentioned that for the invasion of Meetei Kingdom two contingents, namely the Muslim and Cachar contingent on the one hand and another one Meetei contingent were formed. The Muslim was led by Nawab Mohammed Nazir with his younger brother Sheik Chunet and Kourip Sheik and the Cachar contingent by Bhimbal and Yakharek with great soldies like Phaleitao, Maikatao, Sebudhi, Tekkaraja, Keikeyalung and Tharakpa. The other Meetei contingent was led by Shanongba with his great soldiers like Labunga, Soraisamcha Takhomba, Oinamcha Pukchao, Thokchom Muba.82

The joint force of Cachar proceeded to Manipur crossing the Gawai river and reached the plam area of Manipur at Khoupum and the Muslim troop encamped at the bank of Yangoi (which is now Bishnupur Lamangdong).

82. B. Kulachandra Sharma & K. Badaruddin, Meitei Pangal Hourakpham, n. 74, p. 20.
While, the Cachar and Meetei troop had set up their camp on the upper hill track of Thongjao hill of Khoupam.

King Khagemba’s preparation to defend his Kingdom against the invasion was executed by many brave soldiers of Manipur. They dug a lankhong for the fortress in the four parts along the Southern side of the Eharai to Haoyen Yangoibung (at present south-western side of Bishnupur). The troop of Manipur along with important braveries was under the command of the king himself and the important braveries were: Khurailakpa Chingsomba, Lairen Nongsamei/Suyo, Lairikyengbam Jagatsing/chaksing, Kiyam Lairenmei, Sektachabu Taba, Mongbijamba Haomu Yaraba, Akhom Mayon, Salamcha Kiyamba. Okramcha Kyamba, Wairokpamcha Khungam, Ngangbamcha Koingamba. Yumnamcha Kiyamba, Haobamcha Aroi, Yenlangbamcha Khungam, Pala Koireng, Khumukchamcha Koingam, Wangkheimayum Kiyamba, Salamcha Cheksa, Nongthombamcha Moiramba, Takenmayumcha Athouba, Thokchamcha Koireng, Chiromcha Lairenmei, Salamcha Koingam, Maibamcha Keisa, etc. with the 180 (one hundred and eighty) cavalry and two guns.  

The Cachar troop of Mador Yakharek and Bhimbal had decided to retreat without giving any information to Musalman because of the Meetei skill in art of the warfare.

83. Ibid., pp. 22-23.
The Kabuis of Khoupum informed the Manipur soldiers about the retreat of the Cachar troop. The Manipuri soldiers had fought a war with Cachar troop at Toubul Khoijuman in Bishnupur. Meanwhile accidentenly, king Khagemba fell down from his horse due to the stumble of his horse and king Khagemba was arrested by Muslim leader soldier, Munon Khan and tried to kill the king by his spear. But Khagemba was saved by intelligent Nongsamei. Munon Khan was killed by Nongsamei with his spear. After this incident the Cachar soldier’s troop had abruptly retreated. Yakharek and Bhimbal also returned to their homeland. After the disperse of Cachar troop king Khagemba with his troop remained to fight against the Muslim troop by using 180 cavalry and 2 guns for 3 hours but the Meetei soldiers were unable to face the Musalman soldiers. Then king Khagemba came to realize that the Musalman soldier could not be met with his force. To make a plan king Khagemba called the eminent leaders of Manipur. They decided that to send Nongsamei who he was well versed indifferent languages like Takhel, Pasa, Cachari, Bengali, Tekhao. He was asked to compromise the matter with the Muslim troop. Nongsamei proposed for a settlement by asking the Muslim troop to have a discussion with king Khagemba without arms. With a secret plan the Muslim troop was arrested by the Meetei troop.84

The second battle between the king Khagemba and youngest brother Shanongba ended in the year 1606. After the end of the war, the king

84. Ibid., pp. 22-23.
Khagemba had agreed to settle the Muslim soldiers to form the Muslim society and they were given their wives. Thus, the great Muslim soldiers were to be the Meetei soldier. The Muslim society, that is, the Manipur Muhammad Shani was formed. The society was very helpful in the administration of Manipur as a whole. King Khagemba had given two Meetei women Nongthonbam Chanu Shaktak and Chakpram Chanu Melei as the wives of Muhammad Shani. Then king Khagemba had earmarked a place now called Yaiskul (Moirangkhom) to settle Muhammad Shani with his companion.85

From this incident the Muslim religion or Islam began to spread in Manipur.

**Hinduism in Manipur**

Hinduism is the title applied to the form of religion which prevails among the vast majority of the present population of the India.86

Hinduism or Hindu religion had its first influence in Manipur during the reign of King Charairongba (1697-1709) preached by a Hindu missionary coming from Orissa under the patronage of Rai Banmali. From his advice Radha Krisha statues were installed and people started worshipping them. In 1707, a temple of Radha Krishna was constructed by brick and it was served by Rai Bamali. Sometimes king Charairongba also came to the temple and offered prayers. Till to-day the statues of Radha Krishna are worshipped in the

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Guruariabam Mandir at Thumbuthong. The influence of Hinduism was strongly felt in Manipur during the reign of king Garibaniwaj or Pamheiba (1709-1748) son of King Charairongba. During the reign of king Garibaniwaj a serious religious confrontation took place between the old pundits of Shaivite faith and tantric practice and the reformer, Shanti Das Gosai of Ramandi cult supported by the king. In the year 1716 a Hindu missionary came to Manipur it was led by Shanti Das Gosai along with two followers named Bhagaban Das and Narayan Das from Shrihat Jilla Narshing Tila. They had come in the eastern side and across Ngapram Chingjen and reached Manipur and took shelter in the palace. Then Shanti Das Gosai met king Garibaniwaj and suggested that the Hindu Ramandi religion be adopted as a state religion. The king discussed the matter with his officers. But the officers did not approve of the matter of Hindu Ramandi religion and opposed the idea of following it on the ground that it would affect the culture of the state.

The officers opposed the King as follows:

“O King! Why should we learn the language and adopt the religious practices of other people by abandoning our own language and religion and be converts? By so doing one day in future our language and religion may vanish and we may speak other’s language and follow the religion of others as our own, thereby allowing ourselves to be swept away by the strong currents of alien language and religion coming as the roaring currents of a mighty river.

87. Sarangthem Boramani Singh, Meitei Ningthourol, n. 76, p.89.
We, the people refuse to be converts because in future this land will greatly suffer, please, have a second thought and reconsider minutely.”

The skilful expression, manner and intelligence of Shanti Das Gosai bewitched king Garibaniwaj. The people and officers of Manipur were against Hindu religion but king Garibaniwaj took the Hindu religion as the state religion. The king released the ancient custom and tradition of Manipur at the instruction of Shanti Das Gosai. Then king Garibaniwaj and Shanti Das Gosai had a holy dip in the confluence of the Imphal River and the Irl River called Irong (Lilong) and Shanti Das Gosai put a sacred thread around the king’s neck as mark of embracing Hinduism. From that day onward Shanti Das Gosai became to be known as Guru and the king as Maharaja. After the initiation into Hinduism, king Garibaniwaj tried to change the Meetei society to Hindu society step by step at the instruction of Shanti Das Gosai and almost all the altars of Gods i.e. Umang Lai or god of forest and Meetei Lai or god of Meetei were destroyed to prevent people from worshipping there. In 1723 Langban (September) almost all the Umang Lai (god of forest) was demolished. In the same year in the month of Hiyangei (November) the rituals of Lainingthou Nongsaba, Yimthei Lai, Pathoibi, Sanamahi were performed by the Bamons (Brahmins). In 1726 in the month of Enga (June), all the Umang Lais, (forest god) were collected and buried in the forest of Mongbahanba (Mahabali) under Heibong Sidaba. In 1726 July, Lairemma Panthoibi, Lainingthou Sanamahi,

89. Sarangthem Boramani Singh, Meitei Ningthourol, n. 76, pp. 96-97.
90. Ibid., p.107.
Lainingthou Soraren, Lairemma huidonpokpi and other seven gods, the bronze image of God Sanamahi were destroyed at the instigation of the reformer.\textsuperscript{91} Shanti Das Gosai had changed altar of Hiyangthan Lairemma Hireima in Hiyangthang into Kamakhya Devi and Shanti Das Gosai also changed the Meetei yek/Salai into Gotra. Then in month of November, 1737, Lukun Thangba of 300 pupils was performed to initiate them into Hinduism. It was led by the Maharaja.\textsuperscript{92} After the introduction of Ramandi Religion, the Shri Ram statue was installed and worshipped under the name called Ramji Prabhu. A pond measuring 10000 sq. fit. had been dug in the Wangkhei Leikai and named after king as Ningthem Pukhri. The statues of Radha Krishna and Kalika worshipped by Pamheiba from the beginning as a king were shifted from the palace to the bank of Ningthem Pukhri by constructing a temple served by a Brahman. Now, this Radha Krishna temple is looked after by Sairem in the Northern side of the Ningthem Pukhri. The big stone collected from Sana Keithel was used in erecting the statue of Hanuman which was placed and worshipped at Mongbahanba.\textsuperscript{93}

Of the four ancient traditional types of cremation, namely, air cremation, water cremation, earth cremation and fire cremation the last one, that is, fire cremation was a ritual practice. The name of fire cremation “Khambi eratpa potloi Hithaba” was named as Jeigya by Shanti Das Gosai. Twelve days after

\textsuperscript{91} E.Nilakanta, \textit{Fragments of Manipuri Culture}, n. 88, p.36.
\textsuperscript{93} Sarangthem Boramani Singh, \textit{Meitei Ningthourol}, n. 76, p.107.
the death of a person the close relatives of the deceased performed the ritual purification act and on the thirteenth day a somewhat huge amount of material things was sacrificed to god. And a very little bone of the dead person was dropped in the dock of the Tonphong in the Ningthi River which had flown from the Himalyan Mountain.\textsuperscript{94} Shanti Das Gosai asked king Garibaniwaj to show the book which was written in Meetei script called Puya (ancient Book of the Meetei) and paphal (statue) of Pakhangba. This book was not meant for ordinary human beings and the script was also for God only. The book which has written in this script was tough and it was not to be touched. But king Garibaniwaj believed all the words of the Shanti Das Gosai. Garibaniwaj ordered to collect all the puyas or ancient books with the help of an elephant and keep in front of the Kangla Uttra. According to the norm of Hindu fire cremation about 125 puyas or Meetei ancient books (holy books) were burnt down in front of Kangla Uttra in the year 1732, Mera (August), on Sunday.\textsuperscript{95} This day on which all the puyas were consigned to flames is observed in Manipur.\textsuperscript{96}

Again, in the year 1737, almost all the people of seven yek/salai were initiated into Hinduism by the king Garibaniwaj and almost the Meeteis were also forced to take the Hindu religion and the people who did not imbibe the Hindu religion were awarded heavy punishment.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., p. 108.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibungohal & Khelchandra, Cheitharol Kumbaba (Imphal: Manipur Sahitya Parishad, 2005), p. 93.
\textsuperscript{96} Sairem Nilabir, Laiyengthou Sanamahi Amasung Sanamahi Laining Hinggaat Eehou, n. 92, p. 103.
Here, T.C. Hodson remarks, Religious dissent was treated with the same ruthless severity as was meted out to political opponents and wholesale banishments and execution drove the people into acceptance of the tenets of Hinduism.

A very revered statue of Lainingthou Sanamahi constructed by king Khagemba was unceremoniously destroyed by king Garibaniwaj in 1726.

The song of Hinduism was sung in the Manipuri language. The name Manipur was also introduced during this period. All this the king did in consultation with his Guru Shanti Das and Sanamahism was replaced by Hinduism.

The Hindu religion was then in its zenith during the reign of king Bhagyachandra (1758-98). He was also initiated into Hinduism. In 1780 he constructed the wooden statue of Shri Govindaji and he founded the Ras Lila. The Brahma Sabha was also established during his reign. He also introduced the customs and traditions of the Hindu Gouriya Beishia. During his regime a book entitled “Wayel Lairik” was written. In this book the rules and regulations of the Hindu religion were included. These rules and regulation were supposed to be followed by all castes of Hindu.

During the reign of king Chandrakriti also many meeteis embraced Hinduism. The worship of Nongpok Ningthou popularly known as Chingoi

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Eruppa was changed into Baruni Mahadeva worship in the form of a festival. The book entitled “Wayel Lairik” of the Bhagyachandra regime was enlarged and renamed as “Bebastannaba” during his reign.99

The Hindu religion spread in Manipur gradually and a number of Meetei words for mountain, river temple, lake, etc. were changed into Sanskrit words. As examples the following may be cited:

| 1. Kongba Meirombi          | - | Geibi Ganga |
| 2. Nungjeng Eyokkom         | - | Bindu Sarobar |
| 3. Chingoi Turel            | - | Baruni Nadhi |
| 4. Sekmai turel             | - | Soubhadra Nadhi |
| 5. Moirang Turel            | - | Augusta Nadhi |
| 6. Imphal Turel             | - | Bijiya Nadhi |
| 7. Iril turel               | - | Iranadhi |
| 8. Loktak                   | - | Lakshmi Jil |
| 9. Nongmaijjing             | - | Nilkanthakgiri |
| 10. Hiyangthang ching       | - | Chirachalgiri |
| 11. Koubru ching            | - | Koumar Pabbrata |

99. Ibid., p.108.
12. Moirang - Mahir ranggapur

13. Heibokching - Bhaghaneshorgiri

The names of many Meetei deities were also changed, thus –

1. Soraren - Indra
2. Marjing - Kuber
3. Wangbaren - Jom Raj
4. Panthoibi - Durga
5. Khoirephaba - Baruna
6. Erum Ningthou - Angi
7. Thangjing - Ashinikumar
8. Nongpok Ningthou - Mahadeva
9. Loyarakpa - Baya devata. ¹⁰⁰

Thus, the Hindu religion was prevalent in Manipur. Till now the Hindu religion is existing along with the Meetei religion.

**Christianity in Manipur**

Imperialism, colonial rule and Christian proselytism were the key aspects of the British conquest of North East India in the nineteenth century.

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¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 110-111.
With the expansion of the British rule over the Naga territory the Christian missionaries approached the British authorities to grant permission to work among the Nagas.

A young missionary William Pettigrew from England was sent by the Arthington Aboriginess based at Leeds and named after an English millionaire, Robert Arthington. It was a mobile missionary movement financed by Arthington and each member missionary would be sponsored for three years and then would be withdrawn. William Pettigrew was sent to start proselytizing works among the Meetei of Manipur which was conquered in 1891. Pettigrew learnt Manipuri and Bengali while in Bengal, and arrived at Imphal in 1894. He was the first foreign missionary to have worked in Manipur. His first objective was to Christianise the Hindu Meitei of Imphal Valley, and accordingly for this purpose, he opened a school at Moirangkhom, Imphal, the capital of the kingdom. Six months later, Major Maxwell, President of the Darbar ordered him to close it down lest the missionary activities provoke the orthodox Manipuri Hindus. However, he was allowed to work among the people of the hills. In 1895, he came to Ukhrul and got permission from the Awunga of the village to build a house for his living. It was the beginning of missionary settlement and their work in Tangkhul. Rev. Pettigrew was to convince the people that the missionaries were not the paid agents of the government. They had come for the service of the people to enlighten their physical, intellectual and spiritual growth. His important task was to educate

the people in order to enable them how to read and write; and to preach the Gospel of Salvation through the spread of education. For hygiene and physical growth and ultimately for the end of his missionary work, he did not underestimate the importance of medical service, for which a dispensary was attached to his residence at Ukhrul. Many diseases which could not be cured by the traditional appeasement of the spirits were cured by the application of modern scientific medicines of the missionary. This convinced the ignorant people to come forward and co-operated with the missionaries which brought about great changes in the life of the Tangkhuls physically, intellectually and spiritually.103

In 1896, a Primary School was opened at Ukhrul where 30 students were enrolled. Later it became a Middle English School in 1897 and the number of students increased further. Political Agents, Maxwell, John Shakespeare, gave strong support to the efforts of Rev. William Pettigrew. Shakespeare pressed the American Baptist Mission union for more missionaries to work at Ukhrul. The students of the mission school taught by Rev. Pettigrew became not only Christian converts but they were made evangelists. Tangkhuls, Meiteis, Kukis, Koms and Anals joined the school of Rev. Pettigrew at Ukhrul. The Kuki evangelists who were the students of the Ukhrul mission school specially, Teba Karong, Longkhovel Kom and others did evangelical work in South east and north east parts of Manipur hills.104

103. Ibid., p. 206.
However, it was not until 1901 that converts were made. In that year, 12 students who attended the mission school were converted and got baptism. By 1907, the membership rose to 70, but most of them participated in their traditional festivals, dancing, singing, even in drinking Naga rice-beer which, according to western missionaries, was connected to spirit worship. Therefore, W. Pettigrew drew up a list of rules for the new converts to follow strictly. Here many rebelled against the rule and withdrew from the line put up by the missionary except seven dedicated Christian students. Then, Pettigrew along with the seven students established a separate Church at Ukhrul. This was the first Christian community church in Manipur.105

But Rev. Pettigrew had not succeeded in the spread of Christianity in Manipur Valley. Another missionary, Rev. U. M. Fox arrived at Ukhrul in 1911. He was permitted to enter Ukhrul at the intervention of Raja Churachand Singh.

Rev. Fox penetrated into the valley, (the formerly forbidden land to the missionaries) and converted five state Government employees into Christianity in 1915. Maipak was the first Rongmei to embrace Christianity. The following employees were baptized by Rev. U.M. Fox at Imphal on December, 5, 1915, i) Maipak Kabui, ii) Kachindai Kacha Naga, iii) Bhagirah Gorkha, iv) Thanga Hmar, v) Majaching, iv) Chaisom Kom.106

Manipur state Durbar objected to this conversion and outright rejected the location of any church or mission branch in the valley. Thus, the Christianity spread step by step in Manipur. Now, in Manipur, Baptist, Catholics, Seventh day Adventists, Presbyterian and other groups like Judaism, Mid mission and Independent Church of India made the people to develop tolerance and harmony towards other denominations including the indigenous faith which they failed to destroy.