CHAPTER- III

BACKGROUND OF MOIRANG
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3.1 Historical and Geographical Background

Historically 'Moirang' refers to an ancient independent chiefdom in the valley of Manipur which is now the easternmost state of Indian Union, located between 28° 83' N and 25° 68' N Latitude and 93° 03' E and 94° 80' E Longitude. Anciently, the valley of Manipur was studded with a number of isolated communities which at later stage of history coalesced into seven independent political entities which one may appropriately call chiefdoms. At the final stage of this political state of affairs in this valley three of those seven chiefdoms, namely Moirang, Khumam and Meitei were conspicuous. The Meitei chiefdom had already conquered and annexed into it the other chiefdoms than Moirang and Khumam. The Khumam chiefdom also fell prey to the ever rising power of the Meitei, losing her independence in the 15th century A.D. And, Moirang fought its last battle with the Meitei in the 18th century at which advent she lost to the latter nation. With the annexation of Moirang the building up of the historical Meitei kingdom, the lone kingdom in the true sense of the term in the history of Manipur, was consummated.

A social consequence of the loss of Moirang chiefdom in the hands of the Meitei was that the core locality of Moirang was reduced to the status of being one of the villages of the Meitei kingdom in the plains of Manipur. Since then Moirang assumes this geographical connotation of being a village of the larger Meitei society throughout the subsequent period of history, including
the period of British occupation of Manipur, and this condition of Moirang continued till the post-Independence period of Manipur as a territorial part and parcel of Indian Union. Only in 1953 was formed the 'Moirang Improvement Cooperative Society Unlimited by the then elites of Moirang under whose long-drawn efforts the Moirang Small Town Committee emerged in 1966 in which year thereby township/urbanism became installed with a specified area of this erstwhile village locality. Subsequently in 1981 was instituted a Municipality Board, and in 1996 it got officially transformed into the Moirang Municipality Council under the Government of Manipur Municipality Act, 1996. The entire earlier Moirang village now falls under the jurisdiction of this Municipal Council. Now, so far as municipal administration is concerned Moirang is no longer a village. In other administrative respects, however, this Municipal Moirang has at its periphery four hinterland villages, namely Tronglaobi, Naransena, Thamnapokpi and Ngangkhaiwai; Municipal Moirang and these villages on the fringe together form Greater Moirang.

Another social fall-out of amalgamation of early historical Moirang Chiefdom into the greater Meitei body politic is the emergence of usage of the word 'Moirang', it referring not to the political Moirang of past history, but to Moirang as the name of one of the seven exogamous clans or phratries of the larger Meitei body social. Evidently this connotation of 'Moirang' speaks about it as the name of a kin group of the larger traditional Meitei social system. While thus being relegated to the status of a kin group, however, since the time of later Meitei monarchy there has been a tradition of recognizing at least
symbolically the historical kingship of Moirang; this tradition is maintained till
the time of the last king of Manipur, Maharaj Bodhachandra by deputing
someone of the Meitei king’s favour and conferring on him the title of Moirang
ningthou (i.e., King of Moirang). The man who holds the office of Moirang
ningthou is still the head of the ritual affairs of Moirang.

Meanwhile mention may be made of the rich pristine cultural heritage
of Moirang. During the ancient historical days when there existed seven
independent chiefdoms in the valley of Manipur, the chiefdom of Moirang was
the cardinal seat of culture and civilization, and for that matter, culturally the
most flourished one in this valley. The nature of the present work does not
demand explanation of the reasons to which could be attributed that cultural
richness of Moirang at the beginning of history in the valley of Manipur; hence,
it is avoided here. But, it is felt necessary to point out some of the significant
influences that Moirang culture exerted in building up the cultural
paraphernalia necessarily employed in the evolutionary reorganization of the
greater Meitei society under the leadership of the Meitei rulers, consequent
upon the gradual assimilation of all the socio-cultural systems of the erstwhile
independent chiefdoms into the fold of the Meitei society.

In its present form, the larger Meitei social and cultural life is
characteristically a synthesis of, excluding a few sundry western cultural
elements, Hindu culture and religion, and traditional indigenous cultural and
religious system. The indigenous component of the contemporary Meitei
cultural system was reconstituted, as local historians unanimously accept, by
and large after the model of the cultural system of historical Moirang. What is
locally expressed as Lai-haraoba, is the hub of the basic cultural value system
(comprising aesthetic, ideological and moral categories of value) of the entire
traditional components of Meitei culture. This very model culture complex had
its origin in historical Moirang, and is as such a contribution extra-ordinary of
Moirang of history to the Meitei cultural world.

For this reason of Moirang provenance, till to-day Lai-haraoba, the
greatest traditional cultural festival of the Meitei community of Manipur, held at
Moirang at its temple of Thangjing (the supreme divine ideality of Moirang till
date) is held to be the greatest celebration of this festival where one finds the
original austerity of the cosmogonical beliefs concerning ‘creation’ and
‘creativity’. Again, for the reason of ultimate origin and originality of it, this
festival cannot, as a cursory rule, be performed elsewhere in the other Meitei
localities before the commencement of this festival at Moirang, which is fixed
on the 3rd day of Kalen (2nd month of the local calendar roughly corresponding
to the Gregorian calendar month of May) of every year.

Again, Moirang of ancient past was the birth place of literature.
Tradition of Moirang says that this was the place where the female deity
Panthoibi incarnated in human forms in an epic cycle of seven legendary
heroines. The personality of Panthoibi represents the local version of the
cultural-complex of matriarchy. According to Moirang traditions of Panthoibi,
each of the stories of the seven incarnations of this female deity was an epic of the romantic relations of those heroines with their respective heroes, expressed in such high romantic literary standards as qualifying each to be an epic in the true sense of the term. Those epic stories were, in order of sequence, those of Thongnang lairoulembi and Henjunaha, Sanloulembi and Nganba, Phouibi and Akongjamba, Tonulajjing and Kadengthangjahanba, Yaithing Konu and Khuyol Haoba, Leima Sunulembi and Chothe Thangwai Pakhangba, and Thoibi and Khamba (The first name in each of these pairs is the name of the heroine).

The literary traditions embodied in the epic cycle of Moirang origin is adopted in toto in the greater traditions of literature of the larger Meitei traditional culture along with the amalgamation of the earlier Moirang chiefdom to the then expanding and rising socio-cultural system of the larger Meitei nation. The traditional folk dance forms, folk singing (locally called Moirang sai), written folk literary texts of the Meitei treasure of art and culture, are also based on the cultural themes (expressed as Moirang Kangleiro) of the aforesaid romantic legendary stories of Moirang epic cycle.

There are yet a number of culture traits of Moirang origin that have been incorporated and sewn into the cultural fabric of the Meitei. But, in the present context only the above two major culture complexes are taken into account in consideration of their more or less immediate relevance to the
present study, which will be referred to contextually in what to follow in this work.

Two connotations of the name 'Moirang', first, as the name of an ancient chiefdom in the valley of Manipur, and second, as the name of a major kin group, whether of clan or phratry category, of the larger Meitei kinship system have been pointed above. Now, the work turns its interest to observing Moirang as a place. In this connection the changes of status of Moirang as a place have been mentioned above, from being a village for long history, passing through the stage of its upgradation to township, till it later became a municipal area. Now, may be added its present position in the larger and administrative system of Manipur State. As of now, Manipur is administratively divided into 9 territorial units i.e., districts; Bishnupur District to which Moirang territorially belongs, is one of these districts. One of the three administrative Sub-divisions of Bishnupur District is named Moirang Sub-division after the name-sake official headquarters of this sub-division, i.e., Moirang (the Municipal Moirang). Henceforth the term 'Moirang' is used in this work in this sense i.e., 'Municipal Moirang' and its people. First, a brief geographical description of the location of this Municipal Moirang is furnished here below.

Heading off Imphal, the capital of Manipur State, the Tedim road, an important highway of this State runs to the south-west. At Bishnupur, an historical village where the British and the Japanese forces fought almost the
decisive battle during the II-World War, about 31 kms away from Imphal, the road flanks the foothill of a western hill range of Manipur whereas the road orients south-ward. Past Bishnupur the romantic scene of the glittering surface of the Loktak Lake, the biggest fresh-water lake of North-east India, enchants a traveler. At about 44 kms this road is bifurcated: the right fork is continuation of the same Tedim road leading to Tedim Chin of Myanmar, it passing through Churachandpur District of Manipur. Shunting on the left fork, one reaches Moirang bazar after covering a small distance of about 1 kms. Moirang bazar is thus located at a distance of 45 km. away from Imphal to the south.

Moirang of later time has, too, an historicness in the historical event that the INA (Indian National Army) of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose hoisted the Indian tri-coloured Flag in the Indian soil at Moirang, in commemoration of which the Netaji Memorial Building has been constructed at Moirang bazar on just on the bank of the tiny Moirang rivulet. It is a remarkable spot of tourist attraction. The geographical set-up of Moirang is another notable ecological feature of Moirang in as much as it is bounded on its north by the southern fringe of Loktak Lake whose water, during the rainy season, spreads much into the interior swampy point of the land.

Municipal Moirang has the following socio-territorial segments (locally expressed as leikai):
1. Khoiru leikai
2. Oksongbung leikai
3. Pansang leikai
4. Patlou leikai
5. Konjengbam leikai
6. Hemam leikai
7. Moirangthem leikai
8. Kumam leikai
9. Mairembam leikai
10. Phairembam leikai
11. Moirangthem Leijubam leikai
12. Ahanthem leikai
13. Thana leikai
14. Thoiya leikai
15. Shribon leikai
16. Kiyam-Pukhram leikai
17. Philem-Laiphrakpam leikai
18. Maibram leikai

These leikais are distributed in 12 municipality wards. leikais No. 3 (Pansang) and No. 4 (Patlou) comprise Ward No. 1; leikais No. 5 (Konjengbam) and No. 6 (Hemam), Ward No. 2; leikais No. 7 (Moirangthem) and No. 8 (Kumam), Ward No. 3; leikais No. 15 (Shribon) and No. 16 (Kiyam-
Pukhram), Ward No. 4; leikai No. 9 (Mairembam) comprises Ward No. 5; leikai No. 10 (Phairembam) and No. 11 (Moirangthem Leijubam) comprise Ward No. 6; leikai No. 7 (Philem-Leiphrakpam) constitutes Ward No. 7; leikai No. 18 (Maibram) constitutes Ward No. 8 and leikai No. 1 (Khoiru), 2 (Oksongbung) and 14 (Thoinya) are Ward Nos. 10, 11 and 12, respectively. It is now observed that the field site i.e., leikai No. 7 (Moirangthem) and leikai No. 8 (Kumam) belong to the local Municipal Ward No. 3 (see Map of Municipal Moirang provided here).

Herewith are enclosed two administrative documents on the general socio-economic and demographic profile, the first of the entire Municipal Moirang, and the second of the Municipal Ward No. 3 only where the two sample leikais of the present study are located. As the two documents show, the population of the sample Municipal Ward (1,429, according to the Census of India 2001: Area Profile) is 8.43% of the total population of the entire Municipal Moirang (16,942, in 2001, according to the Detail Report of Moirang Municipality issued by the office of the Moirang Municipal Council). The 1,429 figured population of this ward is inclusive of a few households of the adjacent leikai, namely Hemam leikai. This is why this number is found higher than the figure of population obtained from the Census the present work takes on this selected two leikais: Kumam and Moirangthem. The Area Profile of Ward No, 3 of Moirang Municipal town (Census of India 2001) gives the picture that out of the total population (1,429: 520 male and 732 females) of this Ward, 1003 (520 males and 483 females) are literates, and their literacy rate is calculated
to be 70.2% (74.6 % males and 66.0% females); and the number of total worker is 526 (291 males and 237 females) and that of non-workers is 901 (406 males and 492 females ) of which again cultivators are 69 (61 males and 8 females), agricultural labourers are 91 (12 males and 79 females), workers in household industries are 42 (7 males and 35 females) and other workers are 326 (211 males and 115 females).

The detailed report of Moirang Municipality referred to above also furnishes a highlight of facilities made available at this area in respect of education, health care, banking etc.; it reports availability there of 10 lower Primary Schools, 1 Upper Junior Basic School, 6 Junior High Schools, 9 High Schools, 2 Colleges (1 government and the other private) and 1 Higher Secondary School; 16 government offices; Rural Hospital, Family and Maternity Hospital, 1 Charitable Hospital (private); and 1 Veterinary Hospital; and 1 United Bank of India (branch), 1 Co-operative Bank (branch) and 1 Rural Bank.

It is an irony of urbanism at Moirang, probably as usual of rural towns, that the Moirang Municipality area (6.013 sq. kms as so furnished in the Detailed Report of Moirang Municipality by the office of the Moirang Municipal Council) is fringed by paddy fields on all other than on the north where the southern extent of the big Loktak lake directly meets the boundary of Moirang in this direction. The swampy terrain in this southern expanse of this lake provides an ecological niche for piscicultural activities of some of the Moirang
urbanites; the official report referred to above estimates this piscicultural area to be 126.034 acres whereas that of the agriculture area to be 641.91 acres. Besides those who are taken to piscicultural activities in the above-mentioned swampy area, a few other Moirang fishermen go far to the Loktak proper on daily business for fishing operation, particularly by adopting the methods of fishing locally expressed as longthrai khonba and langgoi tanba. Traditionally the Moirang fishermen specialized in these two methods of fishing are noted for their expertise.

On the other hand, there may be observe at lest semblance of urbanity within the bounds of the Municipal area, particularly in and around the market place, Moirang bazar, with hospitals, schools, colleges, banks, government offices, etc.; scattered here and there. Passing through Moirang bazar and intersecting longitudinally Municipal Moirang landscape in the middle, the road bifurcating from the State Highway of Manipur, namely Tidim road, serves as the communication life-line of Moirang, it connecting with Imphal, capital city of Manipur to the north and with a number of villages dispersed far and wide to the south and the east. Just past the Moirang bazar another road leaves the said life-line towards the north-east to connect the island villages of Thanga, Karang and Ithing with Moirang.
Ward: Moirang (M Cl) - Ward No.3  
Town: Moirang (M Cl)  
SubDistrict: Moirang Sub-Division  
District: Blahmapur  
State: Manipur

(Source: Census of India 2001)

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<td>Sex Ratio (0-6 Years)</td>
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<td>Sex Ratio (SC)</td>
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<td>Proportion of SC population (%)</td>
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<td>Proportion of ST population (%)</td>
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<td>Literacy Rate (%)</td>
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<td>Work Participation Rate (%)</td>
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** excludes Mao Maram, Paomata and Pumui sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur state.
OFFICE OF THE
NOIRANG MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

Detail Report of Noirang Municipality regarding the following items:

**Item No. 1.** Municipal Map Provided. Area 6.013 sq Kms.

- *2. Industrial area and its sites marked on the Map under index sign.*
- *3. Commercial area also noted on the Map with index symbol.*
- *4. Places of Schools, Colleges, Hospitals etc are noted on the Map.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population in Lacs</th>
<th>Govt. Census</th>
<th>Growth Rate %</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>16684</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>17,178</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.87%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>19,962</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Municipal Censo**

- 2001: 16942
- 2006: 19,962

**No. of schools**

1. 10 Nos of L.P. Schools
2. 1 U.J.B. School
3. 6 Nos of Jr. High Schools
4. 4 Nos of High Schools
5. 2 Nos of College (Govt. & Privet)
6. 1 Hr. Sec. School

**No. of Govt. Office**

16

**No. of Hospitals**

1. Rural Hospital Noirang
2. Family and Maternity Hospital Noirang
3. Charitable Hospital (Privet)
4. Veterinary Hospital Noirang

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Land use</th>
<th>Residential - Commercial Units-Industrial-Agri.</th>
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<tr>
<td>In acres</td>
<td>507.3125 4,806 3,103 647.91</td>
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<tr>
<td>40% 3%</td>
<td>2.5% 50%</td>
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</table>

**No. of Banks**

1. U.B.I. Noirang Branch
3. Rural Bank

**No. of House Hold**

- 88 5,025 as per Municipal Census 2005
- 3,350
Fig. 1 Loktak Lake (eastern view): A mirror of Manipur and a source of livelihood

Fig. 2 INA Memorial Complex Moirang
3.2 Social and Cultural Background

Now, socially and culturally Moirang is a part and parcel of the larger Meitei socio-cultural system. Concomitantly Moirang society and culture is a part-society and part-culture of that larger socio-cultural body. Above, it has been pointed out that Moirang contributed a lot of her culture-historical traditions to the formation of the greater cultural traditions of the Meitei to which bigger community Moirang was assimilated in the historical past. Moirang now shares this greater tradition as it returns to her in the form of the latter’s feedback, and follows it locally as the little tradition of the said greater tradition. This means to say that the people of Moirang are now Meiteis by ethnic identity.

Common religion, common language and common social and cultural customs and norms are the marks of the collectivity of the ethnic Meitei community. Like other Meiteis the Moirang are Hindus by religion; they have been duly Sanskritized, and they speak Meitei language though there may be certain negligible variations in accent of using a few Meitei words. As regards inheritance and succession Moirang society follows the principle of patriliny, and it adopts patrilocal residence upon marriage, all thereby pointing to the custom of male dominance in their social organization. Their kin-lineages are patri-lineages, each having a male originator. A symbolic manifestation of this patrilineal spirit of their society may be observed in the Moirang, for that matter, the Meitei, folk utterance of the phrase napa machum laro, napu
*machum taro* (it meaning 'let your father and father's father descend in you and you be grown up as they are') when a little infant is taken to bath.

At Moirang polygamous marriage is very far and few between. Most families are monogamous families. Divorce is also very rare. In the sample two *leikais* not a single case of polygamous family occurs; and only four cases of divorce are reported. Adultery is not completely unknown, but it seldom takes place. Similarly, suicide is marked by near complete absence. It would be no exaggeration to deduce from these observations of social life at Moirang that social relations in the families there are well-organized. The conjugal relations, in particular, are by and large more or less maintained in a stable equilibrium though not consistently harmonious all the time; occurrence of certain vicissitude in the said relations cannot, of course, be totally ruled out. Here the commendable sense of patience the Moirang women possess may be noted; Moirang males, young and old, are in majority taken to the personal habit of drinking alcohol, a habit that usually entails in causing frictions and commotion in the relations of a female with her husband. Seemingly the Moirang women take such habits of their male folk just as 'given' affair; they assume this attitude possibly under the idea that unnecessary concern with such an affair should not raise obstacle to their devotion to realizing the real social meaning of their family life i.e., achievement of success in producing more successful children than those of other families in their vicinity.
Truly, Moirang social life is characterized by a strong sense of competitiveness most visibly at the inter-family level. Families compete in all walks of life. The less-have families manage to get over the financial constrains they are faced with to show off this might in situation of need at par with the more-have families can do. They compete in personal dresses and decorations, at any cost and by any means on the part of those who are in lower economic standings. The Moirangs take expenses more as a social need than as an economic requirement; both the haves and the have-nots are in this spirit. One can observe this socialistic disposition of the Moirangs, where economic socialism marked by its absence, most palpably in giving bridal gifts on the social occasions of marriage. In marriage of a girl of a family of lower economic profile her parents and other members of her leave no pain and trouble to send her off with parental gifts of as many varied items as possible, really huge quantum of gift by the local standard, almost to the tune of the magnitude and multiplicity of the items of gift that the parents of the economically high families comfortably afford to give on marriages of their daughters. What one on closer observation may find difference between the rich families and those of less economic resources on matters of giving bridal gift only in the gift articles in the form of gold ornaments. This difference is however, less publicly noticeable. So far as the publicly tangible articles of gift are concerned, there would be little difference of the parental marriage gifts to their daughters between the two classes of families in terms of the variety and
counts of each of the articles. Certainly, to a casual observer it would appear that the Moirang families are all equally affluent.

It is worthy of mention in the above context that as in other Meitei social population the Moirangs have the sort of socio-economic mechanism that enables the less affluent families to spend huge enough by the local standard on the social occasions of marriage and the like. The mechanism in point consists in a rather socialistic collective scheme of saving and expenditure organized especially to meet the financial demands of such big social occasions. This organized scheme work in the great variety of co-operative saving and credit societies, locally called marups, in which funds are raised through equal monthly contributions of the members for the periods depending on the amount to be accumulated and accordingly the number of members involved. The case amount thus raised is either used in buying the articles of the collective choice of the co-operative societies (marup) for equal distribution among the members concerned or is distributed in equal shares among the members on monthly basis till the last member gets his or her share, with a nominal mutually agreed interest of money paid variably by the earlier recipients of the shares, cash or kind, fixed in accordance with the orders of months in which they got their shares. Several types and forms of marups are run in this locality.

Also in the sphere of giving their children modern education the Moirangs do compete, irrespective of the varied economic and social
backgrounds of their families. It must be pointed here that it is the mother who is the most effective force in architecturing the prospective future of her children not lower in social standing than those of others' children. Even a widow or a woman whose husband and other members of the family are not helpful in upbringing her child or children in this regard, solely shoulders with hardships and patience the burden, as it is deemed to be her bounden duty and an ultimate aim of her life, of sending her child to the school and college, besides her other sundry tasks to upkeep her child in all possible conditions of the latter’s life in the society. This role of a Moirang mother, particularly of low socio-economic profile, reminds one of the working of a sub-model of the Emoinu model of womanhood identified above. This sub-model refers to the Khamnu type of 'Emoinu-model' mentioned above already.

Competitions in the social fabric of Moirang have been observed above to be actively working; these appear, however, to be properly checked and balanced as these seldom lead to conflicts. Enmity between any two persons may at most assume relations of mutually not speaking terms; it rarely explodes into any criminal act of definable category. It is not exactly known as to what cultural mechanism of the people keeps their conflicts in their observably subdued from. It is difficult to ascertain the element of the people's cultural refinement that possibly works as the raison d'être of softening their passion of enmity and hatred. Amazingly indeed, the people's sense of jealousy is kept arrested in the form of rivalry; truly this is a collective character of the Moirangs.
Now, the present discourse of observations of the Moirang people turns to the trait of distinctiveness of this people. One remarkable distinctiveness of the people may be explored, quite relevantly to the present study, in the invention of the lai-harauba festival traditions. Above, it has been pointed out that la-harauba is the characteristic indigenous national festival of the Meitei, and this grand festival originated in Moirang chiefdom of early history. This festival may summarily be identified as an elaborated ritual dramatization in a folk theatrical form of the whole cycle of life process of human beings, expressed in, among others, an aesthetic elegance of near perfection as so perceived in the creative minds of original designers (Moirang) of the whole drama. In terms of its moral value, this festival is the summum bonum of the entire ethical system of the community, and ideologically it is the gentile craft of the rulers of the local chiefdom, in which case, for instance parental genealogy of the chief of the domain is contrivingly traced to the divine couple in whose honour the festival is celebrated, and hence legitimization of the authority of the chief to rule the chiefdom. The drama is imbued its ritual meanings as it is performed at the temple of the divine couple represented as the original divine creators of the universe, and it is celebrated in the name of the divine family by doing which the original divine Father and Mother are pleased and rejoiced (hence the name of the festival lai-harauba, meaning 'rejoicing of the god and the goddess'), whose that very rejoice and pleasure is believed to be the source of prosperity in all
dimensions of the chief and his consort, as well as of the entire community celebrating the festival.

Of the several parts of the lai-harauba ritual drama, laibou chongba is the most important part of the daily ritual. Laibou chongba is the symbolic expression of the creation of the human body through dancing movements with sixty-four specific hand gestures, each corresponding to one each of the sixty-four biological sequences of creation of the human anatomy. The sixty-four sequences in point are movements showing (after Manjusri Chaki-Sircar, 1984:142-143):

1. birth canal and womb
2. roof of the head
3. forehead
4. two sides of the head
5. front part of the head
6. eyebrows
7. corners of the eyes
8. eyes
9. bridge of the nose
10. nose
11. nostrils
12. checks
13. upper lip
14. lips
15. teeth
16. chin
17. ears
18. ear hole
19. back of the head
20. throat
21. shoulder
22. arms
23. entire shoulder
24. arms
25. elbows
26. inner forearms
27. wrists
28. tops of the palms
29. palms
30. fingers
31. nails
32. lines of palms
33. circular lines on the tips of the fingers
34. spinal cord
35. pulse at the wrists
36. breast
37. touching of the left and right fingers and touching of the left and right thumbs with middle fingers

38. breast-plate

39. heart

40. abdomen

41. waist

42. buttocks

43. anus

44. womb

45. sacrum

46. lower thighs

47. groin

48. upper thighs

49. knees

50. shin bones

51. calves

52. ankles

53. ankle bones

54. heel

55. tops of the feet

56. soles of the feet

57. toes

58. points of the toes
59. toe nails
60. lines under the toes
61. arches of the feet

Shaki-Sircar adds: now, the shamans (locally termed maibis) give a finishing touch to the entire body. Next, the shamans perform a dance asking for the soul of the body from the God, the immortal. In the final step the shamans dance to transmit the soul to the body. She furnishes her drawings on those sixty-four sequence of a human body (see ibid: 144-147).

Creation of the human body in laibou chongba episode of the ritual drama of lai-harauba is succeeded by the cultural expressions of the birth of the baby and the cares taken for it. First, a hut is constructed for delivery of the baby; earlier the Meiteis used to do that and called it Chabok-sang (hut for delivery of the baby) for the common people, and wargon-sang in the royal families. The local word maibi applies not only to those priestesses conducting ritual administration on religions occasion like lai-harauba, but also to the mid-wife. In mundane life it is the mid-wife who attends to delivery cases. In lai-harauba scene of delivery the priestess herself takes the role of a mid-wife. She expresses in gestures of dance all the sequences of the process of child-birth; thus, by touching her own buttock she yells that the baby is born; makes gesture of wiping the baby by way of bathing it. The next dance gestures are those of covering the baby with a clean cloth and nursing it till it grows up when it wants to dress up. Now, the maibi dances in the motif
of clothing the baby while singing in a melodious tune. Now, comes in the scene of constructing a house for the lord to live in; this is done in all its stages, such as laying foundation, leveling the ground, designing of the rooms, fixing of pillars, plastering of the walls etc., expressed through the corresponding gestures of dance accompanied with music of drums and pena (an indigenous form of harp). This accompaniment of music and songs is a regular phenomenon in all the symbolic gesture of dance in lai-harauba ritual drama performed in the open theater at the temple courtyard of the deities worshipped. Next in the sequence of the performances of laibou chongba ritual is that of the economic activities of fruit gathering, hoeing, sowing of seed, harvesting, sowing of cotton seed, picking of cotton, spinning and weaving, all expressed in symbolic movements and gestures of dance songs and music. All other lores of social and cultural livelihood in the domestic setting are also similarly dramatized till the marriage of the man (construed in this context as a divine lord) upon attaining maturity.

A cultural ingenuity of superb quality must have been observed in the above description of one of the core components of lai-harauba ritual drama, in as much as it portrays the cosmic representation of the humanization of man’s experience of birth and growth of a child in an amazingly artistic style of cultural expressions. There are yet many more core episodes of the lai-harauba ritual drama messaging such stupendous cultural meanings of human life in the society as apart of the cosmos. These meanings cultural of high order of this ritual drama apart, lai-harauba assumes also a value of
utility of terrestrial kind in that it induces human (reproductive) fertility among the participant members of the community performing this grand festival since this dramatization of human life in a cosmic representation is set in an all-through pervading air of romantic and erotic gestures nakedly expressed in the dance movements and songs of the priests, the priestesses, and the music of the musicians, all so designed in the name of the pleasure and rejoice of the deities. Augmentation of human population was an historical necessity in the valley of Manipur then when this valley was as arena of several chiefdoms each warring against the other for political supremacy. Aggrandizement and strengthening of population base was indispensable in that political ecology. That *lai-harauba* community festival originated in Moirang suggests the fact that Moirang, among those chiefdoms of the then valley of Manipur, was the first to cognizently apply the above demographic knowledge in the political-economic organization of its chiefdom for its unparalleled development, which it did by inventing the fertility-inspiring ritual drama of *lai-harauba*. By that reason, Moirang, assumingly, prospered in all walks of its chiefdom life, much ahead of the competing chiefdoms at the beginning of the local history of Manipur.

Now, the point that merits especial consideration in the context of the present work related to the appreciation due to Moirang, particularly her intellectual brain of the yore who framed the artistic and cultural designs, par-excellence, of the *lai-harauba* ritual drama whose cultural meanings of high water and the superb artistic manifestation thereof have already been
highlighted above. All this speaks about the commendable richness of
traditions in the field of art and culture of the people of Moirang in history.

Surely, it is against that glorious cultural background of Moirang that
even after the assimilation of this historical chiefdom into the socio-political
and larger cultural fold of the greater Meitei society, the people of Moirang
have been marked by certain traits of their cultural uniqueness. For instance,
the Moirang people ultimately worship their supreme deity, Lord Thangjing
Koirel-lai at their most crucial junctures of affairs even though this deity has
been placed to the status of one of the four deities presiding over the four
cardinal directions of the compass consequent upon incorporation of this deity
in the pantheon of the larger Meitei religious system. This religious reverence
for their deity is observed till to-day.