

**A STUDY OF MUSICAL COMPONENTS IN DEATH
RITUALS OF MANIPURI MEITEI'S: A SOCIO-
CULTURAL ANALYSIS**

Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Performing Arts-Music

By

Soibam Monica Chanu
Registration Number: 12020494

Supervised By

Dr. Kumar Sargam (25050)
Department of Theatre and Music
(Assistant Professor)
Lovely Professional University



LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY, PUNJAB
2026

DECLARATION

I, hereby declared that the presented work in the thesis entitled “**A STUDY OF MUSICAL COMPONENTS IN DEATH RITUALS OF MANIPURI MEITEI’S: A SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS**” in fulfilment of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)** is outcome of research work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. Kumar Sargam, working as Assistant Professor, in the School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Theatre and Music) of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. In keeping with general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgements have been made whenever work described here has been based on findings of other investigator. This work has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree.

S. Monica Chanu

(Signature of Scholar)

Name of the scholar: Soibam Monica Chanu

Registration No.: 12020494

Department/school: School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Theatre and Music)

Lovely Professional University,

Punjab, India

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work reported in the Ph.D. thesis entitled “**A STUDY OF MUSICAL COMPONENTS IN DEATH RITUALS OF MANIPURI MEITEI’S: A SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS**” submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the award of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)** in the School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Theatre and Music), is a research work carried out by Soibam Monica Chanu, (12020494), is bonafide record of his/her original work carried out under my supervision and that no part of thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma or equivalent course.



(Signature of Supervisor)

Name of supervisor: Dr. Kumar Sargam

Designation: Assistant Proferssor

Department/school: School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Theatre and Music)

University: Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

Preface

The Meitei community has a vibrant culture that is depicted in every aspect of their life. The present study focuses on the death rituals and the musical components associated with them. The musical components related to death in Meitei society, though vast and varied, have remained largely unexplored. The significance of the music, as the songs sung in the rituals, is also the main focus of the study, as it relates to the ritual performances and decorum followed and maintained. Here, the two aspects of the ritual performances, i.e., the traditional aspect as well as the Meitei Hindu aspect, have been discussed and analyzed.

It is worthwhile to note the fact that the advent of Hinduism in Manipur had a great impact on the religious, cultural, and political life of the Meiteis in the valley. From the 18th to the early part of the 20th century, Hinduism was the predominant religion of Manipur, sponsored and supported by the monarchs of the time. However, the traditional religion and practices were not entirely dead, and over time, a synthesis of the two emerged. The Meiteis came to witness a syncretized culture, which is evident in the life and practices of the Meiteis in the valley. In modern times, a trend of 'Meitei-ization' of Manipuri society, re-emphasizing the non-Hindu cultural traits, can be seen in the society, thus giving rise to polarisation between traditional Meitei practices and Meitei Hindu practices. The nomenclature 'Meitei Hindu' has been used here to clearly mark the Meiteis who adhere to Hindu practices and those who follow the traditional system and norms as Meiteis. It would help in reasserting traditional Meitei values and the Sanskritized or Hinduized culture prevalent in Manipuri society at present.

The study aims to incorporate the elaborate decorum that must be followed during the rituals and also to highlight the changes that have occurred in the performance of these rituals. Besides, the question of women performing ritual ceremonies has also been highlighted. Collecting the required documents for the research through field work has been a unique experience for the researcher. Trying to collect data by observing all the procedures being done right before my eyes was truly rewarding. But it was not all easy

for the family. While the family is mourning for the deceased and charged with emotion, it is pretty inconvenient to seek approval for observations of the proceedings. In fact, taking prior approval for recording or observing as a part of the study from a family who is emotionally charged due to the death of a family member was not easy. The hardships were worthwhile, and I was lucky to be permitted to observe and record all that was needed.

The study highlights some of the revealing aspects of the rituals and rites practice related to death in society by analyzing both the traditional and Hindu aspects in these practices. And by doing so, it aims to highlight the rich and vibrant culture and tradition of music accompanying these rituals.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I extend my deepest gratitude to all the hardworking performers in the fields of music and theatre across India. Your dedication and passion continue to inspire not only me but also countless students to pursue meaningful careers in the world of performing arts.

*I am profoundly indebted to my venerable supervisor, **Dr. Kumar Sargam**, Department of Theatre and Music, Lovely Professional University, Jalandhar, Punjab. With grace, wisdom, and patience, Dr. Sargam has offered unwavering guidance, steadfast encouragement, and thoughtful critique throughout the course of my academic pilgrimage. I count myself deeply fortunate to have been mentored by one whose intellect is matched only by their compassion allowing me to wander, yet guiding me gently when I faltered. For this rare confluence of freedom and direction, I shall remain eternally grateful.*

*I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to **Guru Naorem Jiten Singh**, Senior Musicologist, for his invaluable guidance, unwavering support, and spiritual encouragement throughout the completion of this thesis. His wisdom and presence enlightened me during the most challenging times, offering strength when I needed it most.*

*With the deepest veneration, I express my heartfelt gratitude to **Guru Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh**, Traditional Senior Guru of Manipuri Nat Sankirtan, whose profound knowledge and spiritual command of the art form have greatly nourished the foundations of my research. His generous guidance, provision of scholarly resources, and illuminating insights into the indigenous and historical fabric of Manipuri music and theatre have shaped this journey in immeasurable ways.*

*My most sincere thanks extend to **Shri Gopiromohon Singh**, esteemed Khol player and guest lecturer at the Manipuri University of Culture. His unceasing inspiration, humility, and support have been a silent yet constant strength during my academic voyage.*

*I owe a deep intellectual and personal debt to **Dr. Makhonmani Mongshaba**, Assistant Professor at the Manipuri University of Culture, for his erudite counsel and his rich expositions on the music of Manipur and India. His wisdom has acted as a compass throughout the unfolding of my scholarly pursuits.*

*With profound humility, I offer my gratitude to the following stalwarts and torchbearers of Manipuri and Meitei musical traditions. **Iboyaima**, an expert and preserver of Manipuri Meitei musical heritage. **Yambem Umakanta Meitei**, gifted performer of the Meitei traditional music. **Karam Tomba Meitei**, performer and mentor of Manipuri Pung. **Aheibam Tolen Meitei**, an evocative and soulful Manipuri traditional song vocalist. **R.K. Surjit**, virtuosic Pena scholar and revered Guru at Jawaharlal Nehru Dance Academy. **Salam Brojen Singh** and **Shobhachandra Thounaojam** dedicated practitioner of Manipuri Nat Sankirtan. Their mentorship, painstaking instruction, and patient tutelage have imbued in me not only technical skill, but also the inner discipline and humility required to serve an audience with truth and grace.*

*To **Mr. Thongam Jingo**, **Mr. Hidam Chandramani**, **Mr. Kamal**, **Ms. Ranveer Kaur**, **Ms. Diksha Choudhary** and **Mr. Naorem Dayananda**, I offer special thanks for their presence during moments of tribulation. Their silent strength and steadfast support helped me endure through the harshest trials.*

During my fieldwork, especially in the sensitive task of audio-visual documentation, I was sustained by the unspoken kindness of friends, peers, and countless others whose names may not be inscribed here, but whose contributions shall forever remain etched in my heart.

Most of all, I express my deepest reverence to my Parents Soibam Ibomcha, Soibam (O) R.K. Sanatatombi, Irom Shyamkeshor, Mitlubi Naorem, beloved family, my relatives whose faith in me has never wavered. Their sacrifices, silent prayers, and boundless love have been the invisible scaffolding upon which my dreams stand.

And finally, to the Lovely Professional University, Punjab, to every soul who has stood beside me with compassion, patience, and belief whether named or unnamed I extend my sincerest gratitude. Though your names may not grace this page, your presence lives on in every word, every note, and every page of this work.

Soibam Monica Chanu

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

- 1.1 Introduction to Manipur
- 1.2 Main Rivers of Manipur
- 1.3 Important Lakes of Manipur
- 1.4 State Language
- 1.5 Historical Background
- 1.6 Ethnography
 - 1.6.1 State Festivals
 - 1.6.2 Indigenous Games
 - 1.6.3 Handlooms and Handicrafts
 - 1.6.4 Food
- 1.7 Folk Culture
 - 1.7.1 Folk Music (Songs & Instruments)
 - 1.7.2 Folklore
 - 1.7.3 Folk Dances

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

- 2.1 Previous Theses
- 2.2 Books
- 2.3 Research Papers
- 2.4 Research Gap
- 2.5 Objectives
- 2.6 Methodology

2.7 Area of the Research

Chapter 3: Cultural Identity of Meitei Community

3.1 Introduction to Meitei

3.2 Seven Clans of Meitei

3.3 Traditions and Rituals

3.3.1 Birth Rituals

3.3.2 *Chakumba* (The Ritual of feeding rice for the first time)

3.3.3 *Lu Kokpa Nahut/Nahut Nareng Thouram* (The ritual of Shaving Hair and Ear Piercing)

3.3.4. *Luhongba* (Marriage Rituals)

Chapter 4: Death Rituals among the Meitei

4.1 Understanding Death

4.2 Rituals Before Death

4.3 Major Functions of Death Rituals

4.3.1 *Potloiba* (Cremation)

4.3.2 *MangthongThingba*

4.3.3 *Preta* Form Death Ritual

4.3.4 *Lamboiba* (Sannyas Form)

4.3.5 *Chuk Saba*

4.3.6 *Lairik Taba* (Dasha Hon)

4.3.7 Mangani Leihun /Asthi

4.3.8 LannaThouram /Shraddha

4.3.9 *Thagi Luk Katpa* (Monthly Ritual)

4.3.10 *Kumon Phiroi* (First Death Anniversary)

Chapter 5: Musical Components in Meitei Death Rituals

5.1 Types of Music

5.1.1 Vocal Music

5.1.2 Instrumental Music (Membrophone, Idiophone, Chordophone, Aerophone)

5.1.3 Cholom (Dance)

5.2 Analysis of Melodies and Songs

5.2.1 Traditional Songs (*Sanamahi*)

5.2.2 Hindu Songs (*Nat Sankirtan*)

5.3 Analysis of Musical Instruments Used

5.3.1 *Khun Pung* and Meitei Pung

5.3.2 Mangang, Jhal, Kartal, Kangshi, Sharik

5.3.3 Moibung (Conch)

5.3.4 Pena (String Instrument)

5.4 Sankirtan Taal (Rhythmic Patterns)

Chapter 6: Social Functions of Music in Meitei Society

6.1 Meitei Music and Gender Roles

6.2 Socio-Cultural Relations and Music among the Meitei

6.3 Preservation and Global Impact of Meitei Music Traditions

6.4 Economic Growth and Social Balance among the Meitei Musicians

6.5 Challenges and Opportunities for Future Research in Meitei Music

Conclusions

List of Figures:

Fig 4.1: *Potloiba* (Cremation)

Fig 4.2: Process of Cleaning the Deceased

Fig 4.3: *Ku/Kai*

Fig 4.4: Offering flowers to the deceased person

Fig 4.5: *Mei Koiba* (Fire Circumambulation)

Fig 4.6: *Humai Humba*

Fig 4.7: *Lairik Taba/Dasha Han*

Fig 4.8: *Lairik Loiba*

Fig 4.9: Arranging materials for ritual by *Arangpham*

Fig 4.10: *Ashti Sanchay*

Fig 4.11: Idol of *Tengpanba Mapu*

Fig 4.12: Idol of *Shrimad Bhagawad*

Fig 4.13: *Mangani Leihun*

Fig 4.14: *Shradha*

Fig 4.15: Morning session of *Lanna Thouram*

Fig 4.16: *Singkum Phambal*

Fig 4.17: *Sheija*

Fig 4.18: Reciting the Holy Book at *Thagi Luk Katpa*

Fig 4.19: *Kumon Phiroi*

Fig 5.1: *Cholom*

Fig 5.2: *Khunpung* for Sekmai

Fig 5.3: *Pung Macha* (Small *Khun Pung*)

Fig 5.4: *Meitei Pung*

Fig 5.5: *Mangang*

Fig 5.6: *Jhal*

Fig 5.7: *Kartal*

Fig 5.8: *Kangshi*

Fig 5.9: *Sharik*

Fig 5.10: *Moibung*

Fig 5.11: *Pena*

Fig 5.12: *Khukhong Pena*

Fig 5.13: Pena Performance at *Lanna Thouram*

Fig 6.1: Women performed in *Kumon Phiroi*

Appendices

List of Publications

List of Conferences

List of workshops

Bibliography

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Manipur is one of the northeastern states of India, surrounded by hills on all sides. The buzzing city of Imphal is the state capital. Imphal is situated in an oval-shaped valley of approximately 2,000 square kilometres. Lying at the latitude of 23.83° N to 25.68° N and a longitude of 93.03° E to 94.78° E, the State covers a total area of 22,327 square kilometres. There are 34 tribes recognized by Manipur culture that have been assimilated into Indian culture as a whole. Manipur has its own distinct character, which can be observed in its art and culture, which it proudly showcases to the rest of the world. The people of Manipur have a natural affinity for art and culture. The most enchanting aspect of Manipuri culture is a wonderful, colourful mixture of rich customs, traditional cuisines, and music, which embodies the fundamental essence of Manipuri culture, including strict and dynamic conventions, world-famous dances, and a rich history.

The Meitei is the major ethnic community that has been settled in Manipur since time immemorial. The Meitei community has a rich culture and traditions, and they strive to conserve the practices that have been passed down through generations. Music has been an integral part of Meitei culture, from birth to death rituals. This Thesis work aims to study the musical components associated with the Meitei death rituals.

There are two categories of funeral songs and music, i.e.

1. Meitei Traditional style and
2. Meitei Hindu style (which evolved after the arrival of Hinduism in Manipur).

The above two categories differ from each other in terms of song lyrics and some instruments. These two categories are still prevalent today.

The words of the song, Rhythm, Swar, instruments, etc., are not known by the ordinary Meiteis because the ordinary people who are present at the time of ritual, except

for those who are doing the rituals themselves, are emotionally and mourning for the deceased person at that time.

The composition of the ritual songs and music during the events of the Meitei death ritual ceremony, that is, the *Potloiba* (Funeral Rites), *Mangani Leihun/Ashti Sanchay*, *Lana Thouram/Shradha*, and *Kumon Phiroi*, are only briefly understood by the ordinary Manipuri people and thus remain unsatisfied as they cannot understand their aspects and meaning; and so have been blindly following the *Pandit* and *Arangpham* (Program arranger). This aspect of the ritual songs and music has not been researched specifically before. This research work aims to provide common people with a clear understanding and appreciation of the relationship, importance, and aspects of musical performances in the Meitei death ritual ceremony through songs and music. This, in turn, will uplift the mental and spiritual well-being of the people.

1.1 Introduction to Manipur

The State of Manipur lies in the Northeast of India, with a valley at its centre surrounded by the lofty hills of nine ranges. Imphal is the capital of Manipur. Jawaharlal Nehru once described Manipur as the Jewel of India. The State has a total area of 22,327 sq. km. and a population of 28,55,794 according to the 2011 census.¹ The State is inhabited by various ethnic groups that have their own distinct cultures, languages, traditions, and so on. It is also considered a mini India owing to its diversity and plurality. The beauty of the valley and its surrounding nine hill ranges earned it the name *Sana-Leipak*. The State is surrounded by Myanmar in the East, Nagaland in the North, Assam in the West and in the South by Myanmar and Mizoram. The 3/4th of the total surface area of the State is hills, and the remaining portion is valley. Geographically, the State is divided into Hills and valleys.

In the early times, the land was submerged beneath a vast water body. The earliest habitation began in the hills. When the water level decreased, inhabitants began to move

¹ Manipur Diary 2023, Govt of Manipur, Directorate of Information and Public Relations

to the valley and plains. Those hilly people started to reside in the plains by coming down from the hills. The valley dwellers came to be known as *Tam-mee*, and those who remained in the hills came to be known as *Ching-mee*. According to the book “The Meitei Society” by N. Birachandra Singh it has mention that “In the geographical term, in the Mesozoic era (230-60 million years) there was a long, deep and narrow sea known as Tethys which originated from the Mediterranean Sea and extended toward the east occupying the northern boundary of India, including Manipur. In the geosyncline sea sediments were deposited throughout the ages and depth of the sea was swallowing set by set. In the latest cretaceous (135-50 million years) orogenic activities led to the upliftment of the highland of Burma, Shan plateau including certain portion of Manipur hills.

From the account of fossils available in the eastern district of Manipur, the hills were formed in the cretaceous period the Tethyan Sea was withdrawn from this region by the great orogenic activities of the period. The process of upliftment Himalayan range, Alps and its branches took place and went on upto the late Cenozoic period and even in the Miocene period. Thus the Koubru hill was formed by about forty million years ago in the Eocene era as proved by the fossils (Kattal) available there”²

Various ethnic groups resided in the hills, and 34 of them are recognized tribes by the Government of India.³ They are: 1. *Aimol*, 2. *Aanal*, 3. *Angami*, 4. *Chiru*, 5. *Chothe*, 6. *Paite* 7. *Mar* 8. *Kabui*, 9. *Kacha Naga*, 10. *koirao*, 11. *Koireng* 12. *Kom*, 13. *Lamgang*, 14. *Mao*, 15. *Maram*, 16. *Maring*, 17. *Mongsang*, 18. *Moyon*, 19. *Lusai*, 20. *Paite*, 21. *Purum*, 22. *Sema*, 23. *Simte*, 24. *Sukte*, 25. *Tangkhul*, 26. *Thadou*, 27. *Jou*, 28. *Walte*, 29. *Poumai Naga*, 30. *Waite*, 31. *Tarai*, 32. *Kharam* 33. *Kuki* and 34. *Mate*. The valley region is mainly inhabited by the Meitei and *Meitei-Pangal* (Manipuri Muslim). Among the hills, only a place called ‘*Kwatha*’ is inhabited by the Meitei.

At present, the State of Manipur is divided into 16 districts: 1. *Bishnupur*, 2. *Chandel* 3. *Churchandpur* 4. *Imphal West* 5. *Imphal East* 6. *Senapati* 7. *Tamenglong* 8.

² N. Birachandra Singh, *The Meitei Society*, p. 1-2.

³ Manipur Diary 2023, Govt of Manipur, Directorate of Information and Public Relations.

*Thoubal 9. Ukhrul 10. Jiribam 11. Noney 12. Tengnoupal 13. Kakching 14. Pherzwal 15. Kamjong and 16. Kangpokpi.*⁴

The valley area of Manipur is approximately 2,600 feet above sea level.⁵ The land of the State slopes from North to South. The North-South distance is longer than that of East-West, and its valley, being surrounded by nine hill ranges, is a gift from nature.

1.2 Main Rivers of the State

The main rivers of the State are the *Imphal Turel* (River), *Thoubal Turel* (River), *Eril Turel* (River), *Nambul Turel* (River), *Barak Turel* (River), *Jiri Turel* (River), *Maku Turel* (River), *Erang Turel* (River), *Lokchao Turel* (River), etc. The *Barak* River is the biggest river that flows through Manipur.

1.3 Important Lakes of Manipur

The important lakes of the State are 1. *Ekok pat* 2. *Waithou Pat* 3. *Poirou pat* 4. *Kharung Pat* 5. *Sana Pat* 6. *Laphu Pat* 7. *Loushi Pat* 8. *Pumlen Pat* 9. *Loktak Pat*, etc. The *Loktak* is the largest lake in the State and also the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India.

1.4 State Language

Manipuri (*Meiteilol*) is the State language and the lingua franca of both the hill and valley people.⁶ The tribes of the hills have their own dialects, whereas *Meiteilol* is spoken to communicate with other ethnic groups. This language is the only means of communication between intercommunities. It is known by both the hill and valley people.

⁴ Manipur Diary 2023, Govt of Manipur, Directorate of Information and Public Relations

⁵ Khoidongbam Geetarani Devi, PhD Thesis, Manipuri Culture Da Mingou, p. 2.

⁶ Manipur Diary 2023, Govt of Manipur, Directorate of Information and Public Relations

1.5 Historical background

Manipur was a sovereign Nation-State in South East Asia for thousands of years. During ancient times, different clans, each under their own kingship and territorial boundaries, ruled in the State.

The kingdom was known by different names in the past. The people of Ouja called Manipur 'Ka-te'. The Tekhaos called Mekhala, Mekhale, or Mekhali. The Engbes also referred to Manipur as Mikali, and the Cacharis referred to it as Mogali.⁷ People of different regions gave the kingdom different names. In the Ariba Manipuri Sahityagi Itihas written by Ningthoujam Khelchandra, it is stated that “*Shakok Lamlen Kouba lairk adudagi khangbadi leipak ashibu mayai mayai koiren poirei namthak saron pung hainasu kouwe, laijao mingnaiba taretpu lonnana leipakpu nikhan hahandana pubiye habagi namthak saronpung kouwe; hayichaktakta leipak ashibu Tillikoktom Ahanba; khunungchakta Mira Pongthoklam; Langbachakta hanna shemba konna loiba Tillikok Leikoiren; konnachakta Muwapalli kourammi.*

‘*Soubon Yaibiren*’ haina kouba lairik aduda hairibadi leibak ashi Porei Meitei koudringeida Chakpa Langba kourammi, mathangda Muwapalli, matungda Wangam Tanthong Mayung Kuiba Lenthong Maphei Pakpa koukhi. Matung kainathangda Poreiton khuntokpadagi Poirei Meitei koukhi. Shating Shakok kouba lairikta Eri; Nungoibigi manak taipong thongi marak aduda Yai Mani kouba ama lei. Mani adu lei haibagi lam ashibu Manipur koubani.”⁸

It is significant from the said text that in ancient times, the kingdom had different names. Some of them are *Mayai Koiren Poirei Namthak SaronPung, Tilikoktomtom Ahanba, Mira Pongthoklam, Tillikok Leikoiren, Muwapalli, Poirei Meitei, Chakpa Langba*, etc. The text also stated the origin of the name Manipur, explaining that the

⁷ Shri Ningthoujam Khelchandra Singh, Ariba Manipuri Sahityagi Etahas, p. 1.

⁸ Ibid., p. 2-3.

existence of a *Yai / Mani* (jewel/diamond) in the vicinity of a place called *Nungoibi* gained its name as Manipur.

Manipur is home to various ethnic groups and clans. Each group had its own head or king. Later, Manipur came under the umbrella of one kingship during the reign of King Nongda Lairen Pakhangba of the Mangang Clan, who defeated the kings of other clans. Nongda Lairen Pakhangba became the king of Manipur in 33 AD, with his palace at Kangla, Imphal.

The kingdom had its own religion since time immemorial. People worshipped *Lainingthou Sanamahi*, *Ebudhou Pakhangba* and *Ema Leimarel Shidabi*. They had their own distinct culture and tradition. During the early 1700s, Hinduism arrived in Manipur, and the then king adopted the religion.

Hinduism started to influence the region during the reign of King Meidingu Charairongba (1697-1709).⁹ After the death of King Meidingu Charairongba in 1709, his heir, King Pamheiba, reigned. During his period, King Pamheiba adopted a sect of Hinduism under the disciple of one Baman Gangdhar. In 1716 A.D., Santadas Gosai, along with Bhagaban Das and Narayan Das, stepped into the kingdom. King Pamheiba became a disciple of Santadas Gosai and was influenced by the preachings.¹⁰ After learning about the new religion from Santadas, King Pamheiba made the Ramanandi/Ramayeta sect of Hinduism the religion of his subjects. Following the orders of his Guru, Santadas Gosai, he burned down the *Meitei Puyas* (books, records, and religious texts) written in the original *Meitei* script before the sacred *Kangla Utra* at the capital of the kingdom. The symbols and structures worshipped by the people from all parts of the kingdom were collected and buried beneath a fig tree at a place called *Mongba Hanba*, later called as *Mahabali*. It has been cited in various texts that one symbol of Lord *Sanamahi*, worshipped by King Meidingu Khagemba at a place called

⁹ Chabungbam Jibanmala Devi, Hindu Dharma Changlakpadagi Manipuri (Meitei) gi Harao Kummeida Honglakliba Mashak, PhD Thesis, p. 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

Apong Engkhol, was destroyed on Monday, the 20th day of the Meitei month *Eenga*, in 1726.¹¹ A heavenly curse was bellowed from the sky due to such an act:

*“Khoiyum Etou Saiwonba Chinggu Etik Arubabu Utna Matourage. Chingu eibu Poirei Yimla –Chang Thang Leikai Pamsang Kenna Leirak Sarang yange. Namu Mipum Khudingbu Khoiba Liroge Yathang Konlonge.”*¹²

A reign of disaster was let loose since the curse caused sufferings and deaths in the kingdom. Later, it was revealed that all the sufferings were caused by the curse of the sinful acts. In 1729, on the 2nd day of the Meitei month of *Eenga*, Thursday, the symbol/idol of *Lainingthou* and *Lairembi* was created by two persons, namely *Nongyai Chamarakpa Ngami Aheiba* and *Kshetra Sinheiba*.¹³ As quoted in the texts, it is stated that the tradition of worshipping a symbol or idol that prevailed during the reign of King Meidingu Khagemba resumed after the incident during King Pamheiba's reign.

The adoption of Hinduism by King Pamheiba during the 18th century led to the deterioration of the pre-existing religion, culture, and traditions of the Meitei; however, this could not be extinguished to the fullest extent.

1.6 Ethnography

Manipur has its own distinct culture, traditions, language, etc. The State language of Manipur is Manipuri (*Meiteilol*). The land is inhabited by 34 officially recognized ethnic communities, each with its own unique culture and traditions. Art and culture play a significant role in the recognition of the State by outsiders.

¹¹ Chabungbam Jibanmala Devi, Hindu Dharma Changlakpadagi Manipuri (Meitei) gi Harao-Kummeida Honglakliba Mashak, PhD Thesis, p. 10.

¹² Bhogeshor Singh, Sanamahi Laikan, p. 67.

¹³ Chabungbam Jibanmala Devi, Hindu Dharma Changlakpadagi Manipuri (Meitei) gi Harao-Kummeida Honglakliba Mashak, PhD Thesis, p. 12.

1.6.1 Festivals Celebrated in Manipur

Manipur is considered a mini-India where diverse communities and vibrant cultures co-exist. The diverse communities have their indigenous festivals, which have been conducted since time immemorial. The count is added with the advent of Hinduism in the region, as festivals, new to the soil, were introduced with the adoption of Hindu culture. Major festivals of the State are:

Yaosang:

This is a five-day festival of the Meitei community, celebrated by both Meitei Hindus and Meiteis professing traditional religion and culture. It is conducted for five days from the full moon day of the Meitei month of *Lamta* (March). It is in coincidence with the *Holi* festival and celebrated in many ways, similar to one another. Donations from households known as *Nakathengba* are performed. A folk dance known as *Thabal Chongba* is a significant part of this festival. A movement for sports is on the rise, which is performed for the said five days.

Cheiraoba:

Cheiraoba is the New Year event in the Manipuri calendar. This festival is celebrated during the month of *Sajibu* (March-April). It is marked with religious rituals and feasts. On the day of *Cheiraoba*, people climb the nearest hilltops, believing that this will bring them good fortune and improve their lives.

Lai Haraoba:

For every village of the Meiteis, the Gods and Goddesses are worshipped as protectors of the village, known as *Umang Lai* (Cosmic God). *Lai Haraoba* is the festival of worshipping the *Umang Lai* for the particular village. It is a spiritual event that is performed with music and dance.

Kang Chingba:

The Hindu grand festival of *Ratha Yatra* is celebrated as *Kang* by the Manipuri Hindus. The chariot of Lord *Jagannath* is pulled by the worshippers with the belief that it will give them strength. The festival is celebrated in the Manipuri lunar month of *Ingen* (June-July). The literal meaning of *Kang Chingba* is ‘pulling the chariot’.

Heikru Hidongba:

It is a festival where the boat race is the main feature. This festival is held at an inland water body known as *Thangapat*, near the temple of *Shri Bijoy Govinda*, on the 11th day of the Manipuri lunar month *Langban* (September).

Mera Hou Chongba:

This festival is celebrated on the full moon day of the Meitei month of *Mera* (October). It is celebrated in the presence of the king, where every community participates with dance and merrymaking. Exchange of gifts is a main feature of this festival. This is a symbolic festival of upholding unity and integrity in the State.

Sanamahi Cheng Hongba:

The main ritual of this festival is observed at *Kangla*, where rice and vegetables are offered to the sacred shrine of Lord *Sanamahi* with prayers for a favourable monsoon, so that rice and crops can yield in large quantities. It is performed on the full moon day of the Manipuri lunar month of *Inga* (June-July). Individuals also perform the ritual at their respective houses where Lord *Sanamahi* is worshipped.

Ningol Chakouba:

It is a festival in which the married sisters and daughters are invited for a feast to their paternal homes. This festival is one of the main festivals of the Meitei community. It serves as a reunion for family members, strengthening family ties. Feast, presentation of gifts and blessings are the main features of this festival. The festival is held on the second day of the Manipuri lunar month of *Hiyangei* (October-November).

Eid:

The Muslim community in Manipur is known as the *Meitei Pangal*. They also celebrate *Eid* by observing a month-long holy fast of Ramadan.

Gan-Ngaai:

It is a festival of the Kabui community of Manipur. This festival is celebrated for five days in the Manipuri lunar month of *Wakching*, which falls in December or January.¹⁴ The first day is observed with religious rituals, and the remaining festival days are celebrated with dance, feasts, and the exchange of gifts.

Lui-Ngai-Ni:

It is a seed sowing festival of the tribal communities belonging to the Nagas. This festival is celebrated annually on February 15th.¹⁵ It is celebrated with music, dance, merrymaking, feasts and exchange of gifts. This festival is also significant for the cultural solidarity of the Nagas.

Chumpha:

It is a harvest festival of the Tangkhul Nagas. It is celebrated for seven days in the month of December. This festival is marked by merrymaking, social gatherings, processions, etc.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

Kut:

It is a harvesting festival celebrated by the Chin-Kuki-Mizo communities. The festival is performed on the 1st day of November every year.¹⁶ It is marked with dance, music, feast and merrymaking.

1.6.2 Indigenous Games of Manipur

Manipur is home to various indigenous games having their origins rooted in the ancient soil of the region. The present State of India, and once an Independent Sovereign State, has a fine history to tell. Battles and competitions between the ancient small kingdoms within ancient Manipur had led to the development of indigenous sports, which served physical as well as mental strength to the participants. The major indigenous games of the region are;

Sagol Kangjei:

This sporting event is the original form of modern-day Polo. This traditional game was learnt by the British and introduced globally as Polo. Seven players mounted on horseback form a team. This is a competition between two teams to score more goals. The bat or stick is known as *Kangjei*, and the ball is known as *Kanghu*. *Sagol Kangjei* has been an integral part of the culture and history of the region. This game has been recognized in The Guinness Book of World Records, stating that it has been played since around 3100 B.C. as *Sagol Kangjei* in the region.

Khong Kangjei:

As *Sagol Kangjei* is played on horseback, *Khong Kangjei* is played on foot. Seven players form a team. It shares several similarities with modern-day hockey. The stick used in the game is made of bamboo with a bent bottom to carry and hit the ball. The ball is made of bamboo root. The game requires strength, wittiness and knowledge of wrestling (Traditional *Mukna*).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

Yubi Lakpi:

Yubi Lakpi means "grabbing a coconut." It is, in many ways, similar to the modern game of rugby. In *Yubi Lakpi*, a greased coconut is used as a ball. In this game, seven players form a team. The game showcases masculinity, physical strength and skills of the players.

Kang:

It is an indoor game played on a smooth earthen surface. An oval-shaped striker known as 'Kang' is used to hit targets known as *Kangkhil*. The game is played with seven players per team. It is usually played during the summer season and played for fixed time durations. Strict codes are maintained while playing this game.

Hiyang Tannaba (Boat race):

Hiyang Tannaba is an event featuring a boat race conducted at a certain reserved inland water body known as *Thangapat*. The boats used in this event are known as *Heeyang* (or *Heeyai*) *Heeren*, which literally means supreme boat. It is not only a competitive event; it carries spiritual significance. The participants adorn themselves in traditional attire, and the boats are decorated to depict cultural or religious significance.

Thang Ta and Sarit Sarat:

Thang Ta and *Sarit Sarat* are the traditional martial arts forms of Manipur. The literal meaning of *Thang Ta* is 'Sword and Spear', and *Sarit Sarat* refers to the techniques of one-to-one combat. In olden times, every youth of Manipur was trained in these martial arts. It contributed to the creation of a healthy society and trained warriors to safeguard the nation.

1.6.3 Handloom and Handicrafts

The State is also rich in handlooms and handicrafts, which include pottery, bamboo and cane products, wood carvings, water rush products, and textiles.

1.6.4 Food

The staple food of the region is rice, and its cuisine is influenced by the climate and topography of the region. Noteworthy indigenous dishes of Manipur include *Eromba*, *Chamthong*, *Singju*, *Kangsoi*, etc.

1.7 Folk Culture

The scope of folk culture with respect to a particular region is very vast. It comprises the practices from past generations that have been passed down to the present generation. To discuss the folk culture of a region, the rituals practised from birth to death of an individual, the culture of the communities inhabited, religious beliefs, etc., are to be taken into account. Within the category of folk culture, the areas of Folk Music, Folk Dance, and Folklore are discussed here.

Like other regions of the globe, Manipur also has a rich culture. These cultures have been an intrinsic part of Manipuri society since time immemorial. The age-old cultural practices are still prevalent in Manipur

The rich Folklore, folk music and folk dances of the region are the outgrowth of the age-old diverse culture, traditions and history of the State. Among the indigenous forms of dance, *Maibi Jagoi*, *Lai Haraoba Jagoi*, *Khamba Thoibi Jagoi*, etc., are popular.

The State is home to several folk musical instruments like *Khun Pung*, *Meitei Pung*, *Pena*, etc. The Folklore of the State consists of myths, legends, and folktales. The advent of Hinduism and its prevalence for the past three centuries have given more inputs to the same.

1.7.1 Folk Music (Folk Songs and Folk Instruments)

Folk connotes traditional things and practices. Folk Music (Lok Sangeet in Hindi) and Folk Song (Lok Geet in Hindi), both of which are common, are popularly known as *Khunung Eshei* in Manipur. A folk song is a component of folk music. Whereas, in recent trends, folk music is seen as segregated from the song and taking a unique and popular form of music.

Folk Songs:

The definition of folk song is not easy to lay down in simple words. It can be considered the original manifestation of countryside or village life experiences, which are very close to nature. It is contradictory to modern derivatives of music, which often use modern instruments and a contemporary style of singing.

Folk songs are the presentation of lyrics, which are the narratives relating to or based on nature. These lyrics are sung through an appropriate rhythm. To gain a clear understanding of the Folk Songs of Manipur, they will be discussed categorically in the upcoming sections.

a. *Lai Haraoba Eshei:*

Lai Haraoba is considered the biggest spiritual festival of Manipur. The literal meaning of *Lai Haraoba* is "Lai," which means "God" or "Goddess," and "Haraoba," which means "happiness" or "to be pleased." Therefore, the spiritual event of *Lai Haraoba* is performed to please the God or Goddess. The purpose of this festival is to seek the blessings from the God or Goddess of the village so that the villagers can prosper in every field. During this spiritual festival, the Priest (*Maiba*) or Priestess (*Maibi*), adorned in elegant attire, perform songs before the God or Goddess. The lyrics as well as the style have differences from place to place.

b. *Khullang Eshei*:

Khullang Eshei is one of the oldest forms of folk song indigenous to Manipur. Literally, *Khullang Eshei* implies 'the song of the paddy field workers'. In this form of song, human emotions such as love, affection, joy, grief, etc., are expressed in a dialogue style. The style of singing was adopted from the rhythm and manner in which farmers or workers sang during activities such as seed sowing and harvesting. The style began to be used by young boys and girls as a means of expressing romantic emotions.

c. *Louyan Eshei*:

This style of song was sung while tilling agricultural land before sowing seeds. It is sung at the rhythm of hitting spades on the agricultural land. Literally, *Louyan Eshei* means the song of tilling the agricultural land.

d. *Nonglao Eshei*:

Nonglao means calling for rain, and *Eshei* means song. In ancient times, when there was a drought-like situation due to scarcity of rain, this form of song was performed by a priest or priestess. It is a nationwide spiritual event addressing the urgency of rain as crops began to fail and water became scarce. At a stream in the meiram direction of the hill known as *Langjing Ching*, a spiritual event is performed where this form of song is sung.¹⁷ This form of song signifies the position of spirituality in the folk song of Manipur.

e. *Naoshum Eshei*:

Naoshum Eshei means a Lullaby song. This form of song is typically sung by a mother, aunt, or other caregiver to put young babies to sleep. This song has the soothing power to calm a crying child and help them fall asleep. It can create relaxation for the child and contribute to the development of their mental health.

¹⁷ Laishram Birendra Kumar Singh, Manipuri Khunnung Eshei Khomjinba, p.67.

f. *Naothem Eshei:*

This is also a form of song used to calm a crying child and help them fall asleep. It is sung by a mother putting the child on her back and singing by tapping the child's back. It is common to sing this song on a moonlit night, gazing up at the moon. This type of song can improve a child's mental health. Children who had experienced such songs during their childhood have a comparatively brighter future. The consciousness level of such children is very high. While hearing this song, hormones such as Endorphins and Dopamine are released in the child's brain, which are beneficial for enhancing consciousness levels.

g. *Khongjom Parba:*

This song is performed in a storytelling or narrative style. It has its origin during the *Khongjom* battle. In the southeastern part of Manipur, a battle took place between the Manipuri's and the British at a place called *Khongjom*.

This form of song began to prevail in Manipur as a narrative of the fierce battle and a remembrance of the sacrifices made by the brave Manipuri soldiers. It is sung using a *Dholak*. Later, this form of song was not confined to the narrative of the *Khongjom* battle. It also began to sing the narratives of Manipuri kings, myths, legends, etc. This art form has enriched and preserved the Folklore, history and other aspects of Manipur.

Folk Instruments:

Manipur is home to various folk instruments which have been used in the area of music. These instruments are mainly used in rituals and festivals. Some of the main folk instruments are given below:

a. *Khunbung /Khunpung:*

Khunpung is a traditional folk instrument of Manipur. The sound of this musical instrument is produced by hitting its surface. It is a *Pung* instrument, bigger and longer in size. It is used in the rituals that take place in the particular village. It was also used in

summoning a village meeting, signaling external aggression, informing of the elopement of a village girl, etc. This type of *Pung* is generally made by *Uningthou* or *Wang* tree.¹⁸

b. *Laibung* / *Laipung*:

Laibung / *LaiPung* is a type of *Pung* instrument included in the category of percussion instruments. It is reserved for rituals of village deities. The shape and size of this instrument are similar to those of *Khun Pung*. The *lai Pung* used at a place called Sekmai is longer in size. It is also generally made from *Uningthou* or *Wang* tree.

c. *Pena*:

The Pena is a bowed instrument closely associated with Meitei culture since ancient times. This musical instrument is used in spiritual events, religious rituals, birth rituals, marriage rituals, death rituals and festivals. This instrument was even used to awaken the king in the morning. *Pena* is of two types: 1. *Pena Achouba* and 2. *Pena Macha (Khukhong Pena)*.¹⁹

d. *Tingteila* / *Labung*:

Tingteila or *Labung* is an ancient bowed musical instrument. It is used by the tribal communities of Manipur. The Tangkhul tribes of Manipur call it *Tingteila*, and the Kabui Tribes call it *Labung*.²⁰

e. *Langtei Pung*:

This instrument is included in the *Pung* category of percussion instruments. It has been used in dance and music since ancient times. It is still in use during the Lai Haraoba festival. Both faces of this instrument are the same in size. One face is hit by a hand and the other by a stick while playing this instrument.

¹⁸ Dr. Laishram Tejbati, *Indigenous Musical Instruments of Manipur*, p.36.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

1.7.2 Folk Dances

Folk dance is a vital component of a culture. They teach a community's history, traditions, and values. They also help to preserve the culture and pass it on to future generations. Folk dances are commonly performed at important events such as weddings, festivals, and religious ceremonies.

Manipur is home to a wide variety of dance genres. Manipuri dances comprise folk dancing. During festivals like *Lai Haraoba*, Manipuri folk dances are typically performed in honour of local gods, such as *Umang Lai*. The various indigenous tribal dance forms also influence Manipuri dance styles. It is frequently done by several groups, each with its apparel, theme, patterns, and expertise. It is predominantly religious and seeks to express spirituality. It is typically performed during festivals and rituals, such as weddings and rites, especially by the Meitei people.

In Manipur, dancing is regarded not just as an art form, but also as an essential component of life and all ceremonies. Dance is a form of worship that seeks to provide a spiritual experience for both the dancer and the audience. Some of the major Manipuri folk dances are:

a. ***Lai Haraoba Jagoi:***

It is the traditional and spiritual dance performed in the *Lai Hraoba* festival of the Meiteis. The dance is presented as a worship of the cosmic God/Goddess, depicting the creation of the Universe, Earth, and the Worldly beings.

b. ***Khamba Thoibi Dance:***

Khamba Thoibi is a traditional dance performed in India's Manipur State that tells the narrative of a couple's love and tragic ending. It is typically performed as part of *Lai haoraoba* or as a separate performance.

c. ***Kabui Dance:***

The Kabuis, who live in Manipur's western hill ranges, have an extensive tradition of dance and song and are famous for their magnificent costumes. During the Gang-Ngai

festival, the Kabuis execute a variety of stylized dances, accompanied by robust drums and high-pitched vocals. The boys hold sharp weapons (daos) in their hands and march in circles with girls dressed in traditional attire.

d. *Shim Lam Dance:*

The Shim Lam Dance is often referred to as the Fly Dance. According to Kabui folklore, a prophet named *Mhung* created laws that influenced all living beings on Earth. *Mhung* held a sacrifice called '*Jourumei*', to which all creatures were invited. Each species did its unique dance. The Shim Lam dance is thought to be based on the dance performed by *Tajuibon*, a flying insect with shiny wings that goes from one blossom to another, drinking nectar. The Kabuis execute the dance during their *Gan-Ngai* Festival.

e. *Luivat Pheizak Dance:*

The *Luivat Pheizak* Dance is a popular dance among the Tangkhul Naga group of Manipur. During all traditional festivals, this dance is performed, representing the various stages of farming and the humble way of life of the Tangkhul Naga community. There is no musical accompaniment beyond the quadruple tones or notes of various pitches. The dance includes vivid costumes, a variety of notes from act to act, and agile hand and leg movements.

f. *Thang Ta:*

Thang-Ta represents Manipur's ancient and exceptional tradition. It demonstrates an incredible combat skill with the *Thang* (sword) and *Ta* (spear). *Thang-Ta* represents the Manipur traditional martial arts skills. To become proficient in this skill and be ready to handle a situation akin to a war, it was normal for all Manipuri men to go through a rigorous training program. This dance provides basic battle training while also developing personal strength, stamina, consistency, and mental agility. In recognition of the numerous benefits offered by the dance, the Kings of Manipur used to have *Thang-Ta* experts in their courts.

1.7.3 Folklore

The term "folklore" is better understood as the set of narratives that are passed down from one generation to another. Culture, tradition, beliefs, historical facts, art, architecture, myths, legends, tales, etc., are passed down from one generation to the next. This set of information is collectively known as a folktale. The synonym of Folklore is popular antiquities or popular literature. This has never been private information; it is widely known and accepted as such. In various parts of India, it is known as *Lok Sanskriti* or *Lok Sahitya*. Folklore can also be considered as the unwritten accounts of human history pertaining to a particular region or group of people sharing a common history. In Manipuri, it is known as *Chinthatang Wari* or *Khununglon*. The literal meaning of *Chinthatang Wari* is 'tales that pass from mouth to mouth', and *Khununglon* implies 'the sayings of the very ancient'.

There are numerous Meitei customs, beliefs, and rituals. The Meiteis' conception of purity and impurity is reflected in their religious taboos. A bath, for example, transforms a person from an impure to a pure State. Therefore, a guy must bathe before engaging in religious activities. Since cooking is considered a religious act, a woman cannot cook without first having a bath. During her menstrual cycle and the three months following childbirth, a woman is in the pollution phase. The woman, who is thought to be polluted due to childbirth, is restored to normal conditions by a purifying ceremony performed by a priest. For the sake of the newborn's welfare, a ritual ceremony known as *Epanthaba* is performed on the sixth day following delivery.

In the Meitei community, the rites of passage for death are a significant ceremonial event. The ritual begins on the first day of death, such as *Potloiba* (Funeral), *Lairik Taba*, *Mangani Leihun* (Ashti), and *Shradha* (*Lanna Thouram*). All the rituals are performed with traditional music, etc.

It is also mentioned that when a family member dies, the clan is viewed as impure; all kitchenware is cleaned, and the deceased's clothing is burned on the first day of the death. Until the *Lanna Thouram* (*Shradha*) rites are performed, the deceased's

family members follow particular food restrictions, such as avoiding meat, fish, and pan. On the next day, after the *Shradha* ceremony, family members and neighbours taste the fish curry. This part is referred to as "tasting the fish" (*Nga-tangba*).

The Meiteis have a great belief in oracles and God. It is believed that God's mediators and messengers are a priest (*Maiba*) and a priestess (*Maibi*). Through a connection with God that is inaccessible to the average person, they performed certain rites, interpreted the mysteries of the future, and told the stories of the secret reasons behind various calamities of the land and the individual. Priests and priestesses are not part of the mainstream lifestyle; they have rules that must be obeyed. They are consulted for ceremonies involving the remembrance of forefathers (*Apokpka Khurumba*) and forest deities (*Umanglai*). In the past, the priestess served as a midwife, cutting the child's umbilical cord while the priest used herbs and sacred chants to treat some critical illnesses. They explain the causes as well as the corrective and ceremonial actions that must be taken to overcome the obstacle.

Sajibu Cheiraoba is the Meiteis' New Year, according to the lunar calendar. It is a traditional event held on the *Sajibu Nongma Panba* (In the month of April). On this day, married women visit their mothers' homes and bring gifts to welcome the New Year. It is also customary for people to climb the adjacent mountain (*Ching Kaba*) on this auspicious day after eating lunch packed with various familial curries, believing that doing so will bring them prosperity and pleasure. For the Meiteis, *Ningol Chakouba* is one of the most significant celebrations. According to the Meitei calendar, which corresponds to November, it is observed on the second day of Hiyangei.²¹ Their father and brothers invite married women to their maternal home (*Mapam Lamdam*) for a feast. Married daughters bestow blessings for the family's well-being. She also receives gifts from their father and brothers as a token of their love and happiness.

²¹ Manganleibi Loktongbam, Folklore genres of Meitei Community, article, e-pao.net, 28 July 2018.

Khongjom Parba: The style of this song's performance is narrative or storytelling. It began with the fight of *Khongjom*. A battle between the Manipuris and the British took place in *Khongjom*, in the southeastern region of Manipur. This genre of music began to gain popularity in Manipur as a means to recount the fierce battles and remember the sacrifices of the courageous Manipuri warriors. It is performed with a *Dholak*. Later, the story of the *Khongjom* fight was not the only use of this type of song. Additionally, it started singing about Manipuri rulers, myths, tales, and other stories. Manipur's history, Folklore, and other elements have been maintained and enhanced by this art form. It is noteworthy to mention the various dance forms, such as *the Khamba Thoibi Dance*, *Lai Haoraoba* dance, and the Meitei traditional sword dance (*Thang-Ta*).

Like any other culture, folktales have been a part of the genre since ancient times. Folktales in the Meitei language are referred to as *Phungga Wari*, where "*Wari*" means "Story" and "*Phungga*" literally means "Hearth."²² It has been noted that in Meitei culture, oral storytelling is a tradition that has its roots close to the *Phungga*. This is commemorated as a significant ritual in every Meitei kitchen, *Phungga* ensemble, which is a sacred space and a symbol of worship for the Goddess *Emoinu*, the Goddess of wealth. The hearth was used as a cooking source in ancient Manipur. While waiting for dinner in the evening, the mother, father, grandparents, and other family elders shared the story.

It is also known as *Chakngai Wari* in another form. In literal terms, *Chakngai* means to wait for the rice to be served. All together, it refers to a story that has been told before the rice is served. Meitei folktales are also spoken arts with a simple, creative expression that is based on fictional human concepts. No one looks for the truth or the story's fictional style. In addition to providing entertainment, these story formats educate and enlighten the public. People from the Meitei culture enjoy hearing stories that recount life's events and make predictions about the future.

²² Manganleibi Loktongbam, Folklore genres of Meitei Community, article, e-pao.net, 28 July 2018.

Therefore, Folklore plays a significant role in the reconstruction of the indigenous Meitei culture, tradition, etc., which suffered a setback with the advent of Hinduism in the region. In this way, Folklore is of great significance in the State of Manipur. Every such practice in the past, including cultural, spiritual, religious, song, dance, food habits, art and craft, rituals, festivals, costumes, games and sports, folktales, administrative setups, etc., is preserved and transcended through Folklore.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature:

During this study, previous research work similar to and related to the research topic is studied and analyzed, enabling the identification of new directions based on results from previous studies in the same field and the discovery of new facts to be added to the current study. The available publications similar to the current study, "A study of musical components in the death rituals of Manipuri Meitei's: A socio-cultural analysis", were thoroughly studied and taken into consideration while writing the results. All the studies reviewed during the current study are summarized below in an organized manner under suitable headings.

2.1 Previous Thesis

Rajkumar Satyadita, Manipuri Nat Sankirtana: A comprehensive study with special reference to its Music, 2019

Satyadita, 2019, conducted a comprehensive study on Manipuri Nata Sankirtana with special reference to its Music, which defines the major forms of Manipuri music, including the Manipuri folk music, along with a detailed discussion on the Talas of Nata Sankirtan: Theka and division of talas and details about musical instruments used in it.

Chabungbam Jibanmala Devi, Hindu Dharma Changlakpadagi Manipuri (Meitei) Gi Harao Kumheida Honglakliba Mashak, 2022.

Devi 2022 carried out a study under the title Hindu Dharma Changlakpadagi Manipuri (Meitei) Gi Harao Kumheida Honglakliba Mashak, which defines the historical background of the adaptation of Hindu culture in Manipur and the celebration of Manipuri festivals and folk music before the adaptation of the Hindu religion.

Yumlembam Gopi Devi, Manipuri Jagoi Ras: Hourakpa Amasung Chaokhatlakpa, 2013

Devi (2013) studied Manipuri Jagoi Ras Hourakpa Amasung Chaokhatlakpa, its origins and adaptation in Manipur culture. The study focuses on the local folk dance of Manipur, "Manipuri Jagoi Ras", which consists of 5 types. The study briefly describes the unfolding of Manipuri Jagoi Ras and its transformation into a Manipuri classical dance.

Shagolshem Lalleibi Chanu, Meitei Lainigi Pokpa, Shiba Amsung Luhongbagi Thourasing, 2022

Chanu (2022) conducted a study titled "*Meitei Lainigi Pokpa, Shiba amasung Luhongbagi Thouramsing*." The study briefly describes the rituals performed during birth, marriage and death in Meitei traditional religion, which also includes traditional folk music performed during the various rituals.

Khoidongbam Geetarani Devi, Manipuri Culture Da Minggou, 2021

Devi 2021 conducted a study titled "Manipuri Culture da Mingou," which includes the seven clans of Meitei and the language used in addressing respectable figures. The study provides a brief description of the cultural and linguistic changes that occurred in the seven Meitei clans following the adoption of Hindu culture.

2.2 Books

Shagolshem Kalidamon Singh, Nat Sankirtan, 2023

This book briefly describes the lyrics of songs of Nat Sankirtan performed at birth, marriage and death rituals of the Manipuri Meitei community.

Shri Khangembam Gulapi Sing, Shri Shri Govinda Thouram Seireng (Nat Eshei), 2017

This book provides a brief insight into the Nat Eshei (songs of Nat Sankirtan) performed during marriages, funerals, and Holi celebrations.

Shri Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh, Meitei Nat Sankirtan Neinba (Ahanba Sharuk), 2002

This book provides a detailed description of practising Nat Sankirtan and musical instruments (Meitei Pung and Moibung) used in it.

Elangbam Chaohal, Cholom Pareng, 2019

The book Cholom Pareng provides detailed information about Nat Sankirtan, including Cholom (a dance form), Tals of Sankirtan, and the musical instruments of Sankirtan.

Shri Khangembam Gulapi Singh, Shri Shri Govinda Thouram Seireng (Nat Eshei) Ahanba Sharuk, 2010

This book provides details about the songs of Nat Sankirtan and also mentions a few songs that are performed in Nat Sankirtan.

N. Birachandra Singh, The Meitei Society, A Study on Traditional Life Circle Ceremonies, 2018

This book provides an in-depth exploration of the Meitei community's life cycle rituals, offering a rich cultural and anthropological perspective. It meticulously details ceremonies from birth to death, highlighting their significance in shaping societal norms and values.

Yaiskul Khwairakpam, Sekmaida Pokpa Shiba, 2020

This book provides a detailed description of the rich cultural heritage and rituals performed during the birth and death of the Sekmai community, including the folk music associated with the community's death rituals.

Sairem Nilbir, Erat Thouram Thounirol, 2015

This book focuses on the traditional rituals performed during birth, marriage and death ceremonies of the Meitei traditional religion.

Dr. L Tejbati, Meitei Arangpham Phamba, 2014

This book describes the birth and death rituals of the Meitei community in Manipur, as well as the role of Arangpham (Programme Manager of ritual ceremonies) during these ceremonies.

Naorem Harimati Devi, Arangphamgi Mathou (Meitei/Meetei amasung Gouda), 2018

This book describes the rituals of the Meitei community of Manipur, from birth to death, and the role of Arangpham (Programme Manager of Ritual Ceremonies) during these rituals. It has also described the history of origin and details on the dressing norms of Arangpham.

2.3 Research Papers

Singh, M. T. (2016). MANIPURI NAT SANKIRTANA AS A MAHAYAJANA. *Voice of Research*,5(3), 12-15.

Singh (2016) studied Nata Sankirtana as Mahayajna. Nata Sankirtana, introduced during Rajarshi Bhagyachandra's reign (1763-1798 A.D.), is a unique blend of Music, dance, and rhythmic patterns rooted in Vaishnavite faith. The compositions, based on Bhagavata tradition and classical Ragas and Raginis, reflect regional influences. Manipuris consider Nata Sankirtana their own, viewing it as a collective prayer or *Mahayajna*, lasting about five hours with elaborate rituals. It is also regarded as *Drishya Kavya*, a visible poem, and a true form of worship in Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Drawing from *the Shrimad Bhagavata*,

Nata Sankirtana aligns with the belief that in Kali Yuga, salvation (*moksha*) is achieved through Hari Sankirtana, merging earlier practices such as dhyana, yajnas, and puja. Sri Chaitanya emphasized its importance for liberation. For Meitei Vaishnavites, NataSankirtana is an indispensable spiritual act, central to their lives and society.

Singh, M. T. (2020). Nata Sankirtana and Manipuri Society. In *The Cultural Heritage of Manipur. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH – GRANTHALAYAH*,6(5),476-480.

Singh, M.T. (2020) conducted a study on Nata Sankirtana and Manipuri society, as it holds a central place in Manipuri society, blending Music, dance, and rhythm in devotion to the Vaishnavite faith. Composed by great masters of the time, its *padavalis* are based on the Bhagavata tradition and classical Ragas and Raginis, with notable regional influences. Viewed as a *Mahayajna* (collective prayer), it serves as both a spiritual and cultural cornerstone for the Meitei Vaishnavites. Nata Sankirtana is deeply integrated into life-cycle rituals, particularly during death and mourning. It is performed during the *Shraddha* ceremony, *Dasha Han*, and *Asti Sanchai*, guiding the soul towards salvation (*Baikuntha Dham*). Rituals such as *Pindadan* are inseparably linked to their performance, emphasizing their role in ensuring peace and spiritual liberation. Modern studies highlight its aesthetic, religious, and social significance, revealing how Nata Sankirtana serves as the highest form of *karma*, embodying the spiritual ethos of Manipuri society.

Singh, S. R. (2021). PENA: THE TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF MANIPUR. *Voice of Research*, 10 (2), 42-47.

Singh (2021) studied the Music and musical instruments of Manipur. The *Pena*, a traditional folk fiddle of Manipur, is one of the oldest and most culturally significant musical instruments in India, yet it remains less well-known compared to other traditional instruments. Its origins trace back to before the Christian era, and it continues to hold an inseparable position in the cultural identity of the Meitei community. The *Pena* plays a vital role in the transmission of oral traditions, encompassing devotional, religious,

amorous, festive, and legendary themes. It is deeply integrated into Meitei life, accompanying ceremonies from birth to death. The study of the *Pena* requires extensive fieldwork, including observation, participation, and data collection, with a focus on four key areas: Kanglei (Imphal and its surroundings), Moirang, Chakpa, and Lois. This instrument symbolizes the rich cultural heritage of Manipur, making it an essential subject for understanding the region's traditional Music and oral traditions.

Devi, R. P. (2024). A Cultural Bridge in Meitei Community's Music, heritage and society. *Naad Nartan Journal of Dance and Music*, 12(1), 64-66.

Devi (2024) analyzed the relationship between the Pena, an indigenous musical instrument of Manipur, and the society and culture of the Meitei community. As a folk instrument, Pena plays a crucial role in the cultural life of the Meitei, occupying a central place in Manipur's folk music tradition. The primary aim of this study is to preserve, promote, and ethnographically analyze the significance of the Pena. The research will employ methods such as documentation, descriptive analysis, personal interviews, audio-video recordings, observations, and data collection from relevant books and other sources.

Misra, S. (2018). A glimpse on History of Manipuri Literature Upto Nineteenth Century: A Study. *Pratidhwani the Echo: A Peer-Review International Journal on Humanities & Social Science*, 6(3).

Misra (2018) studied the history of Manipuri literature, mentioning some of the representative literary creations up to the 19th century, and observed that, like every community in the universe, the Manipuri community also has its own language, literature, and culture, the history of which has been long belated. For centuries, Manipuri people have been having turmoil in social, cultural and political fronts. Such turmoil has brought many changes in Manipuri society and its literature, which are beautifully captured by

many writers. Manipuri literature has its richness of innate sensibility and has successfully safeguarded the flavour of its originality, whereas at the same time it has imbibed others as well in the due course of time, be it Sanskrit or Bengali.

Jackson, R. (2019). Agricultural Folk Songs of Manipur: A Historical Perspective. *Think India Journal*, 22(10), 7243-7255.

Jackson (2019) conducted a study on the historical perspective of agricultural folk songs of Manipur. He observed that folksongs are invaluable for reconstructing the early history of Manipur, reflecting its cultural and social practices. In early Manipuri society, important events were recorded and transmitted through folksongs, embodying collective memory and values. As an agrarian society, Manipur integrated agricultural rites and rituals into its songs to boost productivity. Notable examples, such as *Louta Ishei*, *Louyal Ishei*, and *Nonglao Ishei*, have been integral to its cultural heritage since ancient times. These songs celebrate agricultural practices and serve as historical records, offering insights into the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of early agrarian life in the Manipur valley.

Devi, P. L. (2014). GENESIS OF MANIPURI DANCE: A PERSPECTIVE. *IRJMSH*, 5(6).

Devi (2014) conducted a study exploring the historical development of Manipuri Dance, tracing its origins to the early history, which is intertwined with mythology and social-cultural values. It highlights the essential role of artists in preserving the art's innate values, cautioning against reducing it to mere business motives. True artistry requires an understanding of the intrinsic beauty of the art, which only refined individuals can appreciate. For dancers, this involves recognizing the art's deeper meaning, learning its vibrant aspects from knowledgeable teachers, and committing to rigorous practice with dedication. By upholding these principles, artists can maintain the integrity and essence of Manipuri Dance.

Devi, D. S. (2014). RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND BELIEFS PRACTICES AMONG THE MEITEI IN MANIPUR. *International Research Journal of Human Resources and Social Sciences*, 1 (5), 48-55.

Devi D.S. 2014 conducted a study examining the cultural and religious beliefs and practices of the Meitei Vaishnavite community in Manipur, with a focus on their role in society. Rather than exploring all aspects of Meitei life, the research concentrates on specific religious practices and the community's perceptions of them. The study was conducted in Pishumthong Oinam Leikai, a locality in Imphal West district inhabited primarily by members of the Oinam clan. Using non-participant observation, the researcher conducted interviews with participants during rituals to gather insights. The research highlights how religious beliefs influence various aspects of Meitei life and explores their impact on social dynamics. The study highlights the significance of religious practices in preserving cultural heritage and promoting communal identity, providing a deeper understanding of the interplay between religion and society within the Meitei community.

Singh, M. T. (2022). MANIPURI NATA SANKIRTANA. *SPECTRUM*, 8, 202-211.

Singh (2024) studied Manipuri Nata Sankirtana as a cultural heritage and observed that Nata Sankirtana, introduced during the reign of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra (1748-1799), is a unique Manipuri art form that combines music, dance, and rhythm, rooted in the Vaishnavite tradition. Composed in line with the Bhagavata tradition and classical Ragas, it is seen as a Mahayajna, or collective prayer, lasting about five hours. Central to life and death rituals in Meitei Vaishnavite society, it provides spiritual solace during mourning periods, including Shraddha and Dashahan, guiding souls to *Baikuntha Dham*. Naam Sankirtana also plays a vital role in rituals like *Asti Sanchai*. Deeply ingrained in Manipuri culture, it remains an indispensable expression of devotion and heritage.

Singh, L. S. (2021). THE MOTOR SKILLS FOR PERFORMING MANIPURI PUNG CHOLOM. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 2(2), 151–160.

Singh (2021) studied the motor skills for performing Manipuri pung cholom and noted that Manipuri Nata-Sankirtana is a unique performing art form in which male musicians sing Sankirtana, accompanied by instruments such as the Pung (percussion), Kartal (cymbals), and Moibung (conch). The Pung, central to the performance, is showcased through *Pung Cholom*, a dynamic display of dexterous body movements synchronized with rhythmic beats by the Pungyeiba (Pung player). This study aims to identify body parts involved, foundational techniques for playing the Pung, and the motor skills required for Pung Cholom. Using interviews and observations, it explores the psychomotor aspects of Pung Cholom, offering insights into its artistry and contributing to global appreciation of performing arts.

Manna, S. (2020). THE EMERGENCE OF GAUDIYA VAISHNAVISM IN MANIPUR AND ITS IMPACT ON NAT SANKIRTANA. *International Journal of Research-GRANTHALAYAH*, 8(7), 130-136.

Manna (2020) studied the emergence of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Manipur and its impact on Nata sankirtana and found that Gaudiya Vaishnavism, initiated by Shri Chaitanya in the 15th century, reached Manipur through King Bhagyachandra, who, along with his daughter Bimbabati Devi, visited Nabadwip and established a temple to Lord Govinda in the Manipuri village of Nabadwip. Bhagyachandra's introduction of Gaudiya Vaishnavism had a profound influence on Manipuri culture, as exemplified by Nat Sankirtana, a unique blend of Bengali and Manipuri traditions. The cultural exchange infused Gaudiya Vaishnava elements, such as Rasleela, Gour Leela, and Rakhail Ras, into traditional practices like Lai Haraoba. This synthesis also popularized Bengali language and literature in Manipur, with key Vaishnav texts, including *Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu* and *Ujjwal Nilmani*, being translated into Manipuri. The Nat Sankirtana tradition, transmitted through master-disciple lineage, is now an institutionalized cultural heritage, recognized by UNESCO as a vital art form. Despite modern consumerist pressures, this

ritual-rich tradition continues to thrive as an enduring symbol of Manipuri and Indian cultural heritage, deeply rooted in devotional practices.

Singh, N. N. (2015). Religion and Life Cycle Rituals among the Meiteis of Manipur. *Modern Research Studies*, 2(3), 602-633.

Singh (2015) studied the Religion and Life Cycle Rituals among the Meiteis of Manipur and observed that religion, as a universal system of beliefs, helps channel human emotions, address the unknown, and give meaning to life cycle rituals, which mark significant transitions in an individual's life. Among the Meiteis of Manipur, life cycle rituals, including birth, marriage, and death, are vital elements of their socio-cultural life and traditional religion. These rituals guide individuals through life's stages and eventually reconnect them with nature after death. Deeply rooted in Meitei philosophy, these ceremonies ensure the proper functioning of Meitei culture by integrating its complex traits. They remain indispensable aspects of Meitei identity and their cultural and spiritual heritage.

Singh, N. N. (2018). RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS AMONG THE MEITEIS OF MANIPUR. *Anthropology Today*, 4, 69-80.

Singh (2018) studied religious ceremonies and festivals among the Meiteis of Manipur. According to the findings, religion plays a vital role in Meitei culture, with ceremonies and festivals being integral to their traditional Sanamahi religion. This study explores these religious practices through anthropological methods like observation, interviews, and case studies, along with secondary sources such as ancient texts and journals. Meitei festivals and ceremonies reflect their unique philosophy, language, script, and long history, despite being a small community of under 1.5 million in Manipur. Renowned cultural contributions like Polo and Ras Lila highlight their rich heritage. Religious ceremonies and festivals not only preserve Meitei identity but also sustain the full functioning of their culture, underscoring their significance in defining and shaping the Meitei way of life.

Caesar, T., & Sanasam, R. (2018). The Oral Folk Literature of the Ancient Meiteis of Manipur: An Analysis of its Cultural Significance. *Space and Culture, India*, 6(1), 29-37.

Caesar and Sanasam (2018), analyzed the cultural significance of the oral folk literature of the ancient Meiteis of Manipur. Oral narratives, including myths, legends, proverbs, and songs, are the earliest forms of storytelling, integral to religious rituals, folk music, and cultural traditions. These narratives, passed down through generations, reflect the culture of the people and serve as sources of entertainment during festivals and ceremonies. With the advent of writing, oral stories have evolved into valuable literary works, but their traditional charm, often conveyed through improvisation and gestures, is difficult to transcribe. As globalization and commercial entertainment threaten these indigenous arts, it is crucial to preserve them for their role in maintaining cultural identity, collective wisdom, and moral values.

Sana, R. S. (2020). A Historical Study of Manipuri Vaishnavite form of Dance: Nat Sankirtan. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, 7(11), 939-946

Sana (2020) studied the historical study of Manipuri Vaishnavite form of dance, Nat Sankirtan. He observed that the development of Manipuri dance and Music can be divided into two periods: before and after the introduction of Hinduism. The introduction of Vishnu worship in Manipur began during the reign of King Kyamba (1467-1508 CE), which brought with it rituals and ceremonial singing forms, such as Kirtan. The Chaitanya style of Vaishnavism, embraced by King Gareeb Niwaz in 1717 CE, further promoted religious performance arts centred on Lord Krishna. During his reign, the 'Ariba Pala,' the earliest Nata Pala group, became the central ritual for worshipping Lord Rama. In the late 18th century (1763-1798 CE), under Maharaj Bhagyachandra, Drupad Hari Sankirtana gained prominence, and the temple of Shri Govindajee was established, marking a significant development in Manipuri culture. The introduction of Nata Sankirtana as a ritual prologue to Raas Leela was a remarkable contribution.

Singh, N. N. (2018). Meitei Religion: An Emic Perspective. *Spectrum*, 6(1), 72-80.

Singh (2018) studied the emic perspective of Meitei religion and found that Meitei traditional religion reflects a synthesis of Hinduism and the indigenous Sanamahi faith, evolving through historical, cultural, and political changes. Initially, Hinduism gained prominence in Manipur with the support of royal patronage, influencing the external practices of Meitei society, while core traditional beliefs remained intact. Over time, Hinduism became dominant, integrating traditional deities into its rituals, which were often performed by Brahmins. However, a revival of the Sanamahi religion emerged, particularly after Manipur's merger with India and the subsequent resurgence of the Manipuri language and script. In the present post-synthesis period, most Meiteis outwardly identify as Hindus, celebrating festivals like Holi, Durga Puja, and Rath Yatra. However, they maintain daily worship of traditional deities such as Sanamahi, Leimarel Sidabi, and Umang Lais at home. This dynamic interplay between Hinduism and traditional practices highlights a spiral path of synthesis, where external Hindu elements coexist with deeply rooted indigenous values and customs.

Singh, M. T. (2020). Nata Sankirtana and Manipuri Society. In *The Cultural Heritage of Manipur* (pp. 119-126). Routledge.

Singh (2020) carried out a study on Nata Sanirtana and Manupuri society and observed that it is a sacred blend of Music, dance, and rhythm rooted in Vaishnavite traditions and classical Ragas and Raginis. Deeply significant in Manipuri society, it serves as a Mahayajna (collective prayer) that lasts approximately five hours, blending rituals and artistic expression. Nata Sankirtana plays a vital role in life's final rites, offering spiritual solace through the chanting of Hari-naam to ease the soul's journey to Vaikuntha Dham. During the Shraddha ceremony, Sankirtana is central to rituals such as Pindadan and Raga Bijay, marking the completion of the rites. It also accompanies other death rituals, including Dashahan and Asti Sanchai, and incorporates readings of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita. For Meitei Vaishnavites, Nata Sankirtana is an indispensable aspect of

spiritual and cultural life, symbolizing the highest karma and embodying both devotion and tradition in every phase of existence.

Ahmed, M. M., & Singh, P. K. (2008). Plant-lore with reference to Muslim folksong in association with human perception of plants in agricultural and horticultural practices. *Notulae Botanicae Horti Agrobotanici Cluj-Napoca*, 36(1), 42-47.

Ahmed and Singh (2008) studied Plant-Lore with Reference to Muslim Folksong in Association with Human Perception of Plants in Agricultural and Horticultural Practices and observed that the Manipuri-speaking Muslim community in Manipur demonstrates a deep connection with plants, reflected in their agricultural and horticultural practices, as well as in their folksongs and proverbs. Their ethnobotanical traditions highlight the conservation of plants like *Pogostemon purpurascens* Dalz, which is often grown in graveyards due to its religious significance. Plants frequently appear in language as metaphors and expressions, including references to citrus plants for private matters. Folksongs not only convey cultural heritage but have also been observed to positively influence plant growth. This interplay of human-plant interaction emphasizes both cultural and ecological significance, promoting conservation and sustainable living practices.

Singha, S. (2017). Wari Leeba: The Declining Storytelling Tradition of the Meiteis of Manipur and Tripura. *Journal of North East India Studies*, 7(1), 33-46.

Singha (2017) examined the storytelling tradition of Manipur, known as Wari-Leeba, and concluded that it is a vital part of Meitei culture. It highlights the oral tradition of storytelling, which has served as a repository of history and memories for many communities, including the Meitei. However, rapid urbanization and the passing away of older storytellers have led to the distortion and decline of this tradition. The study also explores why this storytelling tradition is less popular in Tripura, despite the presence of a significant Meitei population. The paper has autobiographical undertones, as the

researcher, a Tripura-Manipuri, reflects on the absence of authentic Manipuri traditions in Tripura.

2.4 Research Gap

The Manipuri tradition of Music and Dance is well-acclaimed not only in India but also throughout the entire globe. It has been observed that much research has been conducted regarding Manipuri Dance and Music, but most of the research covers the thematic values of dance and the musical content popular in Manipur. The Nat Sankirtan and other folk and ritual music are covered in a short overview in various projects and research conducted by most scholars and Researchers. The cultural Heritage of the Manipuri Meiteis, Music, and its association with Death Rituals is one of the major subjects that covers the musical variations in Manipuri folk life. However, there is no single research study that analyses music and songs in the death ritual ceremony. The Musical variations, melodies, and songs play a major role in Manipuri Meitei, a death ritual that is still an untouched topic, which may help in finding the long tradition and hidden secrets behind the cultural celebration. It is significant in the day-to-day life of the Manipuri Folks.

2.5 Objective

If we are born, then we are going to die one day. Any religion or community has its own dead rituals, songs, and Music. Particularly, the Meitei people know very little about the functions and the rituals as they should, because they are Emotional at the time of the function, there is less use of the sound system in performing rituals, and they don't know the structure of the song being performed. Additionally, the recitation of the *Brahmin Pandit* is not audible to the people due to the loudness of drums, kartals, and cymbals.

There are different parts performed by different people, such as the *Pandits* (*Brahmins*) in the case of *Vaishnavs*, who perform the ritual recitation; the Shaman/Priest

(*Meitei Piba*) in the case of traditional Meitei, who perform spiritual practices; and the musical performers, all of whom only know their parts.

The aim of this objective is to make ordinary people aware of the shortcomings in the importance and values of the various aspects of the rituals, their Socio-Cultural aspects, and musical components in the death rituals of Manipuri Meitei's.

The main objectives of the research are listed as below:

1. To Understand the Musical Components and Socio-Cultural values in Manipuri Death Rituals
2. To Analyze the Folk Melodies, Music Instruments and their association in Death Rituals
3. To Evaluate the various musical components, literature, and traditional lineage of rituals celebration and musical changes in Death Rituals of Manipuri Meitei's
4. To Create and preserve the musical heritage of Manipur by means of transcribing the traditional melodies and various musical component of Death Rituals which is in the process of changing

2.6 METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted to analyze the research is an Analytical Method, which is more supported by the qualitative data analysis of Manipuri Folk Tradition and Musical interchange during death rituals. A field study and survey method was implemented to gather data from various sources in different parts of Manipur. Primary Data were collected from various sources, including questionnaires and interviews with local residents of Manipur during the field Visit. Secondary data is used from books, theses, research papers, journals and articles.

2.7 Area of the study

The present thesis focuses on the death rituals of the Meitei people living in the valley, specifically examining both Meitei Traditional Religion and Meitei Hindu Religion. This study primarily investigates the musical part of the death rituals of the *Chakpa Loi* community in the *Sekmai* region of Manipur. "*Chakpa*" refers to the Aboriginal and indigenous scheduled caste community of Manipur. Rituals associated with other *Chakpa Loi* groups are not included in this study, as they would significantly broaden the scope of the work. Additionally, Nat Sankirtan, a musical aspect related to the death rituals in the Meitei Hindu tradition, is addressed. The Meitei population, who practice Hinduism, resides in the valley region of Manipur. This research is primarily centred on the Meitei Hindu religion and its associated traditions. Since May 3, 2023, the Meitei-Kuki conflict has led to significant disruptions in the Meitei-inhabited areas of *Churachandpur* and *Tengnoupal* districts. Many Meiteis have fled due to the ongoing violence. Consequently, traditional death rituals, such as *Shradha/Lanna Thouram*, were not performed, and data collection from these regions during the study period was not possible. As a result, there have been no reports on the performance of death rituals in these areas. This situation has greatly affected the traditional death rituals that have been a part of Meitei society for a long time.

CHAPTER 3

Cultural Identity of the Meitei Community

Centuries of history, religion, language, and artistic expression have produced the rich and deeply ingrained cultural identity of the Meitei community, which is primarily located in the valley regions of Manipur in Northeast India. The language, Meiteilon (Manipuri), is essential to Meitei identity since it not only facilitates everyday communication but also acts as a conduit for literature, oral traditions, and classical texts, creating a sense of continuity and unity.

Theology and spiritual rituals have a major impact on Meitei culture. Traditionally, the people practiced Sanamahism, an indigenous religion based on the worship of local deities such as Sanamahi, Leimarel Sidabi, and Pakhangba. Vaishnavism, particularly from the 18th century, has become an important component of Meitei religious life, introducing new rites, festivals, and creative representations.

The performing arts play an important role in expressing and sustaining Meitei identity. Such as Meitei traditional music and Nat Sankirtan (ritual singing and drumming) demonstrate the community's artistic vibrancy and historical significance.

The Meitei community's social structure is formed by clan structures and customary customs that value elder respect, intimate family relationships, and communal harmony. Overall, the Meitei community's cultural identity is a living mosaic made up of language, faith, art, and social practices that exhibit resilience and adaptability while maintaining a deep sense of attachment to their country and heritage.

3.1 Introduction to Meitei

The Meiteis are the indigenous people of the State of Manipur. Their settlement in the kingdom dates back to prehistory. This race has been the brave patriots who are so much attached to their land with their existing original culture, tradition and religion of their own. The Meiteis generally settle in the valley region of Manipur. In the hill areas, *Kwatha* is the only region inhabited by this race/community.

Meiteis have had their own faith and beliefs since early times. Music and dance had been a predominant part of the religious ceremonies and festivities. The quest for the origin of the Meiteis is marked by the existence of its own unique culture and traditions.

Meiteis had been strong believers in the Supreme Creator. Offerings and worship had been indispensable to this community. *Tengbanba Mapu / Lainingthou Sanamahi* is the Supreme Creator according to the Meiteis. This God is worshipped at every household of the Meiteis. The sacred symbol of this King of all Gods is reserved at a place called *Santhong* in every Meitei house.

3.2 Seven Clans of Meitei

The Meiteis have the original seven clans (*Yek / Salai*):

1. *Ningthouja*
2. *Angom*
3. *khuman*
4. *Khaba Nganba*
5. *Moirang*
6. *Luwang*
7. *Sarang-Leishangthem*.²³

²³ Rena Laishram, *Early Meitei History*, p.7.

3.3. Traditions and Rituals

The ethnic communities of Manipur have their own rites and rituals, which are part of their age-old culture. The Meiteis, who are the majority of this region, also have a variety of rites, rituals and traditions. Rituals are those religious practices inseparable from various stages of human life.. The norms and practices varied accordingly to the various stages of human life, i.e. from birth to death and beyond. These rituals are the expressions of gratitude to the Supreme Creator or prayers for our own prosperity.

Meiteis are strict devotees of the Supreme Creator. Their ancestors followed a strict code of rituals, which are very sacred. The said codes have been followed by generations to this day. These rites and rituals can be divided into three parts:

1. Rituals during the childhood period, including birth
2. Rituals during youth and the Middle Ages, i.e. relating to marriages
3. Rituals during old age, including death

These categories of rituals have been performed as a part of their culture and tradition by the Meiteis. Changes in practices could be observed with the advent of time, whereas the strict codes relating to devotion or prayer remained unchanged. The Meiteis are a God-fearing community, and they have always maintained the ancient tradition of these strict codes.

The rituals performed by the Meiteis relating to the childhood period are:

1. Birth Ritual
2. *Chakumba* (Ritual of feeding the rice for the first time)
3. *Nahut Nareng Thouram* (Ritual of ear-piercing) / *Angang Maru Kokpa* (Ritual of shaving the hair)

3.3.1 Birth Rituals

Every birth is indebted to death, which is sure to pay. All humans are mortals who must succumb to death one day or the other. It has been a practice in *Meiteileipak* (now Manipur in the Indian Union), where different rituals, from birth to death, are performed in a grand manner. Out of these rituals, when a person steps onto the earth, prayers and offerings are conducted in a strict manner, which is a compulsory practice.

In the traditional belief of the Meiteis, the raising and nurturing of a child begins from the stage when the child is in the mother's womb. In Meitei society, when a married woman's menstrual cycle has ceased, specific precautions and measures are taken to ensure the health and welfare of both the mother and her future child. The signal of the pregnancy is detected when the mother feels frequent loss of appetite and fatigue. Rituals for the unborn child begin from the third month of pregnancy after observation of the changes occurring to the mother. In the third month, the mother-in-law shall perform a sacred offering to the Lord *Lainingthou* and Goddess *Leimarel* or Goddess *Imoinu*. This offering is made on an auspicious day when sweets, milk, honey, sugarcane, etc. are offered. These blessed foods are then consumed by the pregnant mother.²⁴ The third month of pregnancy is not considered to be a complete pregnancy, where the form of a child is not attained inside the mother's womb. In the belief of the Meiteis, a perfect stage of pregnancy is attained at the fifth month. It is a practice for the Meiteis that the mother-in-law shall offer to the pregnant mother a particular food or fish of her choice in the fifth month. This practice is also conducted on an auspicious day.

Rituals before the child's birth:

In the sixth month of pregnancy, a ritual known as *Mikon Thagonba* is performed. It is a ritual in which special prayers are performed to please the six souls of the mother who are the saviours of the unborn child. In the Meitei philosophy, a human body is believed to have five souls, which are Fire, Water, Air, Earth, and Space. When these five combine into one, an image is formed. This image is considered the sixth soul. Therefore,

²⁴ Dr. L. Tejbati, Meitei Arangpham Phamba, p. 16.

in the ritual of *Mikon Thagonba*, a learned priest shall guide the mother and make her sit at the porch of the house or a sacred place known as *Phunga Lairu* (a sacred place where fire is worshipped) inside the house. And a pot filled with water, known as *Esaiphu*, is placed before her. Three or six living fish are released into the water with sacred verses. This ritual summons the six souls of the mother and seeks blessings for the health and prosperity of mother and child.²⁵ After reciting the sacred verses, the fish will be preserved in the sacred pot. In the consecutive month, one fish will be consumed by the pregnant mother each day. It is believed that this ritual gives strength to the mother and protects the unborn child. This practice is fading in modern times. With the advancement of medical science, consultations at hospitals and with doctors are being done. Medications prescribed by doctors are taken from the early stages of pregnancy through the birth of a child and beyond.

During the 7- or 9-month period of pregnancy, the paternal mother of the pregnant woman will visit her maternal home. It is a beautiful tradition of Meitei society. The paternal mother will bring materials such as cooking pots for rice and dishes, pieces of pine wood, a salt plate, etc.

During the early stage of childbirth, the pinewood is used as the stirring spoon while cooking food. A piece of pinewood is also boiled with drinking water. Pinewood is considered to be a good antiseptic and enhances the cooking process. It also helps in the speedy recovery of the mother's physical health. The young mother is also invited for a feast at her paternal home. During this feast, dishes of *Sareng* (a freshwater catfish) and a spicy Manipuri dish called *Eromba*, prepared from a banana trunk, are prepared and served. The *Eronba* dish, prepared by the banana trunk, is the main dish. It is believed that the said dish helps in preparing the body for a safe childbirth in future occasions, enabling multiple numbers of childbirth, etc., to gain the qualities of an elephant mother. This dish also helps in the qualitative and quantitative production of the mother's breast milk.²⁶ The practice of presentations by the paternal family, the offering of a feast, etc.,

²⁵ Dr. L. Tejbati, Meitei Arangpham Phamba, p. 16.

²⁶ Sairem Nilbir, Erat Thouram Thounirol, p. 4.

clearly shows the responsibilities born by the paternal family for the welfare of the mother and child. The collective responsibilities of both the matrimonial and paternal families are shown in this traditional practice.

During the proximity of childbirth, which is the late stage of pregnancy, a special ritual known as *Tinkok Laikokpagi Thouram* (meaning "ritual to sanctify from evil energies") is performed by engaging a learned priest. On this day of the ritual, the pregnant woman, after taking a clean bath, is made to sit on the porch. The pregnant mother wears a garland made of white flowers. And a sacred water pot known as *Esaiphu* is placed before her. With sacred verses, the white garland is tied to the water pot after it is taken off her neck. The internal philosophy of this practice is that the bad omens and misfortunes of the pregnant mother are transferred to the sacred pot to bear them instead of her. After this practice, the priest shall take away the water pot outside the house.²⁷ This ritual was generally practiced during the past when childbirth took place with the help of a priestess. It is not common nowadays due to advancements in medical science.

Maibi na Angang Unba (Childbirth with the help of Priestess) :

When the child is to be born, a family member of the pregnant woman shall summon the priestess to assist with the childbirth. When the child's birth takes place at the residence of the pregnant mother, one priestess is not sufficient for the occasion as multiple care must be taken during the childbirth. Therefore, more than one priestess is engaged who are termed as *Naoshumbi Maibi*, *Mayoknabi Maibi* and *Khomnoubi Khomenbi Maibi*.²⁸ It is a strict practice that the doors, windows, boxes, pots, etc, inside the house are kept open during childbirth. The Meiteis have a staunch belief that these practices will metaphorically help in the hurdle-free delivery of the child.

In the past, the Meiteis constructed a *Chabokshang* (Maternity Hut) outside the house. Generally, childbirth did not take place inside the house; it was conducted at the

²⁷ Dr. L. Tejabti, Meitei Arangpham Phamba, p. 17.

²⁸ Sairem Nilbir, Erat Thouram Thounirol, p. 4.

Chabokshang. It is a special hut constructed in a suitable location for the locality, village, or group of localities. A mattress made of straw was placed inside the *Chabokshang* for the pregnant mother to lie on. The mattress was to be well-baked in the sun to make it hygienic. Childbirth should take place above the said mattress. Immediately after the delivery, the child is washed, and the umbilical cord is cut. The cord is cut at a palm's length, i.e., about 4 cm from the child's body. At the time of cutting the cord, the placenta should be slightly patted with hands to summon the souls of the child towards its body. The verse to be used during the cutting of the cord as mentioned in *Sairem Nilbir's Erat Thouram Thounirol*:

“*Hey thawai mangamak, Miga tharaga tarukmak! Punshi nungshangba pinabiyu. Kuk-Kuk, Kon-Kon-Kon konsinle.*”²⁹

Translation: 'O! Five souls, joined by the Sixth - the image, the soul's reflection - bless us with a long life. You are called inside the body, *Kuk-Kuk, Kon-Kon*; you are embraced. ' With these verses, the cord should be cut.

The practice of childbirth at *Chabokshang* with the help of a priestess was a tradition in the past. The practice has not completely disappeared; in remote areas where hospital facilities are not developed, this is the option left for them. Nowadays, from the very initial stage of pregnancy, hospitals and doctors are consulted. The role of a priestess in childbirth is a rare sight in the present context.

Khoiri Naopham Phumba (Ritual for burial of umbilical cord):

After the delivery of the child, the cut umbilical cord is buried at a place called *Lukha* (the backyard of the house) by the father of the child. The cord is sliced into seven threads, placed at three layers of banana leaves and put inside an earthen pot. Seven white and green raw rice grains are also placed inside the pot, which represents gold and silver. The gold metaphorically represents Mother Earth, and silver represents Father Space. When the child is a girl, a pot is buried in the northern backyard of the house by offering a coin. The traditional Meitei House is a unique architectural structure having religious

²⁹ Sairem Nilbir Singh, *Erat Thouram Thounirol*, p. 5.

and philosophical significance. Inside the house, a room is preserved as *Ningol Ka* (Room for daughters). The said coin is buried in the backyard of this spot near a wall. In the case of a boy child, the pot is buried in the backyard of the southern portion, just near the foundation pillar of the house. These positions of pot burial are for the Meitei houses, which are constructed facing the east. For houses built facing north, the *Ningol Ka* is located on the left side of the house. The pot burial for a boy child is performed on the right side.³⁰

The traditional Meitei houses are no longer in use in modern times. Overcrowding of the population has also taken place. Due to these reasons, *Lukha* is not common in modern houses. In the present context, pots containing the cord are buried at a suitable back side of the houses, although the preserved spot known as *Lukha* is not common. It is the practice to bury them in sequences for the male lineage and female lineage of all the upcoming children. This is the beauty of Meitei culture that it shows the responsibilities of the sons and daughters to uphold the family when they grow up.

Ayukki Epan Thabagi Thouram (Morning Birth Ritual):

The birth ritual conducted on the sixth day of birth is known as *Epan Thaba*. This is an important ritual of the Meiteis. It is a ritual of prayers and offerings for the child who has newly arrived in the world. The purpose of this ritual is to seek blessings from the Lord, so that the child can feed on the foods provided by nature, follow the path of their forefathers, and lead a prosperous life in the future. *Epan Thaba* is also known as *Yupan Thaba*. The priestess known as *Maibi* plays an important role in the ritual. The priestess shall conduct the bathing of the child and also sanctify the parents with red cedar leaves.

In the morning ritual of *Epan Thaba*, a bamboo basket filled with paddy is offered along with a beautiful dry-fish garland and an indigenous salt plate, which are placed above the paddy basket, to the Sun God. These offerings are made at the porch near the

³⁰ Sairem Nilbir, *Erat Thouram Thounirol*, p 5.

front door of the house. A dish of raw vegetable mixtures known as *Singju* is prepared at the *Yangkok* (winnowing basket made of bamboo) by the priestess. The ingredients of the dish are Rice, *Yendem* (Indo-Malayan Taro / common aroid), Meitei indigenous salt (prepared from springs), chilli, Leaves of *Heibi* (fruit-bearing tree commonly known as meyna tree) and dried *Ngamu* fish (snakehead fish common in Manipur). The priestess shall feed the dish to the newly born child.

The feeding of the raw dish, i.e. *Singju*, symbolizes imparting knowledge to the newborn child about the varieties of food given by nature, which are required for the livelihood. The prepared *Singju* is distributed into six shares, which are kept on six pieces of banana leaves. The priestess shall take a pinch of *Singju* from each of the six banana leaves and act like feeding the child with the sound 'Mam-Mam-Mam'. The act of feeding water is also performed with the sound expression 'Kuk-Kuk-Kuk'. The procedure is followed six times. In the last round, a sacred verse is recited as: '*Hey Thawai Managamak, Miga Thana Tarukmak! Puunshi Nungshang Chakni, Charo, Charo.*' Translation: 'O, Five souls and the sixth image! This is the food to bless a long life. Have it.' The priestess acts as if she is actually feeding the dish. All six steps of feeding the child are associated with a deep philosophy and belief within themselves. In the book *E Kangkhulda Epal Thaba*, it has been mentioned:

“*Ahanba chkahom louduna enba lurokti tengpalba mapu khangnaba chakni. Charasiko. Mam-Mam-Mam (chak enba) laiia khayotnasiko kuk-Kuk-Kuk (eshing enba). Anishuba chakhom louduna enba lurokti hayi haya minglen shidaba mapu khangnaba chakni. Mam-Mam-Mam (chak enba). Kuk-Kuk-Kuk (eshing enba).*

“*Ahumshuba chakhom louduna enba lurokti sagei salai pokpa apokpa khangnaba chakniko charashiko. Mam-Mam-Mam (chak enba) Kuk-Kuk-Kuk (eshing enba)*

Marishuba chakhom louduna enba lurokti taibang thawai maga miga thana taruk fana chakniko. Charasiko. Mam-Mam-Mam (chak enba) Kuk-Kuk-Kuk (eshing enba)

Mangarak suba chakhom louduna enba lurokti panthou palem khangnaba chakniko. Charasiko. Mam-Mam-Mam (chak enba), laiia eshing khayotnashiko Kuk-Kuk-Kuk (eshing enba)

Taruklakshuba chakhom louduna enba lurokti taibang punshi nungshang chakniko. Charashiko.Mam-Mam-Mam (chak enba). Laija khayotnashiko Kuk-Kuk-Kuk (eshing enba)”,³¹

Translation: The first ounce introduces the *Tengbanba Mapu* (Supreme Lord of the Universe). Let's have it. *Mam-Mam-Mam* (dish feeding). Let's drink water, *Kuk-Kuk-Kuk* (water feeding)

Translation: The second ounce teaches the prayer *Hayi Haya*, chanting the name of the Immortal Lord. *Mam-Mam-Mam* (dish feeding). *Kuk-Kuk-Kuk* (water feeding).

Translation: The third ounce introduces the foremost father of your clan. *Mam-Mam-Mam* (dish feeding). *Kuk-Kuk-Kuk* (feeding of water).

Translation: The fourth ounce is to embrace the five souls and the sixth image. Let's eat. *Mam-Mam-Mam* (feeding dish). *Kuk-Kuk-Kuk* (water feeding).

Translation: The fifth ounce introduces the father and mother. Let's eat. *Mam-Mam-Mam* (feeding dish). *Kuk-Kuk-Kuk* (water feeding).

Translation: The sixth ounce is the blessed food for a long life. Let's eat. *Mam-Mam-Mam* (feeding dish). *Kuk-Kuk-Kuk* (water feeding).

In this manner, the ritual of teaching human food to the newly born child concludes.

After this ritual of teaching the human food, the priestess brought the ingredients used in the preparation of Singju outside the gate of the house. These foods are offered to the negative energies / evil spirits, and blessings are sought so that no disturbances are caused to the young child. In Naorem Harimati Devi's Arangphamgi Mathou, it is stated, “*Yangkok ta yaoriba Chinjaksing Ashina Nakahoigi Chakthak Pirabnii. Nouwada Mittaba Yaroi haibanachingba hairaga Heidokhigani.*”³²

Translation: ‘The foods contained in the *Yangkok* (Winnowing Basket) are your offerings. Never stare at the young child again.’ With these verses, the food will be poured at the place.

³¹ Sagolshemcha Yaikhomba *Mangang*, E Kangkhulda Epal Thaba, p. 54-55.

³² Naorem Harimati Devi, Arangphamgi Mathou, p. 10.

After these offerings to the negative energies (*Tinmu Laimu / Saroi Ngaroi*), the priestess will come back to the house with the *Yangkok*. The priestess will keep the newborn child above the *Yangkok* and sway it over the fire set at a *Yotshabi* (a three-pillared furnace). The mother of the child or grandmother (when the mother is not physically well) will sit facing the fire setup. The swaying of the child placed at *Yangkok* is done at a higher position above the *Yotshabi* fire setup. The *Yotshabi* fire setup is not standard nowadays. For convenience, a temporary fire setup is made with the help of a portable furnace, and the ritual is then performed. While swaying the child above the fire, the priestess will ask the mother or grandmother 'What do you want to take? The child or the *Yangkok*. This question will be asked three times. In Sairem Nilbir's, Erat Thouram Thounirol:

*“Maibi na angangdu Yangkok ta haplaga yotshabi mapada wangkhatna pairaga- Nacha lougero, Yangkok lougero- haina Yangkok tu koihai hai. Mama aduna Yangkok louroi, Echa louge-haina khummi. Asumna ahumlak touraba matungda Maibi duna amuk – Nacha pambra, lupa pambra? Nacha pambra, sana pambra ?– haina amuk hangi. Mama duna lupa su pamde, Sana su pamde, Echa pammi- haina khummi.”*³³

Translation: ‘The priestess holds the *Yangkok* laid by the child above the *Yotshabi* and asks ‘Will you take the *Yangkok* or the Child?’. By saying this, the priestess sways the *Yangkok*. The mother will answer, ‘I won't take the *Yangkok*, I'll take my child.' After repeating this process three times, the priestess will ask again, 'Will you choose silver or your child? Will you choose gold or your child? The mother will reply, 'Neither silver nor gold, I want my child.'

After the completion of the procedure three times, the mother or the grandmother offers coins or notes to the priestess and takes the child. This ritual manifests that one's own child is more valuable than material things like gold, silver, etc.

The Meitei Hindus practice a ritual during the evening known as *Swasti Puja*. This practice is performed among the people of the valley in Manipur, who profess Hinduism. This ritual is a set of prayers and offerings to the Goddess *Swasti Devi* for the

³³ Sairem Nilbir Singh, Erat Thouram Thounirol, p. 8.

prosperity of the young born child. The ritual is performed by consulting a Brahmin. Elders of the locality, friends, and relatives are invited to participate in the ritual.

Nungthingi Epan Thabagi Thouram (Evening Birth Ritual):

In continuity of the *Epan Thaba* ritual, the paternal families of the young mother shall visit in the evening by bringing certain materials. The parents, brothers, sisters and elders from the paternal lineage could visit in the ritual. The materials brought by them is known as *Athenpot* which comprises of indigenous live *Ngamu* (local snakehead fish), *Meitei Thum* (salt of local extract), a big size bowl filled with rice, a bamboo basket filled with necklace, bangles, anklets, *khujup* (a type of wrist string), mattress, pillow, cloth, etc for the child and new attire for the mother, betel leaves and nuts, sweets, etc. These materials are brought by women of the paternal lineage who come to give blessings to the newborn child. Prayers and offerings for the long life and prosperity of the newborn child are performed in the evening by engaging a learned priest.

In this evening ritual, the roles of the priest and a maternal uncle of the newborn child, i.e., one of the mother's brothers, are very important. The priest performs prayers for the prosperity of the child. The maternal uncle of the child performs a unique ritual known as *Ten Kappa* (act of archery). The archer, who is the maternal uncle, steps out from the house to the outyard with a bow and five arrows. He will shoot the arrows in four corners, viz. Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest. The last arrow shall be aimed at the upper space and then down to the earth, but left unshot. The shot arrows and the unshot arrow have their own purposes. The four arrows that are shot are meant to switch the bad omens and negative energies staring at the child to the Four Gods who safeguard the four directions. In Sairem Nilbir's Erat Thouram Thounirol:

“Ten kappada ashumna sonlaga kapkni. Madud - Angang Nouwa Ashigi Yeknaba, Sharoi Ngaroi, Tinmu Phattaba Laimu Phattaba, Laina Tinna Pumnamk Tindanlabane, Lai Tallabane, Tilmu Fattaba, Tilleiragano, Laimu Fattaba Laireiragano.” - ashina haina songani. Aduga Nonglam Chithek Kappada- “Nonglam

Ngakpa Lai Thangjingi Khutsu Lirung Tendagi Tenkaplabane” haina haigani. Mitomda kappada - “Mitlam Ngakpa Lai Marjingi Khutshu Lirung Tendagi Tenkaplabane”. Meiramlomda kappadana- “ Meiram Ngakpa Lai Wangbrelgi Khutshu Lirung Tendagi Tenkaplabne.” Nungshitlomda kappadana- “ Nungshitlam Ngakpa Lai Koubrugi Khutshu Lirung Tendagi Tenkaplabne.” - haigani. Mangashuba Tenjei Adud Nongthak amsung Leikha Animakta Tendamlaga Kappda kapthokte.”³⁴

Translation (the translation is not the actual word-to-word meaning, the substance of the verse is reproduced in English): The verses to be spelt while shooting the bow are: 'The enemies of the newborn child, negative energies, evil spirits, and diseases are chased. Go away, all such negative energies.' After these verses, the bow will be shot at the four directions with the following spell: While shooting at the *Nonglam* direction, 'the arrow is shot from the mighty bow of Lord *Thangjing*, Protector of the *Nonglam* direction'. While shooting in *Mitlam* direction, 'the arrow is shot from the mighty bow of Lord *Marjing*, Protector of the *Mitlam* direction'. While shooting in *Meiram* direction, 'the arrow is shot from the mighty bow of Lord *Wangbrel*, Protector of the *Meiram* direction'. While shooting in the *Nungshitlam* direction, 'the arrow is shot from the mighty bow of Lord *Koubru*, Protector of the *Nungshitlam* direction'. The last bow will be aimed at the sky and then at the earth, but kept unshot.

The ritual of archery is conducted in the early evening/dusk, which marks the action of sweeping the negative energies/spirits that could harm the newborn child. The unshot arrow is brought inside the house and kept near the child's bed. When the child suffers from any disease related to the influence of negative energies, the unshot bow is dipped into water, and the child is made to drink it. It is believed that such water will relieve the child from such negative energies.

After this ritual, the archer (uncle of the newborn child) offers money to the child and gives blessings. It will be followed by the same offerings made by the child's parents, guests, and relatives. Blessings are given to the newborn child by all of them.

³⁴ Sairem Nilbir, Erat Thouram Thounirol, p. 9.

The Meiteis take great care of every new birth in society. Care is taken both physically and spiritually from pregnancy till the birth and beyond. These rituals relating to birth signify the uniqueness of the Meitei society in terms of the expectations and nurturing towards a newborn child.

***Yum Shengba gi thouram* (The ritual of sanctifying the house):**

The Meiteis perform a ritual of sanctifying the house on the 10th day of birth. It is performed after the *Epan Thaba* ritual. When a child is born, it is considered that the house is forbidden for a certain period and no sacred or religious ceremony is allowed to be performed. The same belief is prevalent during a death as well. The philosophy behind considering a house to be forbidden when a birth or death occurs is that when such an incident occurs, there is a grave change in the family, more specifically in the mindset of the family members. Such changes are taken into account for a particular period. When the time period lapses, a learned priest or *Brahmin* will conduct the ritual of sanctifying the house, which restores normalcy to the family once again. In the ritual relating to birth, the priest sanctifies the newborn child and the mother with sacred verses. In Nongthombam Naran's *Angang Epan Thaba Thouram Pareng Ashengba*, these verses are highlighted as:

“*Mangang Luwang Khuman epudhou ahum gi matik mayaibu changiba korouhanba yoimayai taodanaba taoroinai meitreng araba ebungo nangi nashek nanganna angang ashigi kaya 10 da changbiduna thawai mapung fahanduna pukning wakhal loushing pumnamkpu afaba lambida lamjingduna punshi nungshang pinabiyu haiduna punemjaba.*”³⁵

Translation: ‘The qualities of the three Gods *Mangang* (morning God), *Luwang* (Noon and Afternoon God) and *Khuman* (Night God) are inherent to the God *Korouhanba Yoimayai Taodanaba Taoroinai Meitreng Araba* (names of the God Sun). May the power of the God Sun embrace the 10 parts of the child’s body and bless with a complete physique, sound mind, good guidance and a long life.’

³⁵ Nongthombam Naran, *Angang Epan Thaba Thouram Pareng Ashuba*, p. 13.

The sacred verse is meant to seek blessings of prosperity and long life for the newborn child from the three Gods, namely *Mangang*, *Luwang* and *Khuman*.

In such a way, a learned priest shall conduct these verses for the welfare, long life and sound mind of the newborn child. Another book titled '*Thaloi-Nongkhailon*' by Budhichandra Yumnamcha contained the following verse:

*“Mapari mamom naonourabada, korou numit mangani khambi meining kumlaga; tarukni shubada touring faklon konna famshinle. Chingu kasha taina famshillabaga. Numit shingbum tarani shurabaga heirang pungma-sem leirang leihun tamna kasha paotaka. Korou numit tarani khambi meining kumlubi mamasung angang nouwangsung mabingbu; samu mahak sengna eru shanteng a. konte nakthangmaina tairrel marongbabu samu khutta suna, hakshen nahaironbu chinda haina laiya khikfen chaina haksheng naha eye.”*³⁶

Translation (only the central idea, not word-to-word meaning): After the child's birth, the mother has been healed with fire massage for five days. On the sixth day, the materials used by the mother for the previous five days are packed and rolled. On the tenth day, the sacred bathing and sanctification are conducted.

On the tenth day of childbirth, by reciting these verses, the forbidden house is sanctified along with the mother and newborn child. The mother and the newborn child will take a bath on the said day. It will be followed by the pouring of water in which gold and silver have been dipped. These events mark the completion of sanctification. This ritual is still preserved by the Meitei community, and sanctification is compulsory in the event of a child's birth.

***Yum shengba* for Meitei Hindu (The ritual of sanctification for Meitei Hindus):**

For the Meitei Hindus, the ritual is performed on the 12th day of birth. The ritual is performed by engaging a Brahmin. The mother and the newborn child will be made to take baths. The floor of the house is well-washed using water and cow dung. A sacred water pot known as *Ghot Chaphu* will be worshipped, and *Panchadevata* (five Gods) are

³⁶ Yumnamcha Budhichandra, *Thaloi-Nongkhailon*, p. 53.

summoned. Offerings of betel leaves and nuts, lamp, incense sticks, banana and milk are offered at the adjoining spot of the porch and courtyard. On one side of the porch, the sacred pot, fruits, betel leaves, and nuts, along with a lamp and incense sticks, are used in the ritual. Lord Krishna is worshipped, and blessings are sought.³⁷ The Brahmin will sprinkle the sacred water, using tulsi leaves, on the mother, child, and the entire house. This ritual is performed in the morning, and the material requirements are comparatively less than those of other rituals.

3.3.2 *Chakumba* (The ritual of feeding rice for the first time)

A ritual is performed in which a newborn child is taught for the first time to consume human food. This ritual is known as *Chak-umba* (literally means rice feeding). The ritual of *Chak-umba* is performed on the fifth month of childbirth. An auspicious day and time are chosen with the help of an astrologer to perform the ritual.

Regarding this ritual and procedure of feeding the child, it is mentioned in Ningombam Manijao's Ponbi Lang as;

*"Houjikti loidam thabum taruk sujanlakle. Pari imom nangbu tara charum tamlage haina mathel lukoi sem, taibang thoudang chakpu chakhom lurok manga semna, laiija khuma tai, tara chin chanba matamna palem mamana haikhiye; pari naowa charodo, mam, mam, kuk kuk; chakhom lurok ahanbana taibang panba mapu khanghanba chakne. Chakhom lurok anisubana malem mama Leimarel Shidabi khangna chakne. Chakhom anisubana malem mama Leimarel Shidabi khangna chakne. Chakhom lurok ahumsubana thawai manga fana chakne. Chakhom mari subana palem panthou khangna chakne. Chakhom lurok manga shubana taibang loushing meira chakne."*³⁸

Translation: It is about to complete six months since the birth. For you, young child, worldly dishes are arranged, five rice balls are prepared, water is kept, and on the command of your mother, eat this food, *Mum, Mum, Kuk, Kuk*. The first one is to introduce the Creator of this world. The second ounce introduces the Mother Earth

³⁷ Naorem Harimati Devi, Arangphamgi Mathou, p. 73.

³⁸ Ningombam Manijao, Ponbi Lang, p. 41-42.

Goddess *Leimarel Shidabi*. The third ounce is to capture the five souls. The fourth ounce introduces the mother and father. The fifth ounce provides a sound and intelligent mind.

In this manner, the mother feeds the child. Each ounce has an internal meaning within it. From the day onwards, the child is taught about worldly food, and the ritual is intended to promote a long and prosperous life, as well as to enhance the child's intelligence.

In the morning of the *Chak-umba* ritual, prayers and offerings are conducted at the porch of the house where worship is made with lamps, incense sticks, fruits, flowers, etc. Seven varieties of fish are prepared in a dish that is to be fed to the child. Vegetables are offered to the sacred shrine of *Lainingthou Sanamahi*, which is worshipped inside the house. In ancient times, seven varieties of fish and seven varieties of animal flesh were prepared in dishes. In modern times, the seven animal fleshs are substituted by *Shareng* (a type of catfish). After feeding the child, it is let free in its belly-down position. Items such as books, gold/silver, weapons/ instruments, paddy, soil, etc., are placed before the child, and the child is set free to touch one of them. It is believed that the child focuses on the material they choose in this event. In short, the material chosen by the child is believed to determine the future of the child. Based on the host family's choice, the ritual could be conducted in a grand manner by inviting friends, relatives, local members, and guests. It could also be performed by adhering only to the basic procedures without making it a grand one.

3.3.3 *Lu Kokpa/ Nahut Nareng thouram* (The ritual of shaving hair/Ear piercing)

When the child completes three years of age, a ritual of ear piercing and hair shaving is conducted. This ritual is generally known as *Nahut Nareng Tamba* (the event of ear piercing). Among the Meitei Hindus, this ritual is known as *Chura Karan* (literally means shaving of hair). This ritual is conducted when the young child attains the age of 3 to 5 years. An auspicious day is chosen by consulting an astrologer or learned priest to perform this ritual. This ritual marks the stage in a child's life where they will get ready

for study/learning. This ritual can also be performed with *Sankirtan* , as per the host family's choice.

On this day, a rite of fire worship will be conducted. A sacred water pot (*Eratphu*) and a sacred Throne will be arranged for prayers and offerings. The ritual follows a strict code of procedures, and therefore, a priest is engaged to perform the rites. The Meitei Hindus engage a Brahmin to perform the rites. It is considered that the procedure of the ritual in many ways is similar to that of a death ritual.

The ritual, generally known as *Nahut Nareng* or *Sam Kakpa* (literally, "hair shaving"), is considered a very important ritual in a person's life, as it is believed to determine their future. After shaving the hair of the child, three virgin girls will pour water from a sacred pot into the head of the child, covered by a thin white cloth. This event of water pouring is considered to sanctify the child physically, mentally and spiritually. Every procedure will be conducted on the advice and instruction of the Priest / Brahmin. When the three girls perform the cleansing or sanctification of the child, the child is brought to the palace of fire worship and seated with their parents. The priest / *Brahmin* will start the rites at the fireplace. This is the main event of the ritual. The sacred water used in the ritual is fetched from a river or pond using an earthen pot on the previous day of the ritual. The Meitei Hindus have a tradition of playing the conch on the evening of the previous day, which gives information about the next day's ritual. The person who will shave the hair of the child is chosen from among the people belonging to other clans. It is believed that the omens of the child are driven away while shaving the child's hair.

It is also a strict procedure that the child shall bow and seek prayers from the parents and elders after the conclusion of the rites performed by the priest/ Brahmin. When there is a *Sankirtan* performance, the child shall also bow to the *Sankirtan* performers. The blessings given are believed to deliver spiritual upgradation to the child.

The ritual could be performed in a grand manner by inviting guests and relatives, arranging a grand feast and conducting *Sankirtan*. This ritual could also be performed by adhering strictly to the rites, i.e., not in a grand manner.

The child could get relief from omens, disturbances and diseases by conducting this ritual. A human is believed to be composed of body, mind and spirit. When the mind and spirit of the child upgrade, the true essence of the upgrade can be felt. This ritual mainly focuses on the spiritual upgradation of the child. The rituals of *Epan Thaba* and *Yum Shengba* were performed when the child was a newborn, not yet able to understand anything. Therefore, when this ritual is performed, the child begins to understand the spiritual aspects in a person's life. In this regard, the ritual of *Nahut Nareng Tamba/Sam Kakpa/Chura Karan* is considered an important ritual for the Meitei society, including the Meitei Hindus. This is the young stage at which the child should begin learning about the spiritual aspects, which are shown in the rites and fire worship conducted by the priest/Brahmin. It is also the stage of the child when their mind is developed to learn things, which is the stage of first schooling.

3.3.4 Luhongba (Marriage Ceremony)

In a person's life journey, there comes a stage when they are fully developed. At this stage, he or she shall perform the very important and compulsory duty of marriage. The ceremony or ritual of marriage is performed in other parts of the globe, whereas there is uniqueness in the marriage ceremonies of the Meiteis. For conducting this ritual, any convenient day is not chosen. An astrologer is consulted, and with the knowledge of the birth month of both the bride and the bridegroom, an auspicious day is chosen for the ceremony.

Two forms of marriage are prevalent in Manipur: 1) Engagement marriage and 2) Love marriage. In an engagement marriage, family members arrange for the marriage upon mutual consent and understanding. In a love marriage, the boy and girl, upon their love relationship, elope, and the families schedule their marriage.

Mangol Kaba:

Mangol Kaba refers to the event of approaching the bride's family for the first time. When the parents of the boy consider that their son is at the perfect age for marriage, they shall approach the family of their chosen daughter-in-law. The visit to her family for the first time to seek permission for the marriage and lifelong relationship is generally known as the event of *Mangol Kaba*.

Yathang Thaba:

Yathang Thanaba implies the stage when the parents of both sides, as well as the future bride and bridegroom, discuss their opinions and affirm the marriage.

Waroiopot :

Waroiopot is the event in which the family of the future bridegroom visit the family of the future bride with sweets and eatables. This event takes place when both sides of the families have agreed and scheduled the marriage between the future bride and bridegroom.

Heijingpot / Heijing Kharai Puba:

The ritual of *Heijingpot / Heijing Kharai puba* is conducted on the eve of the *Luhongba* (Marriage) ceremony. It is performed two or three days prior to the day of marriage. It is a ritual in which materials arranged to seek blessings for the bride and bridegroom are brought to the bride's residence.

Heijingpot / heijing Kharai Puba:

In the *Heijingpot* ritual, religious or spiritual rites are performed. Offerings known as *Athenpot* are brought by the bridegroom's family to offer and seek blessings at the sacred shrine of *Lainingthou Sannamahi*, worshipped inside the house.

Materials (known as *Athenpot*) to be offered at the sacred shrine of *Lainingthou Sannamahi*, located inside the bride's house, are brought in a sacred bamboo basket known as *Lukmai*. These materials consist of *Lafoi Chang Taba* (a banana hand with its fingers counted in pairs, as odd numbers, i.e. 3/5/7... pairs), *Kwa Mapum* (an unpeeled

betel nut) 1, *Mana Mapum* 1 (a betel leaf in its original shape), etc. Some materials known as *Apok Asha* are also brought inside a sacred casket known as *Phiruk*. These materials are to be offered to the forefathers of the bride's family. It is believed that through this ritual, the forefathers of the bridegroom have offered the materials to the forefathers of the bride. This implies the spiritual and sacred aspect of a marriage. *Apok Asha* consists of two numbers of *Lafoi chang Taba*, ten numbers of betel leaves and nuts each, one coconut, one *Heijang* (a type citrus fruit), *Knagabi*, two sugarcane pieces, one pineapple, *Heining* (fruit commonly known as wild mango), *Heikru* (amla fruit), *Leishang* (an evergreen small plant known as club moss), *Dakshina* (notes/coins for offerings), snacks of rice derivative locally known as *Kabok*, *Thoiding Amuba* (snacks derived from black sesame seeds), *Komla* (orange), *Sem* (apple), etc.³⁹ Materials collectively known as *Lamtu Pot* are also brought, which are believed to be offerings from the God or Goddess protecting the village of the bridegroom to the God or Goddess of the bride's village. Materials are placed inside a *Phiruk*, which includes *Kwa* 10, *Mana* 10, *Yubi Mapum* 1, *Heijang Mapum* 1, *Chu Makak* 2, *Kihom* 1, one cucumber, *Lafoi Chang Taba* 2, *Heikru*, *Heining*, *Leishang*, *Kabok Bhul* 1, *Dakshina*, etc.⁴⁰

The main part of this ritual is the offering of materials known as *Heijing Kharai* to the sacred shrine of the Goddess *Leimarel Shidabi*, located inside the bride's house. The prayers are jointly conducted by the two fathers of the bride and the bridegroom at this sacred shrine.⁴¹ The materials offered to the Goddess are known as *Heijing*, and the rite is known as *Heijing Kharai Tamba*. The materials include *Lafoi Chang thokpa* 1, *Kwa Mapum Mana*, *Chu*, *Kihom*, *Leishang*, *Heining*, *Heijrang*, *Heikru*, *Heiri* (cane fruit or snake fruit), *Heitup* (wild apple), *Sem*, *Komla*, *Awathabi*, *Laifi* (attire for the Goddess), *Dakshina* and attires of the bride such as fanek mayek naiba, fi apaba, muga suit, gold and ornaments and one umbrella.

The exchange of materials, brought by the bridegroom's family to the bride's family, takes place. Sweets and eatables for the friends of the bride are also brought by

³⁹ Naorem Harimati Devi, Arangphamgi Mathou, p. 89.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 89.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 90.

the family of the bridegroom. The sweets brought by the bridegroom's family are also distributed to the guests present on the day of the *Heijingpot* ceremony.

Bor Barton:

Bor Barton literally means invitation to the bridegroom. This ritual is performed one day before the day of marriage. One boy, who is a little brother in relation to the bride, with one elder having knowledge of the ritual, visits the family of the bridegroom to give the invitation. It is generally performed in the late afternoon hours. The materials required for the invitation are a plate made of banana leaf (known as *Tanga*) over which betel leaf and nut, a piece of coconut fruit, and a *Kundo* flower (star jasmine) are placed. These materials are brought from the house of the bride by wrapping them in a white handkerchief. To receive the material, i.e. the invitation, the bridegroom will be seated at the porch over a mat with a white cloth covering. The bridegroom shall also wear white cloth. Upon the instruction of the learned elder, the brother of the bride offers the invitation and bows down, requesting to come on the next day of marriage. This ritual is known as *Bor Barton*.

Rites on the day of marriage:

From the early morning of the day of marriage, arrangements will be made at both the house of the bride and the bridegroom by the *Arangpham* (ritual arranger). During the sunrise, mothers of both sides take a bath and adorn themselves with clean clothes. Rice is poured into the rice pot placed in the courtyard, and blessings are sought for a happy, prosperous, and long life for the bride and bridegroom.

Lei Lengba (Making of flower garland):

The marriage garlands for the marriage are prepared by the bride herself. To assist in preparing the garland, friends or sisters of the bride are seated on the right and left of the bride. The flower used for the garland is *Kundo* (Star jasmine), and other flowers are not allowed. If it is not the season of *Kundo* flowers, a type of flower known as *Angot* can

also be used. After the marriage ceremony, the garlands are hung at the mosquito net of the bridegroom's bed or under his pillow for five days. During these days, the flowers never wither or rot.

After the preparation of flower garlands is completed, the bride will take a meal together with her parents. The bride will be seated between her father and mother. The father and mother will each feed one ounce to the bride. Some rice from the parents' shares will also be put on the plate of the bride. In this manner, blessings and love are bestowed upon the bride by her parents. The ounce of rice offered by the mother is believed to have the power of giving strength and long life, and thus these blessings are given to the bride entering into a new life of marriage. In the same manner, the bridegroom is also offered ounces of rice by his parents.

Bor Jatra (Stepping for the bride's place by the bridegroom):

Taking into account the auspicious time of convening the marriage, the bridegroom will get ready. He will be well adorned in the attire of marriage. A priest / Brahmin will conduct worship at an auspicious time of the day. A sacred pot, known as *Ghot Chafu*, with offerings such as flowers and fruits, will be worshipped alongside the bridegroom at the porch. These acts of worship are meant for the welfare of the bridegroom. The attire of the bridegroom consists of a white dhoti (*Pheijom*), a white shirt (*Pumyat*), a white cloth to be worn at the neck and a white turban (*kokyet*). One learned person, known as *Bor Sennaba*, will guide the bridegroom through the entire marriage ceremony process. After the bridegroom is adorned with the complete attire, the *Bor Sennaba* shall assist the bridegroom and pray to the sacred shrine of *Lainingthou Sanamahi*, as well as to the important Gods and Goddesses worshipped inside the house. After these prayers, they will be prepared to march to the bride's place, where the marriage ceremony is being performed. Upon the guidance of the *Bor Sennaba*, the bridegroom shall put forth his footstep, followed by his friends, relatives and guests. The friends of the bridegroom shall hold an umbrella, a mirror and a *Chaisel* (a deep and wide bowl used to drink water). The bridegroom and his associates shall march with a loud

sound and music performed by a concerned musical band. All these are conducted under strict procedures. As they march towards the marriage premises, a queue of ladies will bring the sacred materials required for the marriage ritual.

Mei Okpa/ Maya Okpa (Ritual of waving lights):

On the day of marriage, both the bride and the bridegroom are adorned with splendid attire and ornaments at their respective houses. When the bridegroom reaches the residence of the bride and before entering the marriage pavilion, a ritual of waving light/fire is conducted. It is known as *Mei Okpa / Maya Okpa*. It is conducted by three mothers from the bride's clan upon the instruction of *Arangpham* (Ritual Arranger). Material requirements of this ritual are fire torches, *Kabok Aphaba* (plain snakes of rice derivative), rice and followers. These materials are spread on the path that is crossed by the bridegroom. The purpose of this ritual is to drive away negative energies or spirits that could accompany the bridegroom in his journey. The ritual also implies the permission of the bridegroom to grace the pavilion of the marriage.

Sankirtan / Song Performance:

At the auspicious moment scheduled for the convening of the marriage, the main ritual will commence at the sacred pavilion. The ritual is performed by engaging *Sankirtan* performers, Pung instrument players, *Bor Sennaba*, *Keina Sennabi* (a lady who guides the bride), a priest who will conduct sacred offerings and prayers, *Arangpham*, etc. These persons take the main role in the marriage ritual. Before the arrival of the bridegroom, some elders from the bridegroom's side will arrive at the pavilion, i.e., the residence of the bride. Their presence is necessary for starting the *Sankirtan* performance. Some special elders/guests from the side of the bride will also gather to commence the *Sankirtan*. When these elders and guests are present, *Sankirtan* begins with the host family's permission.

The bride is adorned with the most elegant attire of marriage. She will wear *Potloi* (for Meitei Hindus and *Phanek Mayek Naiba* (for Meiteis professing indigenous

practice). These are the forms of wrap-around skirts worn by a bride in marriage. *Phanek Mayek Naiba* is the traditional wear of a bride. With the advent of Hinduism in the region, *Potloi* was introduced. The use of *Phanek Mayek Naiba* is still not entirely abandoned. Regarding the dress code of marriage, it is mentioned in Sairem Nilbir's book *Erat Thouram Thounirol* as:

“*Luhongadaba nupi asi meiteisigna hindu laining lourubaga eroinana potloi setnariba asi mamangeida d fanek setnarammi. Luhongbada potloi setpagi chatnabi leikhiba asi eningthou Narshingha (1844-50) matamdagi houkhibani. Aduga sam beni lonba amasung samda kurak paiba houkhibadi eningthou Churhand gi (1891-1941) matamdagini. Nganlingei matamda Chakphi, Laiphi Phanek, Fanek mapanda khoijao lonbi asumna sijinnarakhi. Adubu konnadi khoi akoibi lonbi Phige Phanek mayeknaibinachingba sijinnarakhi.*”⁴²

Translation: The present-day scenario of *potloi* used by a bride with the advent of Hinduism was not prevalent in the past, as *phanek* was used. *Potloi* came to be used in marriage during the period of King Nara Singh. The designs in the bride's hair, which include *Bindi* and *Butterfly* designs, were introduced during the reign of King Chand Singh. In ancient times, designs of attire known as *Chakphi*, *Laiphi Phanek*, *Phanek Mapanda Khoijao Lonba* were used. Later, designs of attire known as *Khoi Akoibi Lonbi Phige Phanek Mayeknaiba*, etc., began to be used.

The pictures on display showcase the changing trends in the attire (skirts) worn by brides during marriage, as seen in the introduction of *Potloi* with the advent of Hinduism. Whereas, Meiteis professing indigenous religion are still using *Phanek* during marriage.

Rituals conducted within the sacred pavilion:

The integral part of the marriage is believed to begin with the moment when the bridegroom approaches the pavilion after the fire-waving ceremony has been conducted. The bridegroom shall not enter the pavilion directly after this rite. A seat is prepared for the bridegroom and his friends on the northern or eastern side of the pavilion. It is the

⁴² Sairem Nilbir, *Erat Thouram Thounirol*, p. 35.

place where extended porches are constructed within the courtyard of a house. The bridegroom will sit with his friends at this place till permission is given to enter the sacred pavilion. The *Bor Senaba* shall never leave the bridegroom and always accompany him. When permission is granted to enter the centre of the pavilion, the *Bor Senaba* will guide the bridegroom and make the bridegroom sit at the *Luhongphan* (the seat of the bridegroom for marriage). After this, the song performers take a significant role in the marriage ceremony. The *Keina Senaba* shall guide the bride in all the procedures of the marriage.

The adorned bride, with the help of a priest, will perform prayers and offerings inside the house for her welfare. It is the bridegroom who will first enter the centre of the pavilion and wait for the bride, who is sitting at the *Luhongphan*. During these intervals, the song performers will present song sequences relevant to each part and procedure of the marriage. After the bride has entered the centre of the pavilion and taken her seat, the hands of the bride and bridegroom will be tied by a thread and kept over a stand structure. A sacred bowl for a ritual known as *Kujapot Yaba* is tied with both hands. The mother of the bride ties it. Notes are offered above this bowl by family members from both sides, friends, relatives, and guests. The offerings are considered to be blessings given by all to the bride and bridegroom for a new couple's life.

After this, the bride will perform circumambulation, completing seven rounds in the clockwise direction of the bridegroom. It will be conducted under the guidance of and led by *Keina Sennabi*. Flowers will be sprinkled by the bride on the bridegroom at the completion of each circle. This part of marriage is known as *Lei Koiba*. By completing the seventh round and springing of flowers, the bride, upon the guidance of *Keina Sennabi*, adorns the two garlands of *Kundo* flowers around the neck of the bridegroom. These two garlands were prepared by the bride in the morning. The bridegroom will take out one garland from the two on his neck and adorn the bride. The bride has already taken her seat after adorning the bridegroom. The song performers will present blessing songs for each stage of the marriage ceremony.

Kangshubi lannba:

After the bride and the bridegroom have adorned the wedding garland on one another, a sacred knot will be tied between the attire worn by each of them. This knotting marks the oneness of the bride and the bridegroom. Both of them will bow to the gatherings at the marriage pavilion and approach the house of the bride. Both will pray and seek blessings at the sacred shrine of *Lainingthou Sanamahi*, which is worshipped inside the home. The mothers of the bride and bridegroom offer betel leaves and nuts to the bride and bridegroom. This practice is considered to be a showering of love by their parents. The bride offers *Kangshubi* (a snack derived from black sesame seeds) to the bridegroom and vice versa. Both will happily eat the snacks. In this way, love and happiness are shared between the bride and the bridegroom through the sharing of *Khangshubi*. This part of the marriage ritual is known as *Kangshubi Lannaba*.

After *Kangshubi Lannaba*, the knot will be untied, and the bridegroom will step out of the house. He will bow and pray to the song performers and elders around. With this, the bridegroom shall leave for his residence with his friends. This stage is considered the concluding part of the marriage ceremony, held at the marriage pavilion. To bring an end to the marriage ceremony, the song performers will perform the part of the song known as *Joi Bhai* (a concluding song sequence performed in *Sankirtan*). This marks the end of the marriage ritual at the bride's residence, i.e., the marriage pavilion.

Nupi Thinba:

The bride is accompanied by her parents, family members, friends, relatives and guests on her side while coming to the residence of the bridegroom. At the bridegroom's residence, sweets and snacks are offered and eaten together. It is a tradition that one elder or younger brother of the bride's mother shall wave his hands on the mattress of the bridegroom's bed with the blessings of a prosperous couple's life and continuity of the clan by giving birth to sons and daughters. This maternal uncle of the bride also offers money to the bride. The other elders from the bride's side also shower blessings on the bride.

In the manner and style as stated above, the marriage ceremony of the Meiteis is performed with religious rituals and beliefs. It is also a showcase of the rich culture and tradition of the Meiteis.

Chapter 4

Death Rituals among the Meitei

All the worldly beings blessed with birth are sure to face death. Every mortal being in the universe is destined for an end. When the elements that constitute the body begin to lose their strength, the end approaches as well.

The human body is constituted of five gross elements. When the strength and power of these five elements diminish, the end of life is very close. Death is like the destruction of an old house. The Manipuri word for death is *Shiba*, which means "destruction". When the five elements that constitute the human body are withdrawn, destruction of the body takes place, which is known as death.

4.1 Understanding Death

The event in which the soul departs the physical body is known as death. It is the physical body that dies. The soul is immortal and takes a new birth or eternally joins the Lord based on the deeds of its previous life. In the Meitei philosophy, death is also known as *Nongkaba* (mounting to the upper space).

Death ritual:

In the Meitei society, a sequence of death rituals is performed, which is meant for the salvation of the departed soul and the well-being of the living family members. The family members of the deceased consult and invite a *Brahmin* or Priest, a *Pandit*, a *Beita* (the priest who accompanied the deceased in their final moments), singers, a *Pung Yeiba* (drum player), etc., to perform the rituals. The rituals are performed through prayers, offerings of flowers, fruits, lamps, and incense sticks, as well as the performance of *Sankirtan*, among other methods.

4.2 Rituals before death

In the Meitei society, when an ailing person is very close to death or a person is known to be dying, *the Amaiba* (Priest) is called. The priest could ascertain the time of death by observing the breath in specific parts of the body. *Amaiba* knows the beat, Tempo, and Amplitude of the nervous system, particularly in particular areas from the lower feet to the upper body where the motor system functions. According to the wishes of family members or the dying person, singers are called to perform *Phammang Eshei* (a ritual song performed on the deathbed). The lyrics of these songs are filled with devotion aimed at bringing mental peace and calmness to the person who is dying. It is also meant for the departing soul to accomplish the actual path of the Lord. The Meitei Hindus referred to this part of the ritual as *Mansiksha*.

4.3 Major Functions of death rituals

The death ritual of the Meitei society is not a single event held on a single day. It is performed through a series of rituals that start from the day of death until the first death anniversary ceremony. For a clear understanding of the death ritual performed by the Meiteis, it can be categorically discussed into six parts.

1. *Potloiba* (Cremation)
2. *Lairik taba / Dasha Hon*
3. *Mangani Leihun / Ashti Sanchay*
4. *Lanna Thouram / Shradha*
5. *Thagi luk katpa/ Thagi Din*
6. *Kumon Phiroi* (1st Death Anniversary)

These six categories are briefly discussed as follows.

4.3.1 *Potloiba* (Cremation)

In the Meitei tradition, disposing of the physical body through formal rites and rituals is known as *Potloiba*. *Potloiba* can be interpreted as 'Pot,' which signifies the physical body, and 'Loiba,' which means to put to an end or dispose of. The philosophy

behind the ritual of *Potloiba* is the destruction of the five gross elements that constitute the human body: Fire, Air, Water, Earth, and Space.

Types of *Potloiba*:

During the early period, different forms of *Potloiba* were conducted in the Meitei society. These forms are discussed as follows:

1. *Eshing Potloi* (Disposal of the body through water):

This form of *Potloiba* was performed by disposing of the physical body of the deceased in some water bodies like rivers, lakes, seas, etc.

2. *Nungshit ki Potloi* (Disposal of the body through the air / open space):

In this practice, the physical body of the deceased is thrown or left to decompose at some conspicuous place which is reserved for the said form of *Potloiba*. A well-ventilated open space with an abundance of sunlight is favourable for this type of *Potloiba*. Such a place is generally far from the villages inhabited by the human population.

3. *Leipakki Potloi* (Disposal of the body through earth or soil):

This is a common burial practice observed in various regions worldwide. In this type of *Potloiba*, a hole or grave is dug at the surface area, and the physical body is buried. It was prevalent in Manipur before the advent of Vaishnav Hinduism.

This form of burial is still in practice in Meitei tradition when an infant below three years of age dies. The body of the deceased child is placed inside a pot, well-sealed and buried underground.

4. *Meigi Potloi* (Disposal of the body through fire):



Fig 4.1: *Potloiba* (Cremation)⁴³

⁴³ Field visit conducted at Meitei *Potloiba* (cremation ground), Manipur, 30 November, 2021.

This type of *Potloiba* is also commonly practised in the form of a funeral. The deceased's physical body is burned to dispose of it. In the Meitei society, the forms of *Lepakki Potloi* and *Meigi Potloi* are prevalent in the contemporary period. The ritual of *Potloiba* philosophically signifies the dissolution of the five elements and the union of oneself, such as Fire with Fire, Water with Water, Air with Air, Earth with Earth, and Space with Space.

Process of *Potloiba*:

The Meitei society maintains the practice where, if any person dies in the locality, relatives, friends, and local members rush voluntarily to the deceased's residence to participate in and arrange for the *Potloiba* ritual. When the person dies during nighttime, *Potloiba* is performed the next morning. Before marching the deceased's physical body to the funeral site, several rites and rituals are performed by engaging learned elders or priests at the deceased's residence. The deceased is brought out from inside the house and kept for some time at a place called *Phamen* (a sacred place at the porch / extended portion of the house where only the eldest member of the family hierarchy is allowed to sit). It is followed by the ritual at *Khangenpham* (a sacred place reserved in the courtyard / front yard where a deceased is kept) after keeping the body at that place.

It is a tradition in Meitei society to engage a *Beita* (a priest who accompanies the dying person in their final moments) when a person is nearing death. After inspecting the beats of specific body parts, the *Beita* will advise the family members on the arrangements of the *Potloiba* ritual. The *Beita* will also determine the best time to march for the funeral. All these are meant for the joyous journey of the departing soul. At *Beita's* instructions, arrangements for *Potloiba* will be made. Lamp offerings with prayer will be made to the Lord, *Lainingthou*, worshipped at the house. The deceased body will be brought to *Phamen* and then to *Khangenpham* on the advice of the *Beita*.

In the interim period between relocating the body from inside the house to outside, a hut will be prepared in the courtyard. The hut will be placed at the

Khangenpham. A banana leaf is placed, symbolizing a bed sheet, and a piece of banana trunk is placed, symbolizing a pillow. Arrangements for keeping the body in the hut will be made. During these arrangements, the *Beita* will take care of the dying person. When the body is brought out from inside the house, four youths will carry the body along with the *Beita*, who touches the navel of the deceased. In this event, the head portion of the body will lead the way. At a place called *Naktha* (the left portion of the porch), the priest will perform a prayer and offering to the Goddess *Khamnung Kikoi Langonbi* and rotate the direction of the deceased body, i.e., the feet portion will lead the way from this moment. Bringing out the body led by the head portion philosophically signifies that during birth, the head emerges first from the mother's womb. Rotating the body at *Naktha* and leading with the feet signifies that a new journey is about to begin.

The body is then kept inside the hut erected at *Khangenpham*. This stage is considered the final moment of the deceased, in which the *Beita* bids farewell to the soul. It is followed by washing and bathing the deceased and dressing them in new attire.



Fig 4.2 Process of Cleaning the Deceased⁴⁴

In the past, the hut was constructed with bamboo pillars and thatched roofs. It is commonly encircled by white cloth. With time, the preparation of thatched roofs for huts has become less common in modern times. The practice of the last breath, or the departure of the soul, at *Khangenpham*, is also no longer seen nowadays. Due to the advancement of medical sciences, people generally pass away in hospitals. The bodies of

⁴⁴ Field visit to deceased's residence prior to cremation proceedings, Manipur, 30 November, 2021.

the deceased at the hospital are brought home. There was a common practice in the past in which doctors advised discharging a patient when their death was very close and medical treatments would be useless. In such cases, the role of *Beita* was of great significance. Nowadays, the role of *Beita* is vital, whereas the other practices of the funeral stage still prevail in the Meitei society.

For the reasons cited above, the practice of engaging priests or singers on the deathbed to perform *Phammang Eshei* or recite tales from holy books is not commonly seen.

Ku / Kai:



Fig 4.3: *Ku/Kai*⁴⁵

A coffin is prepared to keep the physical body of the deceased and is used in the procession for the funeral. This coffin is known as *Ku / Kai*. It was also a common practice in the past to construct the coffin by disassembling the wooden bed that the deceased had used during their lifetime. The top and bottom of the *Ku* are made of bamboo slices numbering from 5 to 7 each. The upper structure, which is made of bamboo slices, is used to cover the coffin and is designed as a roof-like structure in a semicircle. The *ku* is tied by a rope or a very thin bamboo slice known locally as *Peiya*. It will be three in number. For the purpose of the ritual, this rope or *Peiya* is known as *Putali*. The entire *Ku* will be placed over three bamboo or wooden rods.

⁴⁵ Field visit to deceased's residence prior to cremation proceedings, Manipur, 30 November, 2021.

After washing and bathing the body of the deceased, it will be placed inside the Ku. A particular type of cloth, embroidered in three layers, will be placed inside the Ku and over the bottom structure, which is made of bamboo slices. This cloth is locally known as *Maitha*. A pillow will be made from *Sangbrei* leaves (a medicinal plant of the mint family). The literal meaning of '*Sangbrei*' is 'evergreen flower'. The philosophy behind using *Sangbrei* is that only the physical body perishes, whereas the soul is considered permanent, immortal, or evergreen. In other words, the soul replaces its physical body in every rebirth. The Meitei Hindus use *the Nirmala of Govindaji* instead of *Sangbrei* as a pillow. Offering notes will be kept at the head, navel, and feet parts, which are respectively known as *Lukhumsel*, *Khoidousel*, and *Khuyasel*. Rice/paddy and cloth will be placed. A type of cloth, embroidered into three layers, will be placed as a blanket. The structure, made of bamboo slices, will be placed to cover the Ku and then covered with a white cloth.



Fig 4.4: Offering flowers to the deceased person⁴⁶

After completing the arrangements for the Ku, the priest or *Brahmin* will conduct the rites. It is followed by floral offerings to the deceased by the family members and the guests. For the Meitei Hindus, a practice called *Bikhya Happa* is very common. *Bikhya Happa* is the practice of putting some rice, potatoes, vegetables, etc., together in a piece of cloth. The philosophy is that the tied foods could be used by the soul in its tiresome journey. A characterization is made amongst the death in Meitei Hindus as *Lamboiba* (the

⁴⁶ Field visit to deceased's residence prior to cremation proceedings, Manipur, 30 November, 2021.

path of the saint) and Non *Lamboiba*. *Bikhya Happa* is practised in the category of *Lamboiba*. The artists will perform songs during the entire process of floral offerings and *Bikhya Happa*. By the end of this part of the ritual, preparation for marching the *Ku* to the funeral site will be made.

Four people board the *Ku* on their shoulders and march in the funeral. When the *Ku* is about to cross the house gate, a particular practice is performed in the cover of the *Ku*, which is opened for a while and then closed. A thread is split into parts and thrown away. Rice is offered on the roads during the journey.⁴⁷ The song performers will lead the way of *Ku*, followed by family members, relatives and guests.

After the part of the ritual is performed at the home, the deceased is brought to the funeral site. Upon reaching the funeral site, the *Ku* is put to the ground for the sake of keeping only and immediately placed over the woods prepared for the funeral. When approaching to place the body above the woods, entry will be made from the southwestern direction, and the head will be turned to the northern direction and placed.⁴⁸ The spot for funerals was generally preserved in a flat area in the past. Four bamboo pillars known as *Chukchiwa / Tendouwa* will be erected in the four directions. A sacred net known as *Thakhal*, affixed to the four bamboo pillars, will be laid in the upward space. To prevent the seven layers of wood from rolling down, three rooted wooden rods, each, will guard the east and west. The physical body of the deceased will be placed in the woods to burn.

Nowadays, with modern advancements, crematoriums made of bricks, stone, and cement are constructed for every locality. The woods are also placed inside the crematorium based on convenience. When the preparations for the funeral are complete, the priest conducts prayers of summoning the sacred fire.

⁴⁷ Naorem Harimati Devi, Arangphamgi Mathou, p. 48.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

Mei Koiba (Fire circumambulation):



**Fig 4.5 *Mei Koiba*
(Fire Circumambulation)⁴⁹**

The host family member of the deceased shall hold a fire torch and revolve around the funeral set-up holding a fire torch. He shall revolve on his right side 3 to 5 times. The host is a family member of the male lineage. While conducting this circumambulation, a pot filled with water is carried on his left shoulder.

Other family members and close kin will follow the host in the same process by holding a fire torch. The fire torches will touch the four corners of the funeral set-up as if lighting the funeral wood. The water carried by the host will be poured backwards in a little quantity from the shoulder itself to the four corners. After the circumambulation, the host will put fire to the woods and worship the fire to give a final farewell to the soul of the deceased. At this stage, the song performers will also conclude their song with prayers for the well-being of all.



Fig 4.6: *Humai Humba*⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Field visit conducted at Meitei *Potloiba* (cremation ground), Manipur, 30 November, 2021.

A fan is also used locally, known as *Humai*, which is handled by hand to give pace to the burning. The host will first use the fan, followed by others who took part in the funeral. Some people will remain at the funeral site until the body is completely burned. These persons will also use the *Humai*.

The host, family members, song performers, and guests will return from the funeral site. The priest, known as *Amai Piba*, will remain at the funeral site for final rites. He could also leave the site by giving the responsibility to someone else taking part in the funeral, who has been taught the practice and procedure. At the completion of the funeral, water will be sprinkled on the fire with prayers. The priest or the responsible person will perform the rites of *Mangthong Thingba*.

4.3.2 *Mangthong Thingba*

A particular rite is performed by the end of the funeral, where spells, prayers and certain acts are performed with the belief that such a rite is also meant to control unwarranted and frequent deaths in the concerned locality. This rite is known as *Mangthong Thingba*.

In the rites of *Mangthong Thingba*, the priest informs the soul of the deceased person just prior to the present death and performs the funeral at that site. It is the belief in Meitei tradition that the grave/funeral site is guarded by the soul of the last person who died in the locality and whose funeral was performed at the site. The priest makes the sacred verse in such way as, 'on this day (the day is mentioned), on this date (date in a lunar month), the funeral/disposal of Fire, Water, Air, Earth and Space of A (name of deceased) is over and I am giving this information to you (name of the predeceased)'.⁵¹

The *Lairon* (incantation) for *Mangthong Thingba* is: “*Se Se, (Chaoba/Chaobi) nahakna nahanmakhei purakpa (natao/ nata) asi sinnare. Ashibaga achangbga ngashidgi*

⁵⁰ Field visit conducted at Meitei *Potloiba* (cremation ground), Manipur, 30 November, 2021.

⁵¹ Naorem Harimati Devi, Arangphamgi Mathou, p. 50.

*numit chayol taretna leiyi palon 7 kahnlabni. Kumhihang, Kumaithing Thing Thing Thinglabane.*⁵²

After chanting this verse, the name of the seven days starting from the day of the funeral is spelt out in reverse (if it is Sunday, then Sunday, Saturday, Friday), and a hand knife draws seven horizontal lines outward from the position of the priest.

The Meitei Hindus believe that there are two types of death.

1. The soul attaining the path of *Preta*
2. The soul attaining the path of *Lamboiba* (*Sanyas*)

4.3.3 *Preta* form death Ritual

The form of *the Preta* ritual, in simple terms, can be described as a ritual conducted to rebirth the deceased's soul and reunite it with its previous clan. Tales of Lord Krishna will be recited by learned *Brahmins* since the time when the deceased was bedridden and struggling for life and death. After death, a sacred offering known as *Beitarani Dan* is made at *Churi* (the adjoining point of the house and the courtyard). Circumambulation for three circles will be performed around the *Bina* (Tulsi plant worshipped at the centre of the courtyard). A banana leaf is placed in the hut constructed in the courtyard to keep the physical body of the deceased. It is not compulsory to put the banana leaf, but due to general practice, it is placed. In its original style, three layers of cloth served as a blanket, which is not required; however, following general practices, it is still used. A pillow made of flowers or a banana trunk can be used. A coin or a piece of bronze alloy can be used.⁵³

After the rites in the courtyard, the physical body will be brought to the funeral site. The host will perform fire circumambulation around the funeral set-up. Like the general practice, the host will hold a fire torch and water pot on his shoulder and circle for 3 or 5 rounds. The torch will touch the four corners of the funeral set-up and pour

⁵² Naorem Harimati Devi, Arangphamgi Mathou, p. 50.

⁵³ Ibid., p.118.

water backwards at the said four corners. After this circumambulation, the torch will fire the funeral set-up. It will be followed by a prayer to the guests who have come to participate in the funeral.

Porok Sonba:

In the death ritual of the *Preta* style, the priest performs a particular series of rites from the very next day of death. The purpose of this series of rites is to conduct prayers for the virtuous journey of the departed soul and to seek blessings from the ancestors for the departed soul to be reborn and rejoin the clan once again. The sacred verse or incantations recited by the priest are known as *Porok Sonba*. *Sankirtan* is also performed along with this series of rites.

The priest recites the sacred verses outside the home's boundary, close to the funeral site. It is mainly conducted at the bank of a water body behind a curtain. After the recitals, as guided by the priest, the host in the male lineage shall perform *Pinda Dan*. *Pinda Dan* means offering food to the departed soul. The process is a humble submission by the host, praying for the rebirth of the departed soul and for the soul to rejoin its clan once again. And thus, *Porok Sonba* and *Pinda Dan* are conducted. These rites shall be performed for all consecutive days till the day of *Yumshengba* (sanctifying the house of the deceased with sacred water performed on the day before *Shradha*). On the day of the main death ritual, which is *Shradha*, the host offers *Pinda Dan* at a suitable place while the *Sankirtan* performance is going on.

Porok Sonba requires a skilled and learned priest. The priest who performs these rites is known as a *Purohit*. He must have a good knowledge of holy books and meditation, as he has a dominant role in submitting himself to the other world, pleading for the rebirth of the departed soul, and rejoining his clan once again. *Pinda Dan* is performed by the offering of physical materials during the recital of sacred verses.

Kira Thangba:

It is compulsory for the male host to physically present himself during the entire process of *Porok Sonba* and *Pinda Dan*. As he is assigned this strict task of prayers and offerings, he is not allowed to stay together in the house with the other family members.

He shall sleep at some suitable place, such as an outhouse. In the past, people from the locality in designated groups would give company to him during the nighttime. The food habit of the male host is also restricted, as he is not allowed to consume salt. Food substitutes are consumed by him. It is a very strict code that he shall always accompany a sword with him. This process is known as *Kira Thangba*. The sword used in this process is known as *Kira Thangba*.

In modern times and with changes in lifestyles, one cannot dedicate oneself in such a way. The process is also very strict and unmistakable. Dedicating oneself solely to the task for several days without going to any work or company is not easy. It is sometimes considered a burden to the host family members. For these reasons, the practice of *Kira Thangba* is fading day by day.

4.3.4 *Lamboiba* (Sannyas Form)

The Meitei Hindu rituals mentioned in the above paragraphs are the *Lamboiba* death ritual forms (*Sannyas*).

Bheg Louba /Bhej Onba:

The decision for *Bheg Louba / Bhej Onba*, that is, the decision to step onto the path of a saint by the departed soul to forever merge with the Creator and never to be reborn again, is to be taken when the person is alive. Based on the wish of the living person and any day, irrespective of being auspicious or not, he or she shall consult a Guru (learned Priest/*Brahmin*) and perform the rites of *Bheg Louba*. The decision of *Bheg Louba* is made when one realizes that the material world is illusory and the truest path is the path of eternity. Ten codes, known as the 10 *Sanskar*, are performed under the guidance of the Guru to take this path. These 10 *Sanskars* are;

1. *Chara Henba* (fasting) 2. *Sam Kokpa* (shaving of hair) 3. *Tithasnan Touba* 4. *Mala Dharan* 5. *Chandan Shiri Chinghatpa and Shapanachingba Thaba* 6. *Namikalpan-Mingthonba* 7. *Mantradan* 8. *Kopin Dharan* 9. *Krishna Pooja* 10. *Aatamasamparna (Krishnada Changjaba)*.⁵⁴

A woman can also take the path of *Bheg Louba*. In this case, the code of *Kopin Setpa* is not performed.

These are the true norms of *Bheg Louba / Bhej Onba*. It was performed while the deceased was still living. When a person predicts his or her death to be close due to illness, he or she shall consult the Guru, and the rites are performed. Nowadays, with the advancement of medical science, people generally die in hospitals. The rites are performed only for name's sake when the person dies. Depending on the situation, the rites of *Bheg Louba / Bhej Onba* are performed after death.

4.3.5 *Chuk Saba*

In the Meitei tradition, death is of two kinds: natural death and unnatural death. Natural death, also known as *Kal Mrityu* by Meitei Hindus, is the phenomenon of death in which a person meets his or her end after performing all the obligations in his or her life. Unnatural death, or *Akal Mrityu*, is an untimely death when one demises before performing obligatory duties.

The second category of unnatural death includes premature death due to suicide, hanging, drowning, burning, death as a bachelor, i.e. before marriage, etc. When such a type of death occurs in a family, a particular death ritual known as *Chuk Saba* is performed. A learned priest conducts this form of ritual with rites and incantations so that such unnatural death should never be repeated to the family again. The funeral rites for such a death differ slightly from those for natural ones, as one rite known as *Chuk Saba* (literally meaning 'marking a permanent boundary') is performed, and extra material ingredients are required for the funeral.

⁵⁴ Laishram Kumar Singh, *Mioibana Shradha Karma Sonliba Karigino*, p.46

Procedure of *Chuk Saba*:

At the *Naktha* (left side of the porch), a small table and a mat made of water rushes will be placed. Other ingredients required for this rite are new attire for the deceased, old clothes worn by the deceased, a sacred water pot called *Nahaifu*, *Tairel* (Red cedar leaves), *Pungphai* grass, gold, silver, scorched beans, stone or pebbles, and coins. A sacred oath with the Sun, the Moon and the Earth will be taken that such unnatural death should never occur to the family again.

The structure of *Chuk Saba* will be erected using *Yendou* (giant reed) in a structure like a goalpost in a football game.

The host (male lineage) and the priest will conduct the incantation of *Chuk Saba*. The verse of this incantation is: “*Hey Numit, Tha, Korou, Malem, Sajik, Thaba, Okpuroi, Taohuiroi, Poirei Maikai Nipal, Sumdai Taratarukmak leiriba lai nakhoi pumnmk khagbihouro Eigi Eyamba/ Enao/ Echan/ Sikhraba Misi Mina Ashi Sagei asina pamnadre. Eyamba/ Enao/ Echa asi amuk hanna hallkanu haiba natte. Mishi Mina Mawong ashi amuk touhanba yadre. Tourakkakni Tourkakoi Takke Hairabadi Eina Pairiba, Mangang, Luwang, Khuaman Ahumgi Khutshu Thang Ashina Kakpada khangnasi. Amuk Hallakkadaba Oirabadi Kakpada Tuptaba Aduga Tuplabadi Hallakpa Yadre.*”⁵⁵

With this verse, a sword locally known as *Thangjou* will cut the *Yendou*. It is a strict rule/code that the *Yendou* shall be cut at once, and if it is not entirely cut, it is not allowed to make a second attempt. The sword shall grind from its position till the *Yendou* is completely cut instead of putting it back and making a second attempt.

These rites are performed with the belief that unwanted and unnatural deaths will never occur to the family again. Prayers are made to specific Gods and Goddesses. The philosophy behind offering scorched beans is that no new buds will spring from the burnt scorched beans. Likewise, it is prayed that no other unnatural death should occur in the

⁵⁵ Sairem Nilbir Singh, *Erat Thouram Thounirol*, p.115

family. The specific ingredients used in the *Chuk Saba* ritual carry a unique philosophy behind them. After the performance of all necessary rites and utterances of sacred verses, the priest shall take away all the material ingredients with him. The priest shall offer/ feed the materials at a convenient place. It is a bad omen to leave any piece of material at the residence of the deceased.⁵⁶

It is a strict code that the host will hand over the materials to the priest. In exchanging the materials, the host and the priest will turn their back on one another. Immediately after the materials are handed over, the host will turn enter the house. The priest shall also immediately leave without looking back at the house. The priest shall utter these verses at the gate of the host: “*Kharai Thongalda Leiriba Thongarel, Engkhol Chaogoinung Mongba Maralyai ashigi Chuksha Moithem Tamliba Ashigi Mishi Mina Phattaba Ashi Shagei Nayekcha, Nadu Naocha Ashida Amukhanna Changhanbiramgau, Eina Puduns Chatle Kharai Thongal Khonthong Thing Thingbihouro.*”⁵⁷ These verses are meant to close the gate against evil and negative energies.

At some distance from the gate, generally some open space or field, the priest shall offer/feed the materials he had brought. While offering the materials, these verses are made:

“*Eram Maba Tumaba, Eram Senba Tusenba, Hanu Kokchao, Hanu Laikham Nakhoisu Tade Ude Hiarganu, Nkahoigi Nachinjak Pirabni. Taidum Taire, Mendum Melle. Chingu Phonglaganu. Yum ashigi Sandangkhada Leiriba Khangda Udaba Leitaba Korouhanba Ebungo, Khangbihouro Ubihouro. Thongjinda Leiriba Thongarel Shidaba, Se Se Thabum Meikhu Khuriba, Lamyai Kaiga Thilliba Ashi, Thourei Tengtangheiba nangna Mishi Mina Phattaba Ashi Amuk Hanjinhallaganu. Namu Taibang Mina sirag Ngainathel Ashida Sana Konga Konjallamlage, Lupa Konga Kontharamlage. Nung*

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 116

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 116

*Ashina Tumdrikhei, Hawaii Ashina Houdrimakhei Sagei Ashida Mishi Mina Ashi Hanjinllakpa Yade.*⁵⁸

After these verses, the priest draws seven lines and leaves the offerings in the open space. The ritual of *Chuk Saba* concludes with this.

4.3.6 *Lairik Taba / Dasha Hon*



Fig 4.7 *Lairik Taba / Dasha Hon*⁵⁹

After the funeral ceremony, a ritual known as *Lairik Taba* is performed at the deceased's residence. The ritual is performed on the day of the funeral, whereas when the funeral ceremony concludes in the late evening hours, *Lairik Taba* is performed on the next day. This ritual is performed at the pavilion constructed for the death ritual by inviting the Priest / *Brahmin*, Singers, and *Pung* artists. The ritual is a form of prayer to the Supreme Lord, conducted in the presence of the deceased's family members, for the eternal rest of the departed soul and the welfare of the living family members. This ritual mainly coincides with the noon hour. For this ritual, elderly guests of the locality are invited through a form of invitation known as *Lai Barton*. Family members are not allowed to eat for the day until the conclusion of the *Lairik Taba* ritual. For those who profess the Meitei religion, tales from the *Puya* (Meitei Holy Books), such as *Wakoklol Thilel Samai Amailon Pukok Puya*, *Tengbanba Amasung Lainingthou Laipao*, and *Ponbi Lang*, are recited.⁶⁰ These recitals relate to the journey of human life, i.e., birth, death and its reasons, life after death, and the journey of the departed soul. Among the Meiteis who

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 116.

⁵⁹ Field visit to *Dasha Hon* ritual, Manipur, 1 May 2022.

⁶⁰ Sairem Nilbir, *Erat Thouram Thounirol*, p. 64.

profess the Hindu sects, tales from *the Bhagawad Puran* (Chapter 8) are recited to family members.

The objectives of the rites and rituals performed in *Lairik Taba* are multiple. The ritual is meant for the departed soul to accomplish the true path of the Supreme Lord. It also serves the purpose of relieving the family members from further unfortunate incidents or bad omens. In other words, aggrieved family members could attain mental stability through devotion to the Supreme Lord, which is conducted through songs and recitals by the priest. It is for this main reason that the ritual of *Lairik Taba* is performed on the first day, i.e., the day of the funeral.

This ritual is conducted in the afternoon hours, starting from the day of the funeral. When the funeral ceremony is concluded late, *Lairik Taba* is performed on the morning of the next day. The ritual of *Lairik Taba* is consecutively performed from the first day till one day prior to *Lanna Thouram* (the main death ritual). The *Lairik Taba* performed on its last day, i.e. one day prior to *Lanna Thouram*, is known as *Lairik Loiba*. When it is inconvenient for the family member to conduct this ritual for all consecutive days, *Lairik Taba* can be performed on the first day, on the day of *Mangani Leihul* (the fifth-day ritual), and the day of *Lairik Loiba*. A particular ritual called *Yum Shengba* (sanctifying by sacred water) is performed on the morning of the day, which is one day prior to *Lanna Thouram* or the day of *Lairik Loiba*.

Lairik Loiba:



Fig 4.8 *Lairik Loiba*⁶¹

⁶¹ Field visit to *Lairik Taba* ritual, Manipur, 8 December 2021.

On the day of *Lairik Loiba*, the singers and the instrumental artists conduct a rite known as *Joi Bhai* (a form of farewell), which marks the end of the *Lairik Taba* ritual. At first, *Dakshina* (donation or offering) is presented to the *Amai Piba* (priest) or *Brahmin*, followed by offerings of *Akatsen/ Dakshina* to the singers/artists and guests. On the day of *Lairik Loiba*, the singers perform a short sequence of devotional songs after the recital of the priest / *Brahmin*. It is followed by offerings and prayers to the instruments, viz, *Pung*, *Mangang*, etc. The performers/artists will kneel down to pray and make floral offerings to the instruments. At the end, the host family member will bow down to the singers and performers and offer an invitation to the next day's death ritual ceremony. On this day, the guests are offered pans, sweets and blessed foods.

Ingredients for *Lairik Taba* ritual:



Fig 4.9 Arranging materials for rituals by *Arangpham*⁶²

One piece of fruit for offering, one pan (betel leave and tobacco), one incest stick, a coin or note for offering, a small table for keeping the sacred book, a small mat made of water reed, some flowers, *Tulshi* leaves or red cedar leaves, some betel leaves and tobacco, some sweets, some fruits, etc. are required in conducting the ritual of *Lairik Taba*. These materials are prepared by *an Arangpham* (one who arranges the materials of a religious ritual) or by someone who does not belong to the bloodline of the deceased.

⁶² Field visit to *Dasha Hon* ritual, Manipur, 1 May 2022.

4.3.7 Mangani Leihun / Ashti Sanchay



Fig 4.10 Ashti Sanchay⁶³

Mangani Leihul literally means the death ritual performed on the fifth day from the next day of the funeral. This ritual is performed on the fifth or sixth day, starting from the day of the funeral. In the ancient Meitei language, this ritual is known as *Tangja Luphouba*. Among the Meiteis who profess the Hindu religion, this ritual is performed as *Ashti Sanchay*.

The human body is composed of five gross elements: Fire, Water, Air, Space, and Earth. After one's death, the five elements are joined, i.e. fire to fire, air to air, water to water, space to space and earth to earth. When one is living, the Supreme Lord holds and controls these elements. *Mangani Leihul* is the death ritual in which floral offerings are made to these five elements.⁶⁴



Fig 4.11 Idol of Tengpanba Mapu



Fig 4.12 Idol of Shrimad Bhagawad

⁶³ Field visit to Meitei Ashti Sanchay Ritual, 9 March 2022.

⁶⁴ Naorem Harimati Devi, Arangphamgi Mathou, p.50

This fifth-day ritual is performed from morning. The sacred throne of the Supreme Lord is arranged at the centre of the sacred pavilion. For the Meitei Hindus, a table is arranged to place the sacred Shrimad Bhagawad. The ritual is associated with the song performance of *Sankirtan*. Between the song performances, recitals, and tales are presented accordingly, with the religion being professed. For the Meiteis, following indigenous practices, the tales are recited by *Piba* (Meitei priests) from ancient Meitei books and for Meitei Hindus by *Brahmins* from Bhagawad Puran.



Fig 4.13: Mangani Leihun⁶⁵

On the day of the ritual, the site where the funeral was performed is visited. A small area at the surface is well cleaned and washed with water for offering prayers. The priest shall perform prayers accompanied by offerings of lamps, candles, and incense sticks. A particular rite of collecting the forehead bone of the deceased is performed. This bone present at the forehead of the deceased is known as *Chintamani*. This bone was extracted from the deceased on the day of the funeral.

The practice of extracting *Chintamani* from the deceased on the day of the funeral is not common nowadays. If the said forehead bone was extracted, then the practice of collecting it is performed with *Sankirtan* on the day of the *Ashti* ritual. The *Sankirtan* performers, *Brahmins* (for Meitei Hindus) or the Priest, family members, friends, relatives and guests march to the funeral site to collect the bone. The rites of washing the bone are performed, and it is tied with a cloth. The cloth is worn by a son or grandson of

⁶⁵ Field visit to *Mangani Leihun* ritual, Manipur, 3 December 2021.

the deceased around their neck and brought home, i.e., to the sacred pavilion. *Sankirtan* is always associated with these processes. The entire process is known as *Ashti Loukhatpa*.

The bone brought to the sacred pavilion is either hung at a pillar on the northwest side of the pavilion or at a conspicuous spot northwest of the sacred throne, which is constructed for the ritual within the pavilion. It is believed that through this practice, the rites and prayers are made to be heard by the *Chintamani*.⁶⁶ Family members offer fruits and flowers to the sacred throne and the sacred spot where the *Chintamani* is kept. Offerings are followed by the guests after the family members.

The guests present in *Ashti / Mangani Leihul* are comparatively more in number than the guests and relatives present at the funeral ceremony. It is for this reason that news could not reach far about the death on the day itself. The relatives, friends and at least one member of the locality families consider it compulsory to take part in this ritual. It is a ritual where the unity among *Meities* could be clearly seen. The guests accompany themselves with material objects when they come to participate in the ritual. It is a common practice to bring fruits, vegetables and other materials that could be offered to the Lord. They would offer to the sacred throne and other sacred shrines or spots that are important in the ritual. The roles of *Arangpham* also grow bigger from this part of the death ritual. He will strictly make all such arrangements and comply with all the necessary procedures to commence the ritual. To kick off the song performance / *Sankirtan*, the *Arangpham* shall present flowers and clothes to the performers. After due compliance with the required permissions and procedures, the song performance shall start. Fire offerings using pine sticks, commonly known as *Uchan Meira* for Meitei traditional practices and *Aarti* for Meitei Hindus, are offered during the concluding part. The fire offering is accompanied by recitals of sacred verses. For the Meitei Hindus, the *Sankirtan* performers present a relevant song with *Bhaghawad Aarti*. With this *Aarti* or *Uchan Meira* offering, the ritual concludes. Fruits and sweets shall be presented to the guests who took part in the ritual.

⁶⁶ Sairem Nilbir Singh, *Erat Thouram Thounirol*, p.65

Material requisites for *Ashti* / *Mangani Leihun*:

Fruits both in proper form and cut ones, betel leaves and nuts, some *Kabok* (a form of sweets made of rice, sugar, etc.), flowers, *Khudei* (cloth worn by male that covers from waist to knee), cloths to offer at the song performers, Lamp/candles, incense sticks, *Lei Chandan* sandalwood pastes, etc.

4.3.8 *Lanna Thouram* / *Shraddha*



Fig 4.14: *Shradha*⁶⁷

From the day of death, a series of rituals, including the *Ashti* / *Mangani Leihul*, is performed. The main ritual is considered to be the *Shradha* (for Meitei Hindus) and *Lanna Thouram* (for traditional Meiteis). When this *Shradha* or *Lanna Thouram* is conducted, the main part of the death rituals concludes. On this day, prayers are conducted for the departed soul to enjoin the Supreme Lord. Food, sweets, fruits, flowers, etc., are offered. *Sankirtan* or ritual songs are performed. The literal meaning of *Shradha* is to seek the blessings of the Lord by offering food, sweets, etc. It is obvious that the Lord or Creator does not directly consume the offerings, but when the guests are pleased with such offerings, it is believed that the Creator is also pleased. Every living human being has a soul within themselves. The soul is the part and parcel of the Supreme Lord / Creator. In addition to the prayers, incantations, offerings and *Sankirtan*, the host offers food and sweets to the guests. *Lanna Thouram* means the ritual that signifies the

⁶⁷ Field visit to *Shradha* ritual, Manipur, 11 July 2022.

deceased has left the physical world, leaving behind their worldly associates, i.e., family, friends, etc., and proceeded on a journey of no return towards the world of the souls.⁶⁸

The day of conducting *Lanna Thouram / Shradha*:

The day on which this main death ritual is performed varies according to age group, caste, type of death ritual preferred, etc. For a child who has attained or is close to 3 years of age but not a teenager, the main death ritual is performed on the seventh day of death after performing *Yumshengba* (springing of sacred water in the house of the deceased) on the sixth day. In case a young and unmarried boy or girl who has taken *Laiming* (Naam Karan or giving the sacred name), i.e. *Lanna Thouram / Shradha*, is performed on the 11th day after conducting *Yumshengba* on the 10th day. The main death ritual is conducted on the 7th day for a *Brahmin* child, on the 11th day for a *Brahmin* adult, on the 7th day for a *Kshetriya* child, and on the 14th day for a *Kshetriya* adult. In the *Preta*-style death ritual, *Shradha* is conducted on the 13th day.⁶⁹

In the intervening night, when this main death ritual falls on the morning of the next day, a special prayer and lamp offering is conducted at the Sacred shrine of Lord *Lainingthou*. The Lord *Lainingthou* is worshipped within every household of the Meiteis. The purpose of this prayer is to seek blessings from the Lord so that no disturbances are caused on the next day's ritual, and it can be conducted in a smooth manner.

The ritual of *Lanna Thouram/Shradha* is held by erecting a pavilion in the courtyard of the house. The ritual is performed during the day since morning. During summer, it is generally held from around 8 am and in the morning, about 9 am. The ritual is performed in two sessions. The main or important part of the ceremony is conducted during the morning session, where prayers and offerings are made. The sacred throne of the Supreme Lord is placed at the centre of the ritual pavilion. For the traditional Meiteis, the throne is considered the throne of Lord *Lainingthou Sannamahi*. A sacred water pot known as *Eratphu* is also worshipped. A learned Meitei priest shall perform the rites. The

⁶⁸ Naorem Harimati Devi, Arangphamgi Mathou, p.52

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 118.

Meitei Hindus worship *Gouranga Maha Prabhu* in place of the sacred throne. A *Brahmin* will conduct the rites. Song and music take an integral role in the ritual. The engaged Pung players and song performers will initiate the ritual, and they shall also take the concluding role.



**Fig 4.15: Morning session
of *Lanna Thouram*⁷⁰**

In the Meitei traditional ritual, the priest shall perform prayers of the Sacred Throne and *Eratphu* just before the song is started. A sacred place is reserved at the northwestern portion of the ritual pavilion where a seat is prepared for the deceased's soul. Offerings of cloth worn by the deceased, new attire, food, and sweets to be used in the ritual and musical instruments of the song performers are made at the said spot. The host family members, elders, relatives and guests shall pray and offer flowers at this sacred place. A spot on the southwestern side of the ritual pavilion is also very sacred. This sacred direction or spot is known as *Santhong*. A seat is also prepared here. A learned elder shall take the seat. Upon the permission of this elder, the song performance shall commence. The song performers take the integral role of discharging the departed soul upwards to Heaven. The middle portion of the ritual pavilion, where all these rites are performed, is known as *Sonnapung*. *Sonnapung* is the space bounded by eight pillars and *Yumbirel / Jatra* (the head or leader of all the pillars) at its centre. Guests participate in the ritual by taking their respective seats in the other spaces of the ritual pavilion around *Sonnapung*.

⁷⁰ Field visit to *Lanna Thouram* ritual, Manipur, 9 December 2021.

Singkum Phambal:



Fig 4.16: *Singkum Phambal*⁷¹

The seat prepared for the departed soul to rest and join the ritual is known as *Singkum Phambal*. Its literal meaning is 'chair of the soul, which has come down'. The seat is prepared with a mat (water rush mat). A white cloth covers the mat. The materials which are kept over the seat are a *Khwangchet* (cloth to wear at the waist), a *Namkhang* (cloth wear like a blanket), *Chinfu* (cloth used as mask to cover mouth by the priest), *Langhing Langshen* (sacred threads seven in numbers), *Chaying Pareng*, a small ball of *Leisha* (soil or mud), a comb, a mirror, a coin or note, a slipper, *Kabok* (rice ball sweets), a lamp, *Menkruk* (scented crystal used in making of incense sticks), etc.⁷² These are the material requirements in the Meitei traditional ritual of *Lanna Thouram*. The seat is prepared in the *Koubru* (northwestern portion) direction of the *Sonnapung*.

Sheija:



Fig 4.17: *Sheija*⁷³

⁷¹ Field visit to *Lanna Thouram* ritual, Manipur, 28 December 2021.

⁷² Naorem Harimati Devi, *Arangphamgi Mathou*, p.53.

⁷³ Field visit to *Lanna Thouram* ritual, Manipur, 11 July 2022.

In the Meitei Hindu ritual, the seat prepared for the departed soul is known as *Sheija* (which means a bed). A mat is covered with a white cloth where attire, a slipper, a lamp, etc, are placed.

As the event is the main death ritual, the *Arangpham* has an enormous task to perform. He will arrange the materials for the respective sequences of the ritual. The prepared materials are placed at their respective positions in the pavilion. The basic requirements of a living human being in the form of materials such as attire, a mat covered with a white cloth, clothes of different varieties used in day-to-day life, utensils, a handy furnace, a small lamp, etc., are placed at the sacred seat of the departed soul. This sacred seat is known as *Sheija* in the Meitei Hindu ritual.

A strict discipline is maintained by the song performers before commencing their song. Before entering the centre of the pavilion, the performers will seek permission from the *Arangpham* through prayer. This practice of prayer is known as *Boriba*. After this, the performers proceed to the centre and bow down, praying to the sacred throne, the guests in the four directions, *the Mandap Mapu* (the learned elder or priest who presides over the ritual ceremony), the host, and others. The performers will take their respective positions and get ready for their performance. The *Arangpham* will then enter the centre to offer *Lei Chandan* (offering the blessed flower) and Clothes to the song performers. This particular practice offered by *Arangpham* is known as *Pala Boriba*.

The song performers, along with the host family members, will bow down to *the Mandap Mapu* for the final permission to commence the song performance. The *Mandop Mapu* shall give oral permission to start the song. This style of giving permission is known as the chanting of *Haridhani* (*Hari* means 'Lord,' *Dhani* means 'Sound') in the Meitei Hindu ritual. The purpose of this ritual is that all the participants devote themselves to the Lord for the good of the departed soul.

After chanting *Haridhani*, the song performance will begin. The music of the Pung instruments will start the first sequence of the performance. It will be followed by the sequence of vocals, i.e., the song. The vocal part starts with a prayer to the Guru (the teacher(s) who have guided in their profession), followed by a prayer to *Sabha* (the house, i.e., the gathering), and so on. The main sequel of the song shall continue after all these disciplined manners.

The sole reason for this musical performance is the virtuousness of the departed soul. It urges a joyful journey of the departed soul and a blissful next birth. In this way, the musical performers take an integral role in this death ritual. They are vested with the responsibility of discharging the departed soul to the soul world.

Before the commencement of the musical performance, the host family members are engaged in deep meditation, devoting themselves to the Lord. When the musical sequence starts, the *Arangpham* gives permission to the family members to relax.

The responsibility for the smooth conduct of the ritual is vested in the *Mandap Mapu*. He shall preside over the ritual pavilion for the rest of the event. The *Mandap Mapu* shall also instruct the conclusion of the ritual. When the ritual ends, the roof of the pavilion is displaced a little bit, making a small hole. It is believed that the soul leaves the pavilion through that hole, marching upward. In another manner, a knot attaching the frames of the pavilion is untied at the southwestern corner of the pavilion with the same belief as that of making a hole in the roof. This act marks the end of the death ritual.

The Meitei Hindus perform two types of *Shradha* based on the two styles adopted during the first day of death:

1. *Shradha* in *Preta* style
2. *Shradha* in *Lamboiba* style

Preta Shradha:

The death ritual adopted in the *Preta* style is meant for the departed soul to be blessed with a next birth, rejoining his family and previous clan once again. In this form of the *Preta* death ritual, *Ashti* is performed on the fifth day, *Yumshengba* on the 11th day, and *Shradha* on the 13th day. The song performance of *Sankirtan* is an integral part of this ritual. During the *Sankirtan* performance in *Shradha*, a particular offering known as *Pinda* is performed. *Pinda* is an offering of food, fruits, flowers, etc., by the host at a water body, with sacred verses being performed by the priest. The rites and sequences of events are voluminous in this style of *Shradha*.

The song performance of *Sankirtan* is similar to the one adopted in the *Lamboiba* style of *Shradha* (*Lamboiba* means a saint who has renounced worldly ties, and *Shradha* in this style is meant for the departed soul to forever enjoin the Lord, never to be reborn again). The difference between these two styles is that in the *Preta* style, the offering of *Pinda* is performed, which is not seen in the *Lamboiba* style. In the *Lamboiba* style, the practice of *Bikhya* (offering the materials required by a saint) is adopted. The materials placed at the *Sheija* in *Preta* style are comparatively large in number. The basic material requirements of a living human being are placed at the *Sheija*.

On the morning of the *Shradha*, the host will sit at the sacred pavilion and perform one rite known as *Chaturdashi Shanti* by the *Purohit*. *Chaturdashi Santi* sanctifies the centre of the pavilion, known as the *Mandir*, for the day's ritual through offerings and sacred verses. Upon the instructions and guidance of the *Brahmin*, the host prays to the Gods of the four directions and the Lord who graces at the centre/*Mandir* for enabling the smooth performance of the day's *Sankirtan* and rituals.⁷⁴ The Lord *Hari* shall grace the *Mandir* of the ritual. The virtue of the Lord is therefore praised in the songs of *Sankirtan*.

⁷⁴ Naorem Harimati Devi, Arangphamgi Mathou, p.135-136.

Materials for offering *Pinda*:

Cooked rice or flour, Ghee (a type of butter), milk, honey, sesame seed, banana, rice, *Tingthou* (*dhuv grass*), *Kusha* leaf, woolen white thread, a piece of Banana trunk, etc., the *Pinda* offering is conducted by the *Brahmin*/priest and the male host. The male host is the eldest son when a parent dies in the family.

Preparation of *Sheija* in *Preta* style:

One bed, one mattress, one pillow, one cloth or bed cover white in colour, one net, three layers of blanket, one pillow cover, a wooden box, a big mat to lay before the bed, a cloth to cover the mat, a dhoti, a shirt, cooking pots for rice and curry, basket for fetching water, spoon and handle used in cooking, three-footed cooking frame, plate and bowl, water pot, rice storage pot, mirror, lamp, nail cutter, a bamboo basket for washing rice, shoe/slipper, bamboo basket filled with paddy, utensils, etc. A mud ball, varieties of fruits, a salt plate, gold, silver, three garlands of flowers, *Shida* (a bunch of vegetables for sacred offering), etc., required in household chores, can be offered.⁷⁵

The Rite of *Chatur Dashi Shanti*:

The rite of *Chatur Dashi Shanti* is performed on the morning of *Shradha*. It is a rite of sanctifying the sacred spot for *Sankirtan* performance; it is not allowed to place the materials for the ritual at the centre of the pavilion before this particular rite is performed. Material requirements for this rite are four *Ka Ashan* (a piece of white cloth placed over a piece of banana leaf and kept at each of the four corners of the *Mandir*/centre spot of the pavilion for *Sankirtan* performance), four sets of fruits, betel leaves and nuts, four offering notes/coins, four lamps/candles, a spoon made of bronze, 1 rupee and 25 *paise* (price of a cow), un-grinded black gram, rice, butter, sesame seeds, *Tingthou* (*dhuv grass*), leaf of *Kusha* grass, water bowl made of banana leaves, etc.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Naorem Harimati Devi, Arangphamgi Mathou, p. 138.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 135.

Lamboiba (Sannyas) Shradha:

This style is also known as the ritual *Bhej Onba* (Change of Attire), as the soul is believed to have taken the path of a saint, renouncing worldly things, and the attire of a saint is offered on the day of *Shradha*. The departed soul is given a new name and forever enjoins the Lord without returning to the world again. In this style of death ritual, a particular conduct known as *Bikhya Happa* is performed on the day of the funeral itself, where rice and vegetables are offered to the departed soul. The daily practice of *Porok Sonba* and *Pinda* offerings is not required in this style of ritual. On the morning of *Shradha*, the ritual of *Bheg Katpa* (offerings of rice, vegetables, etc, are offered by family members and guests, similar to those made to a wandering saint) was performed. The sequel to *Nimai Sanyas* is sung in the *Sankirtan* performance.

Bheigyabati Purnimasi Pooja:

On the morning of the ritual, a unique prayer and offering will be made at the sacred spot reserved for the *Arangpham* (ritual arranger). This spot is considered to be the sacred shrine of Goddess *Bheigyapati Poornamasi*. The sacred spot is reserved at the northwestern corner of the sacred pavilion. A seat will be placed at this spot where the sacred water pot for the ritual known as *Ghot Chaphu*, the banana leaf bowls for placing of water and flowers will be offered along with fruits, betel leaves and nuts, incense sticks, lamps, etc. After these offerings, the *Arangpuren* (leader of the *Arangpham* when two or more of them are engaged) will bring sacred sandalwood paste to the sacred spot of the Goddess and seek the blessings for a smooth *Sankirtan* performance and the ritual in service of the Lord.⁷⁷ The *Arangpham* will presume the blessings of the Goddess and make respective arrangements of the rituals at the sacred spot.

Bheg katpa:

The offerings of *Bheg Katpa* are performed in the morning of *Shradha*. The *Brahmin* guides family members and guests in offering rice, vegetables, etc., for the

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 135.

departed soul. The materials which are offered in this ritual are similar to those materials which are offered to a begging saint. This offering is the integral part of *Shradha* in the *Lamboiba* style. When *Bheg Katpa* ends, it is believed that the main part of the *Shradha* concludes.

In the recent trend, the Meitei Hindus commonly adopt the practice of *Shradha* in the *Lamboiba* style. The aforementioned discussions on *Shradha* are the pictures of *Shradha* performed during the present period. *Preta* style is very rare to be seen nowadays. It is for this reason that the tasks are voluminous and strict compliance with disciplinary codes is required. The host shall refrain from day-to-day chores. The performance of *Sankirtan* is similar in both styles. The role of the *Brahmin*/priest varies in specific areas between these two styles. In the *Lamboiba* style of *Shradha*, the practice of *Bheg Katpa* is performed.

Merit of *Preta Shradha*:

1. Blessings are sought for the departed soul to get the next birth and rejoin his family and clan once again.
2. The bond of love and affection between the deceased and his living family members is clearly visible. The practice of *Porok Sonba* by the male host is an evident practice of dedication and devotion to the departed soul. It is also a proud practice that the service to the father or mother by the son even extends beyond death.
3. The host offering the service with full dedication and devotion is relieved from his sins and blessed with a prosperous life.
4. The seven qualities of the soul could be attained by the dedicated host.

In the beginning, the male host dedicating to the practice of *Porok Sonba* might feel tired. Whereas by the day of Ashti, he will feel internal relief. At the end of offering the *Pinda* during *Shradha*, he will be blessed with the seven qualities of souls: 1. *Prabita* (Purity), 2. *Shanti* (peace and tranquillity) 3. *Prem* (Love) 4. *Ananda* (Calm and satisfaction) 5.

Budhi (internal knowledge) 6. *Khush* (happiness of freedom) 7. *Shakti* (Strength or power).

Demerits of *Preta Shradha*:

1. Inconvenience is posed to the family having no son(s), i.e., male lineage, to host and take responsibility for the strict rites.
2. The *Preta* style has not suited modern-day lifestyles as members of a family are busy with their respective work activities or earning their livelihoods. The daily practice of *Porok Sonba* and *Pinda* offerings became a burden to the daily chores.
3. This style causes an economic burden to financially weak families, such as the cost of the materials to be placed at *Sheija*, which are the daily needs of a living person, cannot be afforded easily.
4. Comparatively, the *Lamboiba* style is more economical in terms of time, finances, and manpower.

Merit of *Lamboiba Shradha*:

1. The objective of the soul is to merge with the Absolute Lord / Creator. The soul could enjoin Him in this style of death ritual.
2. The financial cost of this *Shradha* style is comparatively low. It is convenient for a poor family to opt for this style.
3. The absence of son(s) or male lineage does not cause problems for the family, as *Porok Sonba* and *Kira* offerings are not required. This style also saves time.
4. The material requirements used in offerings are significantly less. The basic necessities of a saint are offered, contrary to the requirements of a material, luxurious world.

Demerit of *Lamboiba Shradha*:

1. There is a malpractice of the pure *Lamboiba* style of *Shradha*. In its truest sense, the decision to opt for this style shall commence from the time when the deceased was alive. They shall perform the 10 codes of *Bheg* while they are alive. The modern-day practice of opting for this style only after death is incomplete.
2. In most cases, the family members opted for this style of *Shradha* based on their convenience. The deceased was not asked about their choice of *Shradha*. It could be a sin to the departed soul if it wishes to be reborn again.
3. In modern days, hospital deaths are very common. The family members frequently choose the style of *Lamboiba* or *Sanyas* at their convenience in these cases as well. The high philosophy of this style is put into despair.

Merit of Meitei traditional *Lana Thouram (Shradha)*:

1. The Meitei traditional style of death ritual gives the opportunity to rejoin the family members and previous clan in the next birth.
2. There is no repentance to the family members regarding the desires of the deceased while he or she was living for the options of ritual styles. In short, in *Meitei* Hindu styles, the deceased could have a choice between the *Preta* or *Lamboiba* style while he or she was living.
3. The predetermination of opting for the path of a saint (*Lamboiba* style) is not required in the Meitei traditional style. This style does not cast any burden of opting for one of the different styles of death rituals.
4. The material requirements and daily procedures are fewer and economical than the *Preta* style of Meitei Hindus.
5. The burden of not having son (s) or male lineage is not cast to the family members as the codes of *Kira*, *Porok Sonba* and *Pinda* offerings in the *Preta* style of Meitei Hindus are not required.
6. The economically weaker sections of society could easily afford this style of death ritual.

Demerit of Meitei traditional *Lanna Thouram*:

1. The sections of the society professing Meitei religion are fewer, and therefore, the ritual performers and priests are scarce.
2. Due to the popular influence of Hinduism in the society, the conduct of the Meitei traditional style of death ritual, such as Pena performance instead of *Sankirtan*, seems to be unadapted.

The practice of Meitei traditional practice is increasing day by day. Among the Meitei Hindus, the *Lamboiba* style is a very common option. The merits and demerits as discussed above have led to the emergence of the current trends. The movement for revivalism has gained momentum in society, and as a result, Meitei traditional beliefs, culture, and religion are being adopted in large numbers.

4.3.9 *Thagi gi luk katpa* (Monthly Ritual)



**Fig 4.18: Reciting the Holy book
at *Thagi Luk Katpa*⁷⁸**

After the main death ritual, that is *Shradha/Lanna Thouram*, the host family conducts sacred offerings and a feast every month. This ritual is known as *Thagi Luk Katpa* (*Thagi* means monthly, *Luk* means feast, and *Katpa* means offering). Among the Meitei Hindus, it is also known as *Thagi Din* (meaning the particular day of the rituals in every month). When it is inconvenient for family members, the feasts are offered only on two occasions: one in the following month of *Shardha/Lanna Thouram* and another in the

⁷⁸ Field visit to *Thagi Luk Katpa* (Monthly Ritual), Manipur, 3 May 2024.

month prior to *Kumon Phiroi*. For the other intervening months, the Meitei traditional style followers offer fruits, flowers, vegetables, etc., to the sacred shrine of Lord *Lainingthou Sanamahi*, worshipped inside the house. It is also a common practice that the families and important relatives, guests, etc., would visit a sacred site of Meitei temples (known as *Umanglai Laikon*) to perform the feast and offerings. These feasts and offerings are generally conducted at the residence of the host family members. In the intervening months when the grand feasts are not performed, the Meitei Hindus perform the offerings at the residence of the *Brahmin*, where the Gods and Goddesses are worshipped. This practice is known as the offering of *Shida*. The Meitei Hindus also conduct the offerings and feast at the sacred *Govindaji* temple and other important Hindu temples.

In the morning of this ritual, the sacred recitals from the Holy Books are narrated by the priest or *Brahmin* for Hindus. Sacred offerings are made to the Lord to be pleased and seek blessings for the departed soul. After the rites and offerings meant for the Lord, the guests and invitees are offered the grand feasts.

4.3.10 *Kumon Phiroi* (1st Death Anniversary)



Fig 4.19: *Kumon Phiroi*⁷⁹

Kumon Phiroi is the last ceremony in the sequence of death rituals, and it is performed on the anniversary of death.

⁷⁹ Field visit to *kumon Phiroi* (1st Death Anniversary) ritual, 24 January 2025

On the day of *Kumon Phiroi*, a grand feast is offered. On this day, the song performance is also conducted. When it is inconvenient for family members to arrange a song performance, the host family members can engage a learned priest or *Brahmin* (for Meitei Hindus) to perform sacred recitals from Holy books. The performance of these sacred recitals on the occasion of *Kumon Phiroi* is less seen.

Song performance, or *Sankirtan*, is generally performed during the said ritual, such as the one performed in the *Shradha/Lanna Thouram* or *Ashti/Mangani Leihun*. The arrangement and codes of the sacred pavilion are also similar. Family members, guests, and relatives conduct sacred offerings in honour of the departed soul. The form of *Sankirtan* performance and material requirements are the same as those of *Shradha*.

When the *Shradha* was performed in *Preta* Style, the lyrics of the *Sankirtan* urged the rebirth of the departed soul to rejoin family members and clan once again. In the case of the *Lamboiba* style, the *Sankirtan* urges for the eternal rest of the soul in the soul world.

Chapter 5

Musical Components in Death Ritual

The death rituals of the Meities are performed with music and song. This practice is a cultural aspect of Meitei society that has been an intrinsic part of its age-old tradition.

Such traditions and cultures are still preserved and practised by the present generation. In the Meitei death ritual ceremony, Music and *Sankirtan*, a form of music and song, are performed, which is meant for the Salvation of the departed soul and the well-being of the family members of the deceased.

Sankirtan means a group of prayers. The main component of *Sankirtan* is a song, which is a form of worship to the Supreme Lord, so that the departed soul can rest in peace at his heavenly abode.

Music and *Sankirtan* are performed in a group. The components of the group can be described as:

1. *Pung Yeiba* (One who plays *Pung* instrument)
2. *Esheihanba* (lead singer)
3. *Esheihanbagi Khonpangba* (assistant of lead singer), one or two members
4. *Esheikhumba/Duhar* (one who answers/repeats the song of *Esheihanba* in conversation style)
5. *Esheikhumbagi Khonpangba* (assistant of *Esheikhumba*), one or two members.
6. *Khomei* (one who sings when the *Esheihanba* and *Esheikhumba* become tired)
7. *Moibung Khongba* (Conch player), which is present in the Nat *Sankirtan* performance of the Meitei-Hindu death ritual.
8. *Mandap Mapu* (the *Brahmin*/Priest who presides over the sacred pavilion) etc.

These are the main components of *Sankirtan*'s performance. The lyrics of the Songs performed in the death ritual music and *Sankirtan* are wholly based on prayers and blessings sought from the Supreme God.

The musical performance of death ritual music and *Sankirtan* is not confined to vocal presentations or songs. The vocalists present wonderful lyrics in the form of prayers, which also depict the mystery of one's life. These vocalists represent the meaningful and philosophical lyrics in a very mesmerizing manner. The rhythms and tunes of the musical instruments add essence to these songs. Apart from these, *Cholom* performance (a form of dance by *Pung* players), the variety of musical instruments, and the fusion of these instruments, etc., holistically make *Sankirtan* a unique art form. Different types of musical instruments, such as the *Pung*, *Kartal*, *Jhal*, *Mangang*, *Sharik*, *Kangshi*, and *Pena*, are used in death ritual music and *Sankirtan*.

In Meitei society, music plays a significant role in their death rituals. The place of music in the death ritual cannot be considered a mere component, but it plays a vital role. It is a compulsion in the Meitei Society to engage Music and *Sankirtan* performers (vocalists and *Pung* players) immediately on the day of death or when an ailing person is in proximity to death. This demonstrates the significance of music in the death rituals of the Meitei Society.

On the very day of death, the rituals cannot be performed without the presence of these musical performers. The family of the deceased and visitors have to wait for these performers to arrive. It is the firm belief of the Meitei society that the departed soul can enter the other world through musical performance. The musical performance is indispensable, just like the rituals performed by the Priests/*Brahmins* and the strict procedures of the death ritual ceremony from the day of death. Succinctly, the holistic approach to musical performance, the rites performed by the priest/Brahman, and the codes of ritual enable the departed soul to leave the living world and head for the world of souls. The Meiteis believe that without these rites and ceremonies, the soul of the deceased causes misfortunes and disturbances to the family as Bhoot/Pret (evil spirits).

In lieu of the above-cited reasons, a clear conclusion can be drawn that music plays an integral role in the death rituals of the Meities. The various musical components of such ceremonies are discussed in detail in the upcoming section of the chapter.

5.1 Types of music

For the sake of clarity, the musical event associated with the death ritual can be categorically discussed. In general, it can be divided into three components:

1. Vocal
2. *Cholom* (Acts and dance movements)
3. Instrumental

5.1.1 Vocal Music

The vocal cords constitute an essential organ in the human body. It is known as the larynx. Vocal can be defined as the medium through which the sound expression coming out of the oral canal is communicated with others. Vocal makes communication possible. It not only carries sound but also all the feelings and emotions that accompany that sound. It reflects a person's personality and level of consciousness, adding value to the words they express. All forms of exclamations, including sadness, wonder, happiness, etc., are conveyed through vocals, and they even convey internal meanings that the words alone cannot express. In short, the voice takes a significant role in day-to-day human affairs. In music, these vocals, through scales and notes, reproduce songs with the help of the human voice.

The death rituals of Meitei are associated with music. In this form of music, vocals play a significant role. In the death ritual music and *Sankirtan*, the leading performers are vocalists. The role of vocalists is to sing relevant songs at the death ceremony. They present the song in such a manner that it conveys devotion and emotion. Through their voice, the lyrical beauty is well expressed. *Sankirtan* is always performed in groups. The majority of the performers in *Sankirtan* are vocalists.

The scales used by the vocalists are divided into three different types of tones, viz. *Ghor*, *Pancham* and *Digra*. *Ghor* is the lowest Tone in *Sankirtan*, while *Pancham* means medium tone, and *Digra* is the highest range of tone. The vocalist touched all three of these tones during the performance of *Sankirtan*. At the beginning of *Sankirtan*, *Ghor* will be used, and later, it gradually develops into *Pancham* and *Digra*. The vocalists wisely chose the type of scale relevant to and demanded by the situation and timing.

The *Sankirtan* practised in Manipur can be categorized as a distinct voice production style of singing, which differs significantly from the styles practised in other regions. The *Sankirtan* of Manipur has its unique features and style of vocal production. The artistic presentation of voice splits and fluctuations (*Khollik*) in the vocal makes *Sankirtan* unique. Such a presentation of voice splits and fluctuation is not easy, and only skilled artists can perform it. *Khollik* is distinct from *Khatka* in Indian classical music and Vibrato in Western music. This practice, used in the *Sankirtan* of Manipur, involves melodious notes produced through a shaking voice.

Such phenomena of using *Khollik* are found in the musical forms of *Sankirtan*, *Khullang Eshei*, *Khunung Eshei*, *Pena*, etc., which are indigenous forms of music associated with Meitei culture and rituals. During the vocal presentation of *Sankirtan*, high-scale voices are produced by using nasals; specifically, a nasal voice is employed when it reaches the *Digra* ranges. The starting scale of *Sankirtan*, which is *Ghor*, is equivalent to the universal A scale, i.e., 440 frequency. Most of the vocals are sung in a high pitch and a loud voice.

The notes of *Sankirtan* are long and sustained tones. This makes the performance of *Sankirtan* take a long time to complete. To produce a high, stretching tone, vocalists inhale deep breaths. This deep breath (diaphragm breathing) is exhaled in slow intervals to sing the tones. Deep breathing is the process in which the lower flat muscle present in the thorax, called the diaphragm, is lowered, and the air cells present in the lower portion of the lungs are activated through the inhaling activity. In this activity, the breast is not expanded. The belly and lower abdomen are seen to be expanded. Due to this reason, the

abdomen of *Sankirtan* vocalists is generally big-bellied. The *Sankirtan* performed during the death ritual of *Shradha* typically lasts 3 to 5 hours. Therefore, the *Sankirtan* artists need enormous energy to perform in such a manner. In the death ritual, vocalists sing in loud voices to make their voices audible to the people present at the ceremony, including family, relatives, and guests. They don't use microphones. The vocalists are trained in voice articulation. It requires a balanced diet, regular breathing exercises, and physical exercise. The age group of the *Sankirtan* artists generally falls in the post-adolescent period, i.e., about 20 years and above.

5.1.2 Instrumental (Membranophone, Idiophone, Chordophone, Aerophone)

Varieties of musical instruments are used in Manipur. Some of them are developed within the State itself, and some have their origin in other regions. These instruments can be categorized into 4 (four) types.

Membranophone:

Membranophones are rhythmic instruments. These instruments produce a vibrating sound by hitting or striking a layer or membrane. These instruments are also known as Percussion instruments. In Indian Classical music, they are termed as *Avanadha Vadya*. Drums are a type of percussion instrument. Based on their shape and size, these drums are given different names.

Many percussion instruments are indigenous to the State of Manipur. They are *Meitei Pung*, *Lai Pung*, *Khun Pung*, *Langtei Pung*, *Langden*, *Harao Pung*, *Yai Pung*, *Pana Pung*, *Tanyei*, etc. Among these percussion instruments, *Meitei Pung* and *Khun Pung* are used in death ritual ceremonies.

Idiophone:

These instruments also provide rhythms. In Indian Classical music, these instruments are termed as *Ghan Vadya*. Two solid structures collide with each other, or objects hit a solid surface (such as an instrument) to produce sound. These instruments cannot be tuned and have a fixed tone chosen by the user. They are made of brass. Standard instruments used

in ritual ceremonies and Hindu temples are *Jhal*, *Mangang*, *Kartal*, *Ramtal*, *Mandila*, *Sharik*, *Kangshi*, etc. Among these, *Jhal*, *Kartal*, *Mangang*, *Sharik*, and *Kangshi* are used in Meitei death rituals.

Chordophone:

These instruments used threads derived from plant fibres, animal hairs, or metal wires, which were attached as strings. They are generally known as String instruments and in Indian classical music as *Tata vadya*. To play the music, fingers, a plectrum, or pointed sticks are used on the attached strings. These instruments include the Guitar, Tanpura, Violin, Sitar, Santoor, etc. The traditional *Pena* instrument of Manipur is included in this category, which is used in the death ritual ceremony.

Aerophone:

Musical instruments that are played by blowing air are called aerophones. These instruments are generally known as wind instruments and in Indian Classical Music as *Sushir Vadya*. The body structures of these instruments are usually flared, tapered, and cylindrical. Among these types of instruments, the *Bansi* and *Moibung* (a kind of Conch) are used in the ritual ceremonies of the Meitei.

5.1.3 Cholom (Dance)



Fig 5.1: Cholom⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Field visit to *Shradha* ritual, Manipur, 30 December 2021.

Cholom is an elegant dance form performed only by men. In recent times, women have also been seen performing this dance form. It was originally a dance form performed by men, characterized by great devotion and profound philosophy. The philosophies behind the dance movements of *Cholom*, as described in Shri Elangbam Ibohal's book '*Cholom*,' reveal these movements as expressions of devotion and gratitude to the Five Elements of the living world, namely Fire, Air, Water, Earth, and Space. The said movements are depicted in the Rajmen of Nat *Sankirtan*.⁸¹

These internal meanings are conveyed through the performers' body movements. The dancers imitate the graceful footsteps of elephants, the elegant steps of a crane when it stretches its wings, leaps high with its feet and bows its head, as well as the bold steps of a lion, where it shakes its body elegantly while moving. The dance movements are derived from the styles of fantastical living creatures that inhabit this natural world. This dance form is an excellent gift from the Meitei forefathers, who had composed it with such beauty and embedded internal meanings.

Cholom conveys the rich knowledge and self-understanding of humankind through dance steps. *Cholom* is an integral part of *Sankirtan*. The emotion and devotion of *Sankirtan* are expressed through *Cholom*. It communicates and conveys the message of *Sankirtan* to the viewers. *Cholom* instils faith in the people who witness *Sankirtan*. It attempts to describe the diverse human emotions and facets of his life journey. Desire, love, jealousy, pride, despair, joy, etc., which are not separable from worldly human life, are expressed through *Cholom*. *Cholom* builds up a *Maha Sankirtan*. In the present-day death ritual, where *Phamsak* (a *Sankirtan* performance by seated artists) is performed, *Cholom* is not included.⁸²

Two musical instruments are used in the *Cholom* performance, I. *Pung* (percussion instrument) and II. *Kartal* (Ghan vadya). *Cholom* performed using *Pung* is known as *Pung Cholom*, and the one performed using *Kartal* is called *Kartal Cholom*.

⁸¹ Shri Elangbam Chaohal Singh, *Cholom*, p. 30.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p 32.

These two *Choloms* are popular in Manipur. The dance steps are presented within the framework of rhythms dictated by the music's beat.

5.2 Analysis of melodies and songs

Music/*Sankirtan* is associated with the death ritual of Meitei. The beautiful lyrics of *Sankirtan* are expressed through melodious and various styles of song. Different rhythms are also used in the Music/*Sankirtan* performance. Music and *Sankirtan* are performed from the day of death till the death anniversary rituals, such as *Potloiba* (funeral ceremony), *Dasha Hon* (Rituals performed at the sacred pavilion from the day of death till the central death ritual, i.e., *Shradha/Lanna Thouram*), *Ashti/Mangani leihul* and *Kumon Phiroi* (death anniversary ritual).

The Music/*Sankirtan* performance has a shorter duration in the funeral ritual and at the sacred pavilion from the day of the funeral until the central death ritual. The *Sankirtan* performance in *Ashti/Mangani Leihul* is comparatively longer, as it is performed during the morning session before the feast is offered. In the main death ritual of *Lanna Thouram/Shradha*, Music/*Sankirtan* is performed for approximately 3-5 hours. The songs of the death ritual music, or *Sankirtan*, are presented in different rhythms.

The songs associated with death rituals and *Sankirtan* are performed within the rhythmic structures that arise from indigenous cultural practices. These musical forms belong to the folk and ritual tradition of the community and are not structured according to the formal raga system of Indian classical music. Their melodic and rhythmic organisation is shaped by social, religious, and cultural functions rather than by structured classical rules.

Raga, as a theoretical and aesthetic framework, belongs primarily to the classical traditions of Hindustani and Carnatic music. It operates through systematic melodic grammar, prescribed note hierarchies, characteristic phrases, and aesthetic rules. Folk traditions, including Meitei ritual music, function through community-based melodic patterns rather than consciously raga-based compositions.

Songs/*Sankirtan* through musical dialogue marks the beginning with prayers offered to the God and Goddess who protect the concerned village, followed by prayers to the Lord enshrined in the sacred pavilion and an audience gathered around.

In the death ritual ceremony of *Kumon Phiroi*, Music/*Sankirtan* is performed during the morning session before the feast is offered. *Lanna Thouram/Shradha* is the main death ritual. For this reason, Music/*Sankirtan* is performed grandly at the *Lanna Thouram/Shradha* ceremony, and its duration is the longest.

The funeral song can be classified into two categories:

Songs of Manipuri Traditional style.

Songs of Manipuri Hindu style (*Nat Sankirtan*), which was introduced after the advent of Hinduism.

The two categories exhibit a great deal of variation in terms of song, music, and instruments.

The death ritual songs of the Meitei are numerous. The death ritual is not a single-day event. There are several stages in death rituals. Sometimes, the songs performed on the first day of the death ritual (funeral day) are repeated in other parts of the death ritual. A few of these song styles are discussed in this section.

Based on the religion professed among the Manipuris, the form of song and music is briefly discussed as follows:

5.2.1 Traditional Songs (Sanamahi)

In this form of music, lyrics that were passed down from the forefathers, i.e., before the advent of Hinduism, are used. The songs performed in the death ritual ceremonies of Meitei include the forms of music known as *Nongarol* (the journey of the

soul to the soul world), *Nongumlon* (the return of the soul for reincarnation), and *Singumlon*, among others. The lyrics of these songs have been used from traditional time.

Nongarol (Ballad about Death Ascending the Heaven)

“Tao Tao Pariwo, Laibak Faba Monuwo

Kangla Yaibung tharaga. Lalhan Pungbu karaga

Kharam Pangna kumgani, Wangpurenbu Tamgani

Maiké ngakpa wangburen, Khamnungbi Ningthouren

Khamnungchasing Thibani, Khongthang kupnaa yengbani

Laigi yathang fangjare, Nungaiba lamdang Tangani

Loibi langjing chingdonda, Nungshi chingi Chingthakta

Laigi lambi leibani, Nungaiba lamdang oibani

Loibi chingbu lomlaga, PothaPungbu youraga

Khamnung Chaklen chagani, Khamnung khuntin fangani

Ningthi thoiba lamdanni, Laireipakki lamjinni

Panganbagi leikolni, Panganbigi satphamni

Leikol laibung tanjare, Laigi pangal fangjare

Sannathongbu yourga, Laireipakpu fanglaga

Epuroidi yathangna, Lairembidi taretna

Leirang khujok purakle, Pangthou thakta chaithare

Khutsamnana chattuna, Yaipha khollao laoduna

Mapu khuya fanghanli, Sida wari tahanli

Mapu thouda kaidana, Namu taibang mioiba

Amang yaithong karabada, Mapu gi koloi sonna

Mapu thouda kaidana

Nongthangna Nongda Tinbagumna, Yaibi Thawai Mangana

Miga Thana Tarukmakna, Mapugi Nganglou khada Tinle

Nungshi Langon Chingsangni, Epuroina Sembani

Nungshi Langon chingsangni

Panthou Laibak fabana, Laigi lamdang khangnina

Harao Khengna Chatkhiba ,Harao Khongthang Thangkhiba

Nungshi langon chingsangni

Laibak Thiba Panthou gi, Khaina Meisha Langigi

Thamoi Leikol Engthari, Pari kamjao hunbani

Lamjeng khourang hengani, Thongarenbu Youraga, Ebenthoubu fanglaga

Nungshi langon chingsangni

Furel Ngangkhabu Yengduna, Lamjeng korek Paiduna

Khamta Eshing Thakkani, Aram khourang kokkani

Furel Ngangkhabu yengduna

Loibi Langon Karaga, Langna Langdon Netlaga

Nungshi Patpu Ugani, Khongham Patpu Koubani

Nungshi khongbu Sengduna, Fisu fijam loiduna

Khongham Epak langani, Loibi Langon /Laigi chingdol kagani

Khamnung Nawa Parina, Taibang Tharei khanduna

Khongthang Echik Hunlakte, Engourokpu Tamlakte

Ningthithoiba lamdamni, Laireipakki lamjinni

Panganbagi leikolni, Panganbagi satphamni

Leikol leiPung Tanjare, Laigi Pangan fangjare

Sannathongbu youraga, Laireipakpu fanglaga

Epuroigi yathangna, Lairembi Taretna Leirang khujong Purakle

Panthou thakta chaithare, Khutsamnna chattuna

Yaipha khollao laoduna, Mapu khuya fanghanli, Shida wari Tahanli”⁸³

Rough Translation (Ballad about Death Ascending the Heaven):

Listen, listen, o son, o blessed daughter.

From the vale of *Kangla*, ascending the *lalhan* mass (for the Meiteis, kangla is a sacred and holy place)

Will go down towards the south, then head to the south-east

The guardian deity of the southeast, the monarch of death

Searching for the death, carefully surveil each step

Has received the divine order, we will search for a happy place

On the height of the mountain, on the top of the mountain of love

⁸³ Interview with Yambem Umakanta Meitei (Artist), Tera Yambem Leirak, Imphal West, 13 July 2024.

There is the abode of God, happy is the place
After ascending the hill, when the resting place is reached
Will eat the meal of the death, will attend the land of death
A beautiful place is this, a threshold to the heaven
A garden of the brave men, a place where brave women blossom
Have landed at the surface of the garden, have attained the divine strength
When the door is reached, will achieve the heaven
By the order of the Lord, the seven *Lairembis* (goddesses)
Handfuls of flowers are brought and showered upon the father
Walking hand in hand by exclaiming the victory call
Will attend the abode of the Lord, will let you listen to the tale of the Lord
By discharging service to the Lord without fail, you mortal being
By ascending the cremation ground, by chanting the name of the lord
By discharging service to the Lord without fail
Like a cloud mingles with the rain, the five souls of the body
Six, including the shadow, all of them mingle in the garden of God.
Life is a chain of incarnation of love created by the Lord
A chain of love incarnation
You must be feeling the pang of separation from the unfortunate father
The garden of the heart is calm; the seed of life for the child will be sown
The thirst for life race will increase when the place of Thagaren is reached (in the Meitei pantheon, Thangaren is the deity of death)
When the old great-grandmother is attained, it is a chain of love incarnation

Watching the Phurel Ngangkha, holding the Lamjeng Korek (Phurel Ngangkha – a kind of pitcher/ Lamjeng Korek – a kind of drinking pot made from dried gourd)

Will drink the water of land of death, all thirst will be quenched then

By watching the Phurel Ngangkha

By ascending the mountain top, by threading on the water mass

Then will see the lake of love, which is called Khongham Pat

Washing the lovely legs, after washing the clothes

Then will cross the water expanse of *Khongham Pat* will ascend the mountain

The little child of the darkness chooses the world of life

Silently, the walk of life has begun; the ripple on the water has risen

Beautiful is the land; it is the threshold to the abode of God

The garden of the brave is the place where the courageous blossoms Have landed at the surface of the garden, have attained the divine strength

When the door is reached, we will achieve the heaven

By the order of the Lord, the seven lairembis

A handful of flowers are brought and showered upon the father

Walking hand in hand by exclaiming the victory call

Will attend the abode of the Lord, will let you listen to the tale of the Lord

By discharging service to the Lord without fail, you mortal being

By ascending the cremation ground, by chanting the name of the lord

By discharging service to the Lord without fail

Like a cloud mingles with the rain, the five souls of the body

In traditional Meitei religious practice, the above song is an important song sung during the death ritual of someone. This song is one of the '*Nongarol*' songs, i.e., a song or ballad about the soul of death ascending heaven, which is sung during the death rituals of a Meitei. The essence of the song is guiding the soul of a deceased individual to the path of heaven.

The song "Nongarol" is started sung in the narrative form. The melody of the starting part is given below:

1

Tao Tao Pariwo

1

5

9

13

17

3

The continuity part of the *Nongarol* song, i.e., *Mapu Thouda Kaidana*, is sung in *Manipuri Tanchap Taal*. The rhythmic pattern is 4/4, and the melody of part of this phrase is given below:



Phiroi Nongumlon

“Thawai chekla paikharabana

Cheklana pombi hanjinlakpada

Cheklagi kaidongfam khangdana

Chekla pombi kakngaonare

Thawai chekla paikhrabana

Khamnung Pungda chaktaruba

Chahi kumja kumonlackle

Taibang panba kaokhare

Chekla pombi sakonduna

Thawai chekla paikhrabana

Anouba langon faorakpada

Punshi nungsangba pinabiyu

Anouba mapok langonbada

Punshiba nungsangba

Nungaiba yaiphaba pinabiyu

Singel leirang katchari

Mapugi Mingkhei sonjari

Anouba langon faorakpada”⁸⁴

The soul has been departed,

When it visits back,

Could not trace its perch,

The birdie's soul is bewildered.

The soul has been departed.

Rested at heaven,

For one long year,

⁸⁴ Interview with Yambem Umakanta Meitei (Artist), Tera Yambem Leirak, Imphal West, 13 July 2024.

*Forgotten worldly life,
Switched to a new form.
The soul has departed.*

*Time has come to incarnate.
Bless! to the new life.
When the new life comes,
Bless with a longer life,
Bless with health and prosperity.
You are offered with flowers,
Lord! Prayers are made to You,
When a new life comes.*

The ritual of *Kumon* is performed one year after the person's death. It is strongly believed that the departed soul could not get a new life on this earth till one year is completed. The song performed in this ritual is a form of prayer seeking blessings for the new life that has begun. It prays for the welfare and prosperity of the new life which the soul is going to take.

The song *Nongumlon* is sung in Manipuri *Menkup* Taal. Its have 6 matras. The melody of this starting line, *Thawai Chekla Paikhrabana*, is given below:

Thawai Chekla Paikhrabana (CHORUS)

The musical notation is as follows:

Staff 1: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody starts with a quarter note G4, followed by an eighth note A4, a quarter note B4, and a half note C5. There is a measure rest, followed by an eighth note D5, a quarter note E5, and a half note F#5.

Staff 2: Continuation of the melody. It starts with an eighth note G5, followed by a quarter note A5, an eighth note B5, a quarter note C6, and a half note D6. There is a measure rest, followed by an eighth note E6, a quarter note F#6, and a half note G6.

Staff 3: Continuation of the melody. It starts with an eighth note A6, followed by a quarter note B6, an eighth note C7, a quarter note D7, and a half note E7. There is a measure rest, followed by an eighth note F#7, a quarter note G7, and a half note A7.

Staff 4: Continuation of the melody. It starts with an eighth note B7, followed by a quarter note C8, an eighth note D8, a quarter note E8, and a half note F#8. There is a measure rest, followed by an eighth note G8, a quarter note A8, and a half note B8.

Staff 5: Continuation of the melody. It starts with an eighth note C9, followed by a quarter note D9, an eighth note E9, a quarter note F#9, and a half note G9. There is a measure rest, followed by an eighth note A9, a quarter note B9, and a half note C10.

Staff 6: Continuation of the melody. It starts with an eighth note D10, followed by a quarter note E10, an eighth note F#10, a quarter note G10, and a half note A10. There is a measure rest, followed by an eighth note B10, a quarter note C11, and a half note D11.

The continuity of the song *Nongumlon*, i.e., *Khamnung Pungda Chaktaruba*, the first part of the verse of melody, is given below:

1

Khamnung Pungda Chaktaruba (1st part of Verse)

The given melody is the 2nd part of the verse, i.e., *Anouba Langon Phaorakpada*:

Anouba Langon Phaorakpada (2nd part of VERSE)

Singumlambi Nongalambi

“Sina palem emagi yaibi thawai mangana Thongak Lairembi ema yengeraga

Ha ema palem nungshibi, taibang lamdang amukta yengjagene ema

Thongak Lairembi emana palemgi yaibi thawai manga yengeraga

Emagi langlen ebema nangna taibang lamdang yenge haibabu

Nangnane amang singum lambi lakpa matamda,

Yangdou lamakhangda thong ani leiramgani, ahang thong lallakpara, ashi thong lalakpara

Emada napao sengna tamune ebemma

Sina palem emagi yaibi thawai mangana Thongak Lairembi ema yengeraga

Ha ema namomna khangdabagi maramna

Yangdou lamakhangda thong ani leirammi

Amana upna langadaba, amana longna langadaba thong ani leirammine emaa

Namomna khangdabagi maram, longna saba thongda lanlaklene emawoo

Thongak Lairembi emana palemgi yaibi thawai manga yengeraga

Longna saba thongna ashithong kouwe, upna saba thongna ahang thong kouwe

Longna saba thongda lallaga laklaba, taibang lamdang hanba yararoida

Palem emagi thawai manga yengeraga, Thongak Lairembi emana mapaobu menlaklene emana..

Sina nanaina tubatki natei lakpana, palem emagi yaibi thawai mangana

Pombi chekla oina langonle, korou nongda leina leina pairakle
Noumanlaba hakchangda kaidonge pairakpa matamda
Noumanlaba hakchangda lamyaikeigi lamdam, khambi meitharaklabada
Cheklana kaidongba ngamdana korou nongda leina leina paireraga
Cheklana kaidongba yadana korou nongda leina leina paibabu
Ngashi poirei sheishakpa wangam tengthanabana
Chekla paikharabana pombi hanjanlakpa matamda
Cheklagi kaidongpham khangdabana pombi kakngaonaredana
Poirei seishakna wangam tengthanarammine epalsing

Sina palem emagi yaibi thawai mangana Thongak Lairembi yengeraga
Ema pari kainabagi meine, emom setnabagi meine
Amuktadi namombu taibang lamdang yengjage hairakpa matamda Thongak Lairembi
emana
Emagi langlen ebemma nangi yaibi thawai mangado Sannajing napomda karo taibang
lamdang yengjaro hairakpa matam
Palem emagi yaibi thawai mangana sanajing napom karakpa matam
Taibanggi lamdang yengakpa matam
Taibang lamdang uraktrabada Thongak Lairembi ema yengeraga ema
Sannajing napomda kare taibang lamdang uba ngamdare
Ema amuktadi taibang lamdang yengjage hangatlakedo
Thongak Lairembi emana emomgi langlen ebemma adu oirabadi

*Nangi yaibi thawai mangado langjing chingda kareraga taibang lamdang yengjaro
hairakpa matam*

Langjing ching kadaibu kouwe?

*Sannajing napomdagi haithare nakhang tare, nakahang dagi haigatle pishum anigi karak
khoiyum lai mabu pak e haibagi laipak haina kouwebane*

*Sibu langjing ching haina kourammi, thawaina sida karaga taibang lamdang yengakpa
uraktrabada*

Thongak Lairembi emana emomgi langlen ebemma ema khangedana

Themdana themdana purakpana, thongak achithen makui nungon ching lanlaga lakpana

Wabana fet laoba, fammang khuruna misna taba lurok, ching, Mangarak kanbi laklaga

Tarung ningthounggi masaikon yourakpa matamda

Thongak Lairembi emana emagi langlen ebemma

Emana laijaerum chonna thammi Mita.pairaga laija erum thakluda

Mitta purem pairaga laija erum thaklubadagi

Thongak Lairembi ema yenglambadagi

Palemgi yaibi thawai mangana nungonle haibagidamak nungon ching haina kouwedo

Sidagidi palem emagi yaibi thawai mangado

Khongjomnubi mata tarukka korou nonga lambi tarakle

Khongjomnubi mata tarukna kanada sinnarake, nongdol thawanmichakta sinnarake

Nongdol thawanmichakna kanada amuk sinnarake, taohuireng hanbada sinnarake

Taohuireng hanbana okpuroida sinnarakedo

Okpuroina thabada, thabana sajikta, sajikna numit sana khongmadon anganbida

Numit sana khongmadon anganbina, loidamgi thaja pakhangbada sinnabirammine

Sina loidamgi thaja pakhangbana, palem emagi yaibi thawai mangado

*Numit 365 ni loidam thaja 12 kumlang ama engna chikna kondana leiba oirasanune
laininghthou*

Sina taibangpanba korou nonga lambi tanba korou nonga tanbana

*Thangjingda kadouribara?, marjingda kadouribra?, wangbrenda kadouribra?, koubruda
kadouribra..?*

Nanaibu tambirakpa panthou oja ebungo nungshiba

Sajikki matung en thaba korou nongmadol famban kakhra

Leimapokpam yumnakta leiramba, leimapokpam khubumda leiramba

Panthou ojana ebungona takpirambadi Korou nonga lambi tanba haibasi

Palem emagi pibukbuknungdagi malemda HUM haina tarakpa matamda

Nawa angangi lawai koirenda khubi amagi mafam pettana lei

Hairiba nouwa angang oiringei matamda khubi amagi mafam pettana leibado

Taibangi aroiba matamdasu hairiba laouwai koirenda khubi amagi mafam petlakedo

*Mashida thawaina kababu korou nongaba kourammine ayamba.*⁸⁵

Roughly Translation:

The Five Souls of Dearest Mother ask the Goddess *Thongak Lairembi*,

‘Let me see the living world’.

Goddess *Thongak Lairembi* answers,

‘My dear daughter, you have asked for the living world,

While you are having this journey to the soul world,

On the way, do you cross the bridge to the soul world or the bridge to the living world,

Give me the right answer?’.

⁸⁵ Interview with R.K. Surjit Singh (Pena Artist), Porompat, Imphal East, 11 July 2024.

The Five Souls of Dearest Mother replies,
'Out of my ignorance,
When there were two bridges in the journey,
One folded downwards, and another folded upwards,
Out of my ignorance, I have crossed the one that folded upwards'.
Goddess *Thongak Lairembi* to the Five Souls of dearest Mother,
'One that folds upwards is the bridge of death, and the other is the bridge of living,
When one has crossed the bridge of death, there is no return to the living world.'
Goddess *Thongak Lairembi* thus consoles the five souls of the dearest mother.
Thus, the tale goes on, and the Five Souls of the Dearest Mother,
Take the form of a birdie and roam across the sky.
The birdie attempts to rest on the withered body.
Whereas the withered body is at the funeral site, and burning has started.
The bird, unable to land, keeps roaming in the sky.
And thus, the *Pena* singer tells this tale.

The Five Souls of the Dearest Mother ask the Goddess *Thongak Lairembi*,
'I am saddened by the separation from my children,
Let me see the living world. Goddess replies,
'My daughter, you may mount the Mt. *Sannajing* to see the living world'.
The Five Souls of the desert mother steps up the Mt. *Sannajing*,
And tries to see the living world.
Disappointed by not being blessed with the sight, he questions the Goddess,

‘I have climbed Mt. *Sannajing* but not blessed with the sight,
Bless me with the sight of the living world.
Goddess *Thongak Lairembi* answers,
‘Then, you step to the hill ranges of *Langjing Ching*,
And you will be blessed with the sight of the living world.

Where is this *Langjing Ching*?
Below the Mt. *Sannajing* (Head),
There lies the upper portion of the nose and above it,
Between the elbows where the Lord presides,
And is known as the forehead,
These ranges are called *Langjing Ching*.
At these ranges, too, the Five Souls can not see the living world.
Goddess *Thongak Lairembi* continued to console and brought the Five Souls.
The souls then pass through the *Makui Nungon Ching*,
The hill of pristine beauty.
And having reached the place of *Tarung King*,
Goddess *Thongak Lairembi* offers,
The sacred water to the souls,
To quench the thirst of the souls.
The Five Souls drink the sacred water,
Gazing at the Goddess *Thongak Lairembi*.

The minds of the Five Souls have changed, and for this reason, the hill is named *Nungon Ching*.

After the Holy drink, the Five Souls,

Along with the six *Khongjomnubi* stars approach for the heavenly abode.

Khongjomnubi handed over the souls to Nongdol Stars.

The *Nongdol* Stars then handed over the Five Souls to the *Taohuireng Hanba*.

Taohuireng Hanba handovers to *Okpuroi*.

Okpuroi to *Thaba* Star and,

Thaba Star to *Sajik* Star and *Sajik* Star to the Sun.

The Sun handovers the Five Souls to the Moon.

Let the Moon bless the Five Souls of the dearest mother,

May the souls rest at the bosom of the Moon for 365 days, i.e., 12 months.

This is the tale of the souls' journey to heaven.

Whether the souls mount to *Thangjing* Hill or Marjing Hill, *Wangbren* Hill or Mt. *Koubru*?

As taught by my beloved teacher,

Who has been deceased?

He belonged to the *Leimapokpam* clan,

A lineage of the *Leimapokpam* ancestors.

It taught me about the journey of souls in such a way that,

When an infant steps onto this earth from the mother's womb,

A thumb-size soft spot is marked at the center of the head.

The said rhumb-size soft spot,

Again, he appears at the time of his death.

The departing souls mount to this spot, and the event is known as *Korou Nongaba*.

The English translation is an approach to bring forth the closest meaning of the divine lyrics. The in-depth philosophy and meaning of the lyrics, as expressed in their original language, cannot be fully captured by the translation.

The song is performed during the death ritual of the Meiteis, who adhere to a traditional religion. The music is performed by a *Pena* singer accompanied by a *Pena* instrument. The song narrates the journey of the five souls towards heaven. The above song relates to the death of an elderly mother leaving behind her children. The music is performed in a dramatic manner, where conversations between the souls and the Goddess *Thongak Lairembi* (the Goddess who guides the departed souls on their journey to the soul world), as well as between the *Pena* singer and the audience, are presented.

Among the Meitei traditional ritual ceremonies, there are three categories:

- a. Songs performed by using the traditional string instrument, i.e., *Pena*
- b. Songs are performed using musical instruments like the *Pung*, *Mangang*, and *Jhal Kartal*.
- c. The unique style of song performed at a place called *Sekmai* in Manipur.

Songs performed by using the traditional string instrument, i.e., *Pena*

Kumon Pena

“Sina palem ema ebemma nungshibi

Hakum gi kumjada cheitek mashing loiradana

Khamnung sawa tanlam amam yaithong kumkhibadu

Pari chaodaba leihouba emom chaodabi leihoubi

Sagei ngaibi marup mapija kayana palem emagidamaktani hairadana

Kum ama fare habagi kumon haina kouwedo

Palem emana anouba mapok langon ama lakpa matamda

Palem emana setnba chanaba charei fi saba loire haibagida firoi haina kouwedo

Hairiba Kumon Phiroi haiba thouram ashida

Maruna maruda hanjanhanbiyo hairadana

Ha ema palem nungshibi

Mangang yek salaida leirambi erom yumnakta taibang falang kumei yaorambi emana

Anoubana mapok langol ama lakpa matam

Mangang yek salaida amuk hanna pokle haireraga

Erom yumnakta hanna leire hairaraga aaa

Taibangi falang.... Kumei yaobiya hairadanaa

Pari chaodaba leihouba emom chaodabi leihoubi

Sagei naibi marup mapija kayana

Palem emagidamaktani hairadana

Leirangi leihun tam taojing heirang katchareraga

*Shangloughi Mangamgmlang Yellang mangam tam mathel lukoi langeraga
Taragi luklen katchariye Emawo*⁸⁶

Roughly Translation-In English

O! beloved Mother,
In the previous year, as your time came, you had gone to the world of soul.
The living children you have left behind,
The dearest and nearest ones in the living world,
For you, O! beloved mother.
On this day of death anniversary (Kumon),
When you incarnate into a new life
New attires to adorn are ready, and so-called Phiroi
In this *Kumon Phiroi* ceremony
Prayers are made to enjoin the root again
O! beloved mother
You once had the surname of Irom from the *Mangang* clan
When you incarnate into a new life
Let you be joined in the *Mangang* clan again
And live among the Irom surname again
Let you be blessed with the worldly life
The living children you have left behind,
The dearest and nearest ones in the living world

⁸⁶ Interview with R.K. Surjit Singh (Pena Artist), Porompat, Imphal East, 11 July 2024.

For you, O! beloved mother
Flowers and fruits are offered.

Kumon or Phiroi, also referred to as *Kumon Phiroi*, is the 1st death anniversary ritual performed in the Meitei society. Among the Meiteis, who follow their indigenous culture and religion, the ritual is performed with a *Pena*. The song presented by *Pena* is a form of prayer that allows the soul, which departed the loving world in the previous year, to take on a new life form and rejoin the living world. The song is an example of a mother who died in the last year, and her family and relatives perform the ritual.

The song "*Kumon Pena*" is sung in a Narrative form without a particular taal. It is sung to the accompaniment of the Manipuri folk String Instrument, the *Pena*. The given melody is the starting part of the Song *Kumon Pena*, i.e., *Sina Palem Ema Ebema Nungshibi*:

Sina Palem Ema Ebema Nungshibi

29

33

37

41

45

49

The 2nd phrase of the melody, i.e., Mangang Yek Salaida Leirambi, is given below:

Mangang Yek Salaida Leirambi

53

57

61

65

69

73



Khangenphamdagi Lamyaiika faobada Saknaba Eshei

“Sina Palem Ema Ebemma khamnung Kikoi Langonbi Emana

Themdana themdana purakpana

Palem gi noumanlaba Hakchang adu Keiren Keijaoda (ku) Happeraga

Khoiyumgi Yangdouba Yangdoubi Anina Lamtharakpana

Lamsonbigi Lamyai Monuna Ware Pothaba Lam

Lamyaikai tanna lakpada langjagi Matat Matat thadatle kabok afaba Chaireraga

Sina Palem Emagi Noumanlaba Hakchangdo Keiren Keijaoda Happeraga

Lamyaikai tanna Lakpabu

*Khamnung Kikoi Langonbi Nura Paothem Heibi Emana Themdana Themdana
Purakpana*

Hada na Palem Nungshibi

Khamnungnaga Kikoi Langonbi
Palemnaga Nattena Palem Sa
Panthounaga Nattana Panthou Sa
Themdana Themdana Purkpa
Emagi Langlenna Ebemma
Emagi Heina Tungda Enlaku
Chaningbana Taojing Heirang Pijage
Chiningbana Leirang Chinhange
Sinningbana (change) Charei Sinhange
Themdana themdana Purakpa
Lamyai Kaigi Lamdamdi
Ha Palem Nungshibi
Malem ema yenglaga
Ha palem emawo
Pokle emagi tampakta taredo
Hinglingei gi matamda
Emadagi thokpa charga hingbani
Aroibagi matamda ema ngonda endoure
Emagi laman na tollaroi
Malem ema yenglaga
Taretki senjana maingoubi
Namomgina samu hakchang chanba leijage
Malem Mabu leiraga

Makei ngakpa lai marine

Uchiwa makhong mari oireda

Sina numit chayol taretna singal taret oiredo

Mei eshing nungshit ahumna hakchangi lipun thouri oiredo

Sina palem emagi noumanlaba hakchang ado lamyaiikaigi lamdamda

Kangla gi masung mapangi mei mapan koureraga

Tubi mathek leirong konkhaba pul Sana Pakhangba Meiturel Meitungang Mahi.....

Kangla mashung mapangi mei mapan koureraga

Lamyai Kagi Lamda aaa

Palem Emagi noumanlba hakchang ado

Khambi meida tharaklene ee ee Eamwo’’⁸⁷

In English

O! Beloved mother,

As guided by the Goddess of death

In elegant steps,

Your soul-less body

Is gracefully put into the coffin

On the Lord’s and Lady’s command

You have approached for the ultimate slumber

To the place of the funeral

⁸⁷ Interview with R.K. Surjit Singh (Pena Artist), Porompat, Imphal East, 11 July 2024.

With sacred offering on the way
O! Beloved mother
Your body is in the coffin
Approaching the place of the funeral
The Goddess of death
She is the great Consoler
Guiding you to approach for the funeral

O! beloved mother
The greatest imitator, the Goddess of death
Guiding you like a mother
Guiding you like a father
Consoling you and bringing forth

My dear daughter,
Follow my steps,
I'll offer your choice of fruits,
I'll present your choice of attire.
Consoling you and bringing forth
To the place of the funeral
O! beloved mother
You are looking at Mother Earth
Dearest Mother Earth,

Born to your surface
During the lifetime,
Lived by the foods you offered,
At the time of death, one must rejoin you
Your debt will be paid
Creed, looking at Mother Earth,
Coins are offered on the way
Bless with the soil that accommodates my body,
When enjoins the earth
The Lords that guard the four directions
Please guard me as four pillars
The seven days form the seven layers,
Fire, water, and air form the bases,
O! beloved mother, your withered body
Approach towards the funeral site,
The nine fires from the sacred Kangla are summoned
Tubi Mathek Leirong Konkhaba Pul Sana
Pakhangba Meiturel Meitungang Matei
The seven fires of Kangla are summoned
To the place of the funeral
The withered body of the beloved mother
Is burnt by the sacred fire
And in the sacred pavilion of *Lanna Thouram*

The soul of the beloved mother
Which left the body on the Lord's command
Marching to the world of soul.
In the sacred pavilion
At the Kangla of the sacred pavilion
Lord has ascended the throne
Gracefully shine on the throne
Gracefully shine on the throne
At the centre of the sacred pavilion
Gracefully shines on the throne
Gentle breeze produces ri-ri- sound
Having heard the mesmerizing sound
Seven Goddesses known as Luhourembi
Seven Goddesses known as Lukhombi
Seven and seven, all fourteen
Gracefully dances around the four
Directions and eight co-ordinates
o! Goddess Moon,
The soul is having a conversation with the Goddess Moon
The nine inner doors have opened
The nine outer doors have opened
Gentle breeze produces *Ri-Ri-* sound

This song is performed by *Pena* during the ritual when the deceased body is brought to the funeral site. The lyrics are traditional, and the above translation is merely a rough attempt to convey the meaning and philosophy of the original. And it cannot be construed as a complete translation. The song outlines the processes by which the deceased body is carried to the funeral site.

Lairik loiba Pena

“Ha ema palem nungshibi

Pari chaoraga nungaigani emomna chaoraga tara marak thetkani khanladana

Palem emana monugi khangchet machi lang

Kalen gi meisha kaya khang, wakchingi ulen kaya khanglaga aaa

Awangba loibi chingda kaya ka, pat ta kaya kumeraga

Pari emomdabu chaoraga loire hairedana

Ha pari emomsa nakhoidabu chaorogaba aaaa

Taragi chadum en, lemlei ngaton setleraga

Pari emom chaonaba naoyok naokonbiramababu u....

Thamoinungdagi thorakpa palem ema haiba khonjelni

Mitlu napom dagi tarakpa peerang laijagana aaa

Ha ema ema koubane palem loibatare malle eee eee eee

Palem apokpi.....

Phajare lainingthou phajare lairembi

Sorarel gi sangainungda humnida suba angang nawa oina

Sayollare lainingthouna

Pari saktam uhabada shidabi ema na haraojare

Sayollare lainingthou na

Phajare lainingthou phajare lairembi hee

Fajare lainingthou fajare lairembi

SonungPungi mayaisida nganthoikhare lainingthou

SonnaPungi mayaisida nganthoikhare lainingthou

Chingu ebungo lainingthou tengpanbagi mapu ebungo ooo ooo

*Hanna hannna khurumjariyee*⁸⁸.

RoughTranslation

O! beloved Mother

You raised your children with hopes,

With great courage,

Without the pain of the heat of summer and the cold of winter,

Mounting up hills and down to lakes,

Only to raise your children,

Yes! Only for the sake of your children,

Feeding them with rice and fish.

You raised your children with love and care,

The call for you is from the heart,

⁸⁸ Interview with R.K. Surjit Singh (Pena Artist), Porompat, Imphal East, 11 July 2024.

With these tears from the eyes.

O! beloved Mother, your end has come,

O! beloved Mother.

Graceful! Lainingthou, Graceful! Lairembi.

O! Lainingthou at the dwelling of the Lord Soraren,

You graced as a three-day-old child,

Mother Shidabi cheers at the sight of Her child.

O! Lainingthou, You have incarnated.

Graceful! Lainingthou, Graceful! Lairembi.

Graceful! Lainingthou, Graceful! Lairembi.

You have graced the sacred pavilion.

You have graced the sacred pavilion.

O! Creator Lainingthou, Lord of the Universe,

Earnestly prayed to You.

This song, with the traditional instrument '*Pena*,' is a sorrowful farewell to the departing soul. The departed, who is the mother, is remembered by their children with deep tears. The children recollect the past when their mother raised them to provide a prosperous future. The selfless suffering their mother endured is remembered. It is painful, though; they realize that they cannot bring back life to their departed mother.

In this ritual, the God and Goddess are believed to have graced the sacred pavilion or structure where the ritual is performed.

Mangani Leihun

*“Sina palem ebema nungshibi, lamyaiikaigi lamda,
noumanlaba hakchangna khambi meitha thoudu lummeraga,
palem gi yaibi thawai mangana lamyaiikaigi lamdamda leihoubabu,
mangani leirang leihun tamjaba numit ashida,
taojing heirang katchare, leirang leihun tamjare, meira Menkup langeraga,
palem emagi yaibi thawai mangabu, karasi hairadana ,
mapari chaodaba leihouba, mamom chaodabi leihoubi, sagei ngai kayana,
palem emagi yaibi thawai manga karasine emawo.....*

Hadana palemnaga Nungshibi

Lamyainaga kaigina lamdagi

Thawainaga mangana Karasi

Palemgina yaibi thawai mangana karakpa

SonnaPung kanglanaga tamlakle

Mapunaga fambalna langba lam

Erungnaga pakleina khanba lam

Kaidana loiroida lakpana

Hadana palemna nungshibi

SonnaPungna kanglana maPungyai

Leirangnaga leihunna tamjage eee

Palemgi yaibi thawaina mangada

Hadana palemna nungshibi

Singelnaga leirang leihunna tamjaba

Ngangheidaba kayana ngangkhiba

Chindanaga paotaonakhibabu

Langjaba khibikna kokpiyu

Hadana palemna nungshibi

Sina palem ema ebemma, mangakhraba yaibi thawai mangabu

kondana lei haibagi ,wangu ninghtou apanba kouwedo

Sina palemgi taramathoini 11 ni mathou yangen, Lanna Thouram youdribafaoba

*mangraba yaibi thawai mangabu, wangu ningthou apanbana kondana leirasanune eee
eeee emawo....*”⁸⁹

English Translation

O! Beloved Mother, at the place of funeral,

When Your withered body was burnt,

Your five souls confined to the place of funeral,

On this day of *Mangani Leihul*, fruits, and flowers are offered to You, incense sticks are offered to You,

Your five souls are called to come,

By Your children, by your dear ones,

Your five souls are called to approach the sacred pavilion.

O! Dearest Mother,

⁸⁹ Interview with R.K. Surjit Singh (Pena Artist), Porompat, Imphal East, 11 July 2024.

From the site of the funeral,

Let's mount, O! five souls.

Mother's five souls approached,

Towards the sacred pavilion,

Where the Lord has enshrined,

And adorned with sacred threads.

The souls gracefully approached.

O! Dearest Mother.

On Your Throne at the sacred pavilion,

Flowers are offered,

To the five souls,

O! Dearest Mother.

Seeking your blessings with flowers,

Forgive our past faults,

Forgive our past misdeeds,

Forgive with your blessings,

O! Dearest Mother.

O! Beloved Mother, Your five souls shall be guarded By the Almighty Wangoo Ningthou Apanba; till the 11th day of the death ritual, Almighty Wangoo Ningthou Apanba shall guard

In the ritual of *Mangani Leihul*, it is strongly believed that the five souls of the departed are trapped at the place of the funeral. On the fifth day after the death, this ritual is performed to summon these five souls to the sacred pavilion, where the main death ritual is to be conducted. With prayers and this ritual song, the five souls are brought to the sacred pavilion. Flowers are offered, and prayers are made to bless the living family and dear ones. It is believed that the five souls are protected and guarded by the Almighty *Wangoo Ningthou Apanba* until the main death ceremony is performed on the 11th day.

Songs performed by using musical instruments like *Pung, Mangang, and Jhal Kartal*.

Phammang Eshei

“Thoujan pinabiyu ebungo

Khurumjari yaipha maramgi

Nanaina thounijari

Thoujal pinabuyu ebungo

Lana thongjaogi pambeisu Ebungo nahakni

Taibangpanbagi thawaisu Ebungo nakani

Natik nayai karida pandamgani

Thoujal pinabiyu ebungo

Taibang leiyengna karibu sonjagani

Thoujal fangjaba nanaidi

Ningba ningbagi maheibu fangjakhare

Taibang leiyengna karibu sonjagani

Apangba taibangda loushing pinakhare
Uda khangdaba nangalbu ngalhankhare
Pangal leitraba mioibu thoujanbire

Tarang hireldi thoidokna tayangle
Epak lakligi mayaida taokhatllakle
Taibang aremba kumheini khangjarage
Uyan chaktinna marupni haijarage
Tarang hireldi thoidokna tayangle

Udaba mafamda uhanbiri
Nourelna pairiba ebungo thoujanbiyu
Yaipha leipunba tattana chaithabiyu
Tarang hireldi thoidkna tayangle

Apangba taibangda loushing pinakhare
Uda khangdaba nangalbu ngalhanbire
Pangal leitraba mioibabu thoujanbire”⁹⁰

In English

Bless me, O Lord!
It is prayed for the good.

⁹⁰ Interview with Aheibam Tolen Meitei (Artist), Takyel Khongban, Imphal West, 17 June 2024.

Earnestly kneel to You.

Bless me, O Lord!

You are the only means to the Shore

You are the soul of the living creatures

You are incomparable

Bless me, O Lord!

What can my incompetent tongue spell?

By Your blessings

Witnessed the reward of each prayer

What can my incompetent tongue spell?

You blessed the ignorant with knowledge.

You blessed with light to the unseen

You blessed the weak with strength

The boat in the ether is uncontrolled

In the midst, it is lost

Realized that worldly things are useless

What was met was a temporary

The boat in the ether is uncontrolled

*You guided the dark path.
Bless! O controller of boat
Shower the flowers of blessings
The boat in the ether is uncontrolled*

*You blessed the ignorant with knowledge.
You blessed with light to the unseen
You blessed the weak with strength*

This form of ritual song is sung at the last moment of a person's life. In the Meitei tradition, the dying body is placed over a mat just in front of his bed. The dying body is made to hear this song. The name of the Lord is chanted, and prays to Him to guide the departing soul. It is believed that by the performance of this ritual, the departing soul could gracefully lead its way to the heavenly abode.

Lei katpa gi Eshei

*“Tengpanba kokpiba
Taibangpal lanbiba
Punshi toloi yaiphaba
Apha nungai pinaba
Tengbanba kokpiba*

*Apokpa khurumshi
Pukning chetna ninglashi
Laigi thougan tourasi*

Laigi thougan fanglasi

Mei eshei nungshit

Leipak atiya mangani

Apokpana leppani Manga (5) mashak khangbani

Tengbanba pokpiri

Taibangpanba lanbiri

Thokpa changba changba khibikpu

Mashadabu tinhan''91

Creator of Universe

Giver of Salvation

Graced the precious life

Giver of the worldly pleasures

Creator of Universe

Let's pray to the Creator.

Let's devote dedicatedly.

Let's render the service to Him.'

Let's seek His blessings.

⁹¹ Interview with Aheibam Tolen Meitei (Artist), Takyel Khongban, Imphal West, 17 June 2024.

Fire, water, air

Land and Sky constitute the five elements

It is His divinity that makes the Five exist

Created the Universe

Giving the Salvation

All the entries and exits

Enjoins you always

Before approaching the funeral, the dead body is kept at a sacred place on the porch or lawn. During this time, a ritual of presenting flowers by the family and near-dear ones is performed. This song is performed during this ritual. It is prayed to the Almighty Lord that He is the giver of life and also the taker of it back. All five elements, i.e., Fire, Water, Air, Earth, and Space, once constituted one when the dead person was living. The five elements ultimately enjoin the Almighty Lord. Flowers are offered for the grace of the Almighty Lord.

Sumangdagi mangfaoba puthokpagi Eshei

“Ha ye he haya

Minglen sollu

Fangani ningaitou thambalbu

Ha he ye haya

Taibang punshi loirabada

Kagani koubru san aching

Ha ye he haya

Minglenbu nattana kanasu leiraroi

Sonjahou Ha Hi He Haya

Palem panthou animakpu kouraganu

Hayi na epani hayana emani

Palem panthou animakpu kouraganu

Atei ama leiraroiye

Hayi na epani haya na emani

Palem panthou animakpu kaoraganu

Hinghanli epana yokpiri emana

Hinglingei emagi tampakta leirammi

Hinghanli epana

Siraga mapugi laireipakta tanjakhi

Shidaba mapuna lanbiri taibangpal

Hinghanli epana

Achumba areppa lambibu youraga

Kagani koubru san aching

Achumba areppa

Panthouna hinou oi

Palemna hinao sa

Koubru sana chingda

Hee thangbiri....

Ha ye he haya

Chant His name

His abode will be graced

*Ha ye he haya."*⁹²

By the end of the mortal life

You will mount the Sacred Koubru

Ha ye he haya

Chanting His name is the only way

Chant Ha ye he haya

Cease to shout for father and mother

Haye is the Father, Haya is the Mother

Cease to shout for father and mother

There is no other way.

Haye is the Father, Haya is the Mother

⁹² Interview with Aheibam Tolen Meitei (Artist), Takyel Khongban, Imphal West, 17 June 2024.

Forget not father and mother

Life is the blessing of Father, cared for by Mother

When alive was living in the Mother's bosom

Life is the blessing of Father

When the life ends, one approaches to the Lord

It is the Lord who guides the path

Life is the blessing of Father

When the path is the righteous one

One can grace the peak of Sacred Koubru

When the path is the righteous one

Blessed by the Father

Cared by the Mother

At the peak of Sacred Koubru

The soul reached

This song is performed when the dead body is brought to the funeral site. The Meiteis believed that the Sacred Mount *Koubru* is the Heavenly Abode. When the soul approaches the Heavenly Abroad, only the Almighty Lord shall guide the way. The song urges us to forget worldly memories and focus solely on chanting His name.

Lairik houba (Mapu gi matik mayai)

In Manipuri

“Chingu Shidaba ebungo

Koubru Sana chingdolthakta

Nganthoiriba lainingthou

Shidaba ebungo

Achat chatta pumnamakpu

Yokpiriba lainingthou

Shidaba ebungo

Tollabagi mapu oiba

Taibang panbagi palemne panthoune

Achat chatta pumnamakpu

Yokpiriba lainingthou shidaba ebungo

Khurumjari mapu

Nijariye thoujaltabu

Khurumjari mapubu”⁹³

In English

O! Immortal Creator

Gracing at the Mt. Koubru

O! Supreme Commander

Immortal Lord

Both living and non-living.'

Dwell by your blessing.

Immortal Lord

The friend of the weakest

Parent to the worldly lives

Both living and non-living.'

Dwell by your blessing, Immortal Lord.

Humbly prays to You

The blessings are awaited

Humbly prays to You

After the funeral, a ritual is also performed at the deceased house with their family and relatives. The ritual is meant for the welfare of the departed soul and the living near and dear ones. It is earnestly prayed to the Almighty Lord that the departed

⁹³ Interview with Aheibam Tolen Meitei (Artist), Takyel Khongban, Imphal West, 17 June 2024.

soul be graced to rest in peace and blessed for the well-being and prosperity of the living family and relatives.

Lairik loiba Eshei

In Manipuri

“Soiroi khanlude Mioiba

Eigi saruk lakkani

Khutpai chetna laklaga

Khutfang tingna hingkhigani

Soiroi khanlude mioiba

Karigi leiri leptuna

Taibang epak nungshiba

Nongmadi soiroi khanluko

Soiroi khanlune mioiba

Punshi chenjelna loirabada

Eigi kana leiraroi

Sagei natei echa eshu

*Pumnamakse leiraroi”.*⁹⁴

In English

Deepened into the illusion

Forgot the sure destiny

Came with the fist

Left with the laid palm

Deepened into the illusion

Amazed by your motionless stand

The world full of pleasures

Is limited, bound to end

Realize this, O! human

When mortal life ends

No one remains by your back

All worldly ties and relations

They will cease to exist

⁹⁴ Interview with Aheibam Tolen Meitei (Artist), Takyel Khongban, Imphal West, 17 June 2024.

The ritual called *Lairik Loiba* is performed on the eve of the main death ritual (*Lanna Thouram*). The song depicts the mortality of worldly life. It pleads us to refrain from worldly pleasures and devote ourselves to the Almighty Lord.

Pukning Warakpa

In Manipuri

Roughly Translation

“Kanagi paokhonnone

Who is your Commander?

Kanana nangbu tharakpano

Who has sent you?

Taibang keithel mayaisida

To this illusionary world

Karibu leige laklibano

What is that you want to gain?

Kanagi paokhonone...

Who is your Commander?

Lounambagi keitheilni

The world is a deceiving market.

Oidaba ngakta yonbani

Those on sale are fake.

Apam pamda khanlingeida

While choosing the likes and dislikes

Korouse mamba hangidoure

The night is soon to embrace

Kanagi paokhonone....

Who is your Commander?

Lounambagi keithelni

The world is a deceiving market.

Lounambagi keitehlai

All being sold are lies.

Oidaba ngakta yonbani

While choosing the likes and dislikes

Apam pamda khanlingeida

Illusioned by those likes and dislikes

Pami pamde khanlingeida

Lambigi mashak khanghouraroi
Kanagi pakhonnone

The path shall not be known
Who is your Commander?

Erang ethakta eroiruro
Pukning langtaknaganu

Avoid worldly pleasures.
Control the mind

Lambi lamfang chatlu.....
Lambise lamuknagani

Do not look at the other paths
Else the true path shall be forgotten

Khangna khangna khanghouraroi
Una una uhouraroi

Knowingly, everything shall end
Evidently, everything shall perish

Kanagi paokhonone”⁹⁵

Who is your Commander?

This song literally means 'Mind control or mind discipline'. It presents a glimpse of what life is about. One is born to this earth on the command of the Commander, who is the Almighty Lord. It is also according to his command that one will return to His abode. One shall not forget the Commander, for he is the only guide to destiny. The song depicts the mortality of the beings and the useless temporary worldly ties and pleasures.

Lanna Thouram Song

“Loikhidoure Matam, Mioibagi Mapham

Punshigi Chengjen Loikhidoure Matam

Pangal Kanbi Lei, eigi Magi Khaidringei

Chatnaba Lamdangda, Thijaba nagmhoude

⁹⁵ Interview with Yambem Umakanta Meitei (Artist), Tera Yambem Leirak, Imphal West, 13 July 2024.

Chattabdi yaroi, Lambidi Khanghoude

Mioiba Mapokti Leirangga Pnadamni

Singelna Leiman Chandringei,

Leirangna Leikhok Loidringei

Chatnaba Lamdang Ahanda Hanghoihousi

Chattabadi Yaroi Lambidi Khangjoude

Punshigi Aroiba Yahip Fangdringeida

Chatnaba Lamdangdo Munna Thihourasi

Punshigi Aroiba.....

Nagshi Sini Paojende, Hayeng Sini Paotake

Nagshi Sini Paojende

Ngashi Ngashi Hyeng Hayeng

Ngashi Sini Paojende

Hameng Leimagi Mapokse

Tanglaabani Malemda

Heitrabadi Arembani

Ngahsi sini paojende

Haying sini paotakte

Aa .. aa... aa.. aa.. aa.. aa..

Tambiri Mahakna , Taibang Chaohanbada

Mahei fangjarabda.....

Fangjaningine Nanainabu, Oijaningine Nanainabu

Fangjaningi Thawaina, Penjaningi Pukningna

Unaraga Haijage Thengnaraga Penjage

Oijaningine Nanainbu

Thoujal Heiba Ebungo Mahakti

Taibangpalba Pumba Mapuni Hainei

Khoiyum Shidaba APokpa

Lainignthou Ebungo

Nahakki Thoujalna Taibangpalba Oihanli

Thoujan Pinabiyu

Awaba Nungaiba Anigi Marakta

Hikna Hikna Kainaba Mioiba Mapok

Eikhoina Kaonagumshi

Michang Mikhai Naidaba Achan Mirai Naidaba

Taibangi Mapuni Nahakti

Thoujal Heiba.....

*Pukningda Ninglase Pukningdada Sonlase*⁹⁶

Roughly Translation

The time is ending, O! mortal human,
The day of living is about to end.
The time is the leveller and knew no bias,
The true path is to ignore to seek,
Sure to step that path but not sought.

Mortal human life is like a flower,
Before the flowers become withered,
Before the flower departs its stem,
Let's seek the truest path.
Sure to step that path but not sought.

Before the slumber at the grave
Let's seek the truest path
Before the slumber at the grave

No one is informed of the day of death
No one is informed

⁹⁶ Interview with Yambem Umakanta Meitei (Artist), Tera Yambem Leirak, Imphal West, 13 July 2024.

Today or tomorrow

No one is informed

This temporary life is the most precious,

It's a waste when the path is unknown

No one is informed of the day of death today or tomorrow

Aa-aa-aa-aa-

Lessons are taught to the ignorant humans,

The blessed humans

Seek it's path and determine to devote,

The heart longs, and the mind wants,

To thank you when the soul meets you

Determine to be your devotee.

The Creator with full of blessings

Is the Lord of the world.

Absolute Almighty Creator

O! lordLainingthou

Your blessing created the worldly lives.

Bless O! Lord

In between the joy and sorrow,

The mortal life shall end in repentance
Let's not forget that
He knew no bias and equated every mortal
He is the Lord of the world
With full of blessings
Let's pray and seek from heart and soul.

The song constitutes a main part of the death ritual ceremony of *Lanna Thouram*. It is sung during the phase of 'main' construction in the said ritual. The songs performed in the death rituals of Meities are diverse and numerous in their members. Songs are performed in different stages of death rituals of Meiteis such as Potloiba (funeral ceremony), *Lairik Taba* (also known as Dasha Hon, which is the ritual performed at the sacred pavilion from the day of death till the main death ritual, i.e., *Lanna Thouram*), *Mangani Leihun* (5th or 6th-day ritual), *Lanna Thouram/shraddha* (main death ritual) and *Kumon Phiroi* (death anniversary ritual).

This song is performed during the main death ritual, i.e., *Lanna Thouram (Shradha)*. The song is a narrative of the morTality of human life. The song urges us to seek the path of devotion during our lifetime.

The unique style of song performed at a place called Sekmai in Manipur.

Singum Eshei

“ *Ha... Hoiroune eebu nongsho hoiroune se.*

Iben nangsho karino? Kaoren salsho nattare, hoiroune se.

Saabi yaithong kumkhibi napari nungshidabara? Hallak-O se.

Poirei lambel chatle loigi leibak youre hallaroi se.

Ha... nahabi apangbi keidouge haina ngaibano se.

Nahan taibang panduda thanglen nouna khainab angaibane se.

Ha... houkhibi haogi laangda thugani hallak-O se.

Haogi laangda thubasho thanglen leiba nattare hallaroi se.

Kheba chingda kakhibi nungsha lange wa oibi hallak-O se.

Haogi wangma lalle hari khongba tare hallaroi se.

Nungjeng nongpok yahipti kontha charei feipu batabi-O se.

Karibu taruseba kontha yaithakhare matare se.

Awang nongpok leikhampok shinam chadi nakholjel matare se.

Epalgi shumang meikhu khuredo tairrel khutta sunadi nahaire se.

Ha... khamnung pakhangba sawa tanba thenggani hirallo se.

Khamnungda pao hanglukhige mana lallo hairaga maraange se.

Ha... heibong achouba iman mcha yengge chaira se.

Heibong nangna khanduna iman macha houkhiba uhoude se.

Ha... shil leima haying eina shiraga shillammo se.

Shillei pathou-O thangjou lengda koina shillamge se.

Shillei pathou-O pathou khullankhiba laktare se.

Charei ufei phamba ithanglenbu malle hirallo se.

Nahan taibang panda natom haija yadaba wane se.

Waithou thamchet charungei likshang tampha khudol manghoure se.

Nanaina phoukhong penglungai changbi laayol thatta khanglako se.

Ashi yenkha tangadi kanana thaba yenno hangningngi se.

Mayumbamna thabane matonsingga nanouba changeine se.

Wai asi tangadi namungba waine netheide se!

Namungnaba wadusho, nungshinaba waramsho hairamge se.

Paikhu uchek lamlanba eepalgi thongjil sepatpa se.

Thongjindabu haibara npalgi phunga lairusho toukhaige se.

Ha... humairo mayang sekpi humairo humlarose.

Laigi humaine kona humai nattare humlaroi se.

Khamnung Pungphu nongphaiching tampha khutop yaioiba maanghoure se.

Khamnung meina chure tairai khutta sunadi nahaire se.

Ha yenbak kokthong tupkhibi napanna hallo haiye hanwai-O se.

Poirei lambel chatle laigi leibak youre hallaroi se.

Thongjil paina nongkhambi liksang tampha khudop khairammo se.

Eepalgi sumang meikhu khure tairrel khutta suna nahaire se.

Inungma soibiraguno laigi yenba khongbiraguna se.”⁹⁷

Summary:

Shingum Eshei is a traditional form of song practised at a place called Sekmai in Manipur. This song is performed during the death ritual when the deceased is carried to a funeral ceremony. As per the tradition of Sekmai, there is no compulsion that this song should be practised at every death incident. Generally, when a respected elder or person of repute in the Sekmai area passes away, this form of the song is performed during the funeral march. The family members of the deceased engaged local persons who could sing the song in good verse. There are no professional artists for this song performance, and no considerations are made regarding the fees or charges of the engaged singers. Family members would pay some cash or offer a kind gesture as a symbol of gratitude.

This song is performed during the time interval when the dead body is brought from *Khangenpham* (a sacred place at the porch or lawn where the dead body is kept for floral offerings and prayers on the day of death) towards the funeral site. The singers performed the song in loud and raw voices, i.e. sound systems like microphones are not used. Normally, the song is repeated three times, which would suit the time taken in marching from *Khngenpham* to the funeral site (*Potloipham*). If the distance is short, the singers skip some lines in the middle and proceed to *Meikoi Eshei* (a Funeral song performed while the deceased is put to the fire in circumambulation). The *Meikoi Eshei* is

⁹⁷ Yaiskul Khwairakpam, Sekmaida Pokpa Shiba, p. 97.

the concluding song performed in the first-day ritual, i.e. the day of death. The singers and family members of the deceased bowed to the relatives, kin, elders and visitors who came to participate in the ceremony.⁹⁸

Meiring Eshei :

“Uchek kokil Ahal-O.

Cheklana hikna hikna kapadi

Pari khaina wagira?

Mamon setna wagira?

Pari khaina wa nattedo.

Cheklana ahal oibana

Ahalgi matam oibana

Cheklana koina koina yenglubada.

Loibi chingou mapalna

Erok khuding hennare.

Lokya tamya yengbada

Pulei kangsinnabana pullei manou chonglakle.

Loklei nasinnabana loklei khumu hullakle.

Loubuk khuding koina yengbada

Peruk kangsinnabasu perukla naashi sharakle.

Kengoi-O tathotlabina mapal ngoun asatlakle.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 99.

Tukhongla langkhong yengbada
Komprek taothrana mapal ngouna satlakle.
Turel tukhul yengbada loibi tera mapanna
mapal-O ngangna satlakle.

Turel-O tukhul ngannare.
Cheklana ahal oibana
Ahalgi matam oibana
Kamlak kuru sung khubom shing kaihoure.

Turelgi changjou kabada
Loibi chingjao kagumle.
Mangolgi tari kabada
khu-oodi pampainaredo.

Sinedo sinedo ahaloiba
Karam hanfadaba cheklana ahal oibanina
Cheklana pukning nungshibagi
*Hikna hikna kappane. Te.*⁹⁹

Rough Translation

O! Oldie Kokil bird,
What made you weep?

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 102-103.

Has your son departed?

Has your daughter departed?

The reasons are none of these.

As the bird ages,

The days of lod being approached,

When the bird looks around,

The hilly worm seeds,

Joyously spread all over.

The sight of tarns and plains,

Filled with springs of flowery herbs.

Ginger lilies budded everywhere.

The sight of the fields and lakes,

Filled with crowded pennywort.

Flowers of bower spinach sprang all over.

The sight of streams and canals,

Filled with white flowers of dropwort.

The sight of the river basins,

Filled with flowers of the Red silk cotton tree.

The rivers and the basins are refreshed.

The bird is aged.

Old times have approached.

Bones are weakened, muscles shattered.

On mounting the river bank,

The body becomes weary.

On mounting the porch,

The knees have shaken.

Oh, Oldie, it is sure to die.

The mortal aged bird,

Saddened by these thoughts,

Made him weep.

Rough Summary:

The song metaphorically compares an aged person with an old *Kokil* (cuckoo) bird. The song questions the old cuckoo about the reasons behind his crying and weeping, and the reasons are answered throughout the song. Nature itself rejuvenates before our eyes. When the end days approached, it was realised that all these sights would be missed. The song reflects the mortality of one's life. The song suggests that everything is temporary, and the only certainty is death.

“*Meiring Eshei*” literally means 'song around a fireplace'. It is a form of the song (folk) that was practised in the olden days at the place of Sekmai in Manipur. The song is a narrative that reminds us of the mortality of human beings. The mortality of life is expressed metaphorically in various natural objects. The song depicts the law of nature that worldly pleasures are temporary and the end of days cannot be stopped. The song is

about the reminiscence of the past when life becomes closer to the end. As one ages, health deteriorates, and the mind becomes weaker. However, it is impossible to rewind to a past life, and it is sure to leave the world.

In the past, male and female bachelors would sing a song on the occasion of *Meiringba*. *Meiringba* is an age-old culture practised when someone dies in the locality at odd hours, and the funeral rites and rituals must be performed after the night has passed. The night is made to pass by an arrangement of fire through the burning of wood, where it is strictly complied that the fire shall not be put out till the night passes. The arrangement of such a fire is made at certain places within the house and in the front yard of the house. It was a religious belief and a strict code in the past. During the winter season, the bachelors gather around a bonfire and sing songs, waiting for the night to pass. The bachelors took part in the event to their fullest and sang with joy. In this way, "*Meiring Eshei*" came into being.¹⁰⁰

The culture of *Meiring Eshei* fades away day by day. The younger generations are not aware of such practices and the existence of such songs. However, the said tradition is still kept alive during the *Lai-Haraoba* Ceremony of *Sekmai*. At the same time, it is practised by the priests and ritual performers during the ceremony on the night of adorning the God or Goddess.¹⁰¹

5.2.2. Songs of Meitei Hindu (Nat Sankirtan)

The song and music performed in the death ritual ceremonies of Meitei Hindus is *Nat Sankirtan*. This *Sankirtan* was introduced after the advent of Hinduism in Manipur. The death ritual ceremonies of Meitei Hindus are performed through *Nat Sankirtan*.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 107-108.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 108.

The lyrics of the Nat *Sankirtan* are the tales of Lord Krishna. It is primarily based on the Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagwat Puran. The composition of *Manshiksha* and the storylines of *Nimai Sanyas* are also sung in *Nat Sankirtan*.

There are various forms of Nat Sankirtan performed during death rituals; among them, only a few commonly practised types have been included in this study.

There are seven sequences of Nat *Sankirtan*. They are:

1. *Raga Houba*
3. *Raga Taba*
4. *Men/Mel and Rajmel*
5. *Tanchap*
6. *Menkup*
7. *Swadhin, And*
8. *Vijay*.¹⁰²

The seven sequences are sung in their respective rhythms and styles of song. The first sequence is initiated by *Pung* and known as *Pung Raga*, followed by a song known as *Eshei Raga*. It will be followed by the remaining sequences. The conclusion of Nat *Sankirtan* is concluded through *Prathana* (joint prayers) and *JoiBhai*.

Such a performance of *Sankirtan* is known as *Maha Sankirtan* (Grand *Sankirtan*). The wind instrument, i.e. *Moibung* (Conch), is used in this Grand *Sankirtan*. Grand *Sankirtan* is performed during the main death ritual, i.e. the *Shradha* and *Phiroi* (1st death anniversary) ceremony.

Manshiksa/Monshikha

“Harinam nattana chanjafam leiroy

Kali jibagi lanbinaba leiroy

¹⁰² Interview with Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh (Seniour Guru of Nat Sankirtan), Kwakeithel Nganapithong, , Imphal , 25 June 2023.

Tanglaba mapokni mahei yalhallu

Mamlaba taibangni hanthana khallu

Matam kaya lelle angang oina

Oijaba khangdana sannaduna

Mathot karakle akiba leirude

Erangda luptuna harinam solhoude

Ahal oirakle sagei chaorakle

Echa eshu nungshi thourina pulle

Punshi loirakle aroiba matam lakle

Loina hundoklamle mongfamda hiple

Kari oina pokpa kanasu khangdre

Karmana lamjingle pokpadi soidre

Hangjou thijou lambi hallakpa naidaba

Magi charan nakta lengdana leijaba

Ningjou nijou kari apamba khanduna

Changjafam nijafam oibani harina

Chanbiheiba mingthol fangkiba harini

Ninglaga nangna kari fangdani

Urakhini eshu, pairakhini cheisu

Khangnei pumnamaksu hek hek kaowe eisu

Yengningi fajaba, kaongamde oidaba

Thangamde louningba, eigisu natraba

Nungaibani khalli, achumbabu kaohalli,

Kaohannaba silli, kaodabana lalli
Apambana chumm, panthungfam yammi,
Khanluraga mammi, mamnaba semi.”¹⁰³

Rough Translation

Hari is the only path,
To attain salvation.
Make the most of this precious life,
Rethink, for the world is dark.
Childhood has been spent,
Carelessly and ignorantly.
Youth, too, arrived with fearlessness,
Wasted in worldly pleasures.
The family grew as they aged,
Bonded by the ties of the children.

Death approached when the end came,
Everything perished with the slumber in the grave.
Uncertain about the next birth,
To be guided by Karma.
Seek the path to salvation,
To rest in peace in the Lord’s abode.

¹⁰³ Shri Khangembam Gulapi Singh, Shri Shri Govinda Thouram Seireng (Nat Eshei) Ahanba Sharuk, p. 151-152.

Pray and seek His blessing,
For Hari, there is only one path.
Hari is known for His sanctity,
Surely, you will be blessed.
When the end approaches, strength will be lost,
The surest reality is ignored.
Allured by the unreal worldly desires,
Could not abstain from temporary pleasures.
The truth is masked by the unreal,
Illusioned and mad to be illusioned,
Desire guides and paths are unclear,
Darkness awaits ahead, in one's own volition.

The living world created by *Hari* (Supreme Lord) is filled with illusions. One forgets the morTality of life and is careless of the life after death. Childhood, youth, and old age are often wasted in ignorance, pleasures, and worldly ties. One is always deepened in selfish personal desires, which are temporary. One's life is blurred by the materialistic decisions one makes. The song urges to accompany *Hari* all the time to attain salvation.

The melody of the line from '*Matam Kaya Lelle Angang Oina*' is given below:



The given melody is the phrase of *Joubon Oirakle kanabu Kirude*.

Joubon Oirakle Kanabu Kirude

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of five staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure. The second staff starts with a measure rest followed by a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The third staff continues the melody with various note values and rests. The fourth staff begins with a measure rest and a treble clef. The fifth staff concludes the phrase with a final note and a measure rest.

This is the melody line of *Ahan Oirakle Sagei Chaorakle*.

Ahan Oirakle Sagei Chaorakle

Nimai Sannyas

“Leihouroko BishnuPriya

Eidi Chatlage Sainyas Fanglage

Leihouroko BishnuPriya...

Mapok Asima Nangbu Hundoklamledo

Nang Warouganu

Leihouroko BishnuPriya

Emagi Pukning Nungshihanganu

Luna Touko Emabu

Eidi chatle Pran Priye

Eidi Chatle Eidi Chatle

Leihouroko BishnuPriya

Eisaktuna Nangna

Emagi Seba Touro Prem Priye

Ei Saktuna

Nungaiba saruk Fangjaraktrabi

Eibu Pokpi Emani

Eidi Chatle Prem Priye

Eid Chatle Chatle

Leihouroko Bishnupriye.”¹⁰⁴

Rough translation:

Farewell! Dear BishnuPriya,

I must step on the Godly path,

Farewell! Dear BishnuPriya.

I must leave you in this birth,

¹⁰⁴ Nongthombam Nipamacha, Nimai Sannyas, p. 24.

Curse me not.

Farewell! Dear BishnuPriya.

Cheer up, my Mother,

Take care of her,

I must leave, O! Dearest,

I must leave,

Farewell! Dear BishnuPriya.

Taking my place,

Take care of Mother, O! Dearest,

Taking my place.

She knew no happiness,

My ill-fated Mother.

I must leave, O! Dearest,

I must leave,

Farewell! Dear BishnuPriya.

In the death ritual of Meitei Hindu, the part of *Nimai Sanyas* is sung. It narrates the event of *Gouranga Nimai Prabhu* stepping out of his family and all worldly pleasures to lead the life of a spiritual preacher. The part of the song is his farewell to his dear wife.

Nimai Sanyas is the most popular composition in the Meitei Hindu death ritual. The given melody is sung in *Menkup* taal.

Leihouroko Bishnupriya

17

21

25

The melody of the phrase, i.e., *Mapok Ashima Nangbu Hundoklam*, is given below:

Mapok Ashima Nangbu Hundoklam

29

33

37

The continuity part of the composition, i.e., *Emagi Pukning Nungshihanganuko*:

Emagi Pukning Nungshihanganuko

The musical score is written for piano in 4/4 time. It consists of six systems of staves. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is primarily in the treble clef, with some notes in the bass clef. The second system starts at measure 41. The third system continues the melody. The fourth system starts at measure 45. The fifth system starts at measure 49 and features a more complex bass line. The sixth system starts at measure 53 and continues the bass line. The score is written in a standard musical notation style with various note values, rests, and accidentals.

*“Lon: asumna bidai louraga prabhu lengthorakle. Bhagawat khurumle, Gangapar toure, Ganga lalle. Ganga lallaga prabhu lengbara haibabu lengba ngamdri. Nabadip ki premna tungda yalli, shrikrishna gi premna mangda chingli. Asi chingnabada prabhu lengba ngamdaduna chap leptuna leiri. Matam asi bidhina uhanli nonganlamdaigi engkhraba matam aduda hamba hamba khongduna macha thirake chenna chenna. Prabhuna leiba samin fangbada macha oiraboi ningduna chensinlake. Nangbu nangbu ema haina kougeko Go-Mata ema eidi nangi nacha natte. Sanbi(cow) nangna nonganlamdaisida nangna chenlibasi nacha thiribanido. Nangna nacha thiriba ashigumna nong hek nganbada eigi emana eibu thigadouribanido asi hairaga sanbibu thadoklaga nabadip lomda onlaga koukhare mama haiduna”.*¹⁰⁵

In such a way, he gave farewell and stepped out for Brindavan. He kneeled to Bhagwaad and crossed the *Ganga*. *Gouranga* stood motionless when he passed *Ganga* as the emotional ties to his hometown, Nabadwip attracted him back, and his love for Lord Krishna pulled him forward. In such a situation, *Gouranga* was unable to move. Destiny took the test of *Gouranga*. On that cold winter night, a mother cow moos in search of her child. Having sensed the presence of *Gouranga*, the cow rushed towards him, thinking him to be its child. The scene made *Gouranga* emotional. He called the cow Go-Mata, 'I am not your son. 'Like you searched for your child, I have a mother who will search for me in the morning. ' Saying this, *Gouranga* turned towards Nabadwip and cried for his Mother.

“Eibudi ninglibi ema hunjeklamle

Emabu kattraba nacha eina

Pap chenba nachani apradha ngakpiyu

Dandabat katchari nachana

Mama ningdaba machani haina khanbiganu

¹⁰⁵ Shagolshem Kalidaman Singh, *Nat Sankirtan*, p. 111-112.

Ema eidi chatchare ema eidi chatchare.”¹⁰⁶

I have left my Mother, who always thinks of me,
Without even saying a word to her,
I have sinned, forgive me,
I kneel from far, O! Mother,
Don't think of me as an irresponsible son,
Farewell, dear Mother, I am leaving.

*“Lon: Asum nghaktang kappi prabhu. Jugta purushki hounabini uru urubadugi matungenna ngahak nghaktang ningshinglubatani. Adugumna prem kayana prabhu punba ngamde. Sansargi wangmagi turban da kakhatkhrabanina. Prabhuna khut ani lonnaraga, ha Krishna emabu kaohanbiro. Nangi charanda chingsinbiro haiduna krishnada prathana katlaga chatli katuwa pangna. Asum chatna chatna khanli Priyadi eina yathang piduna sumduna leihoure. Numit thana leirimakheidi houraroido. Asi khanbda prabhugi etshadagi ahal oiraba Brahman amana Priyagi mamangda hairake. Priya haibi apangbi nangdi ningaidana tummi nabungo chatkhre tallune haire. Matam asida”*¹⁰⁷

Rough Translation:

Gouranga cried for a while. These emotions didn't last long as his destiny awaited. All these emotions could not halt *Gouranga*. He has left all worldly things. He prayed, 'O! Krishna, make me forget my Mother. 'Let me grace Your divine feet'. With these prayers, he approached *Katuwa*. During his journey, a thought provoked him. He remembered how he deceived his dearest wife and put her to slumber. On the wish of *Gouranga*, an

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.112.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 112.

old Brahman appeared in the dream of BishnuPriya, 'O! foolish Priya, you are sleeping carelessly. Your husband has left; rush to him. At this moment -

*“BishnuPriya mitkap thokle koina koina thirakle
Yengbada udare thibada fangdare leipakthakta haihatle
Khuji hundokle lik thadatle laibakki sindur muthatle
Ban mala taramle khungatle sachida take chellakle
“Khut ani lonnare tanik tanik leire wa ngangba thoktare
Sachina hangi haiyuma bahu Nimai keidourage
Mange Mange Nanai Eidi
Prannathat Ebungodo leiramdare
Pranathat ebungodo ahing lonna lengkhare.”*¹⁰⁸

BishnuPriya wakes up, searches for his Lord,
Nowhere to be found, she falls to the ground,
She breaks her bangles and erases the sindoor
She picked up the fallen wedding thread and rushed towards Mother
She folds her hands to Mother Sachi and cannot utter a word
Sachi enquires about what has happened.
BishnuPriya replies, 'I have lost everything.'
‘My dearest Lord is nowhere to be found
'My dearest Lord secretly left during the night.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 112.

“Lon: Priyagi wa tabada leipakta ollibi Priyabu faoba hougatlamde. Angaobigum chellakle koura kouraduna.”¹⁰⁹

Sachi ran out calling her son. She did not even pick Priya up, who was crying on the floor.

*“Ha Nimai Nimai mangle nimai
Laibak thibi Sachi eibu dosh louganu
Nongma ahing nongsaiba hunjeklure nim makhongda
Khanlu khanluraga chakle chakle nngamdare
Nachi koubi eigi laibakta
Nongdamthiba bidhina
Echa kainou haina tambiramla malle.”¹¹⁰*

Ha! Nimai, I am lost,
It is my sin, dear son,
I had left you alone this very night,
I could not bear this pain.
I am ill-fated,
Creator has destined me,
To lose my dearest son.

“ Lon: Sachina fuk hougattuna Nimai Nimai haina kachin koina thibada fangdrabada chenthoraklaga thongjinda khutna pairaga khut-oi tingthoraktuna kourakle.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 113.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 113.

*Lako lako emagi Nimai emaga amukta unakhisine
Emana tampakta pmjaraga amrita amuktang enjakhigene
Mamangeida kurukhetrada simanta panshok trithada
Krishna jashoda do unnabagumna emaga amukta unakhisine”¹¹¹*

Sachi could not find his son in the nook and corner of the house. She rushed to the door, stretched out her left hand, and shouted for her son.

*Come back, Nimai, meet your Mother once,
Let me breastfeed you on my bosom for once,
Like the ancient time at Kurukshetra, Simanta Panshok Tritha,
When Lord Krishna and Mother Yasodha met.*

*“Lon: Yengu baslei prem, emana amrita engine emana amrita enge hairiba matamsi
Sachi masagi chahi humfutarahumdoidagi henlaba matamni. Sachisi macha tara pokpani
keinya nipanni. Polka poklaga hek sikhi, asigi tungda bishwarup haiba ama poke.
Asidagi chahi tara konlag prabhu pokpani. Khwaigi atonbaduna chahi kunmarigi
matungda lengkhrribani. Aduna nongshagumkhraba machadubu angang oiringeigi ruptu
oina adumak ui. Mama machabu ubasi yamna pikliba ado ekao kaodabani aduna
sachina koubada.*

*Emana tampakta pamjarag
Amrita amukta enjakhigene.”¹¹²*

Sachi's love for her son is incomparable, as she is over 73 years old and calls her son for breastfeeding. Sachi is a Mother to 10 children. Eight girl children were born to her, who all died as infants. Later, a boy called Bishwarup was born to him. Ten years later, Nimai was born. Her youngest son, at the age of 24, left her on that night. In the eyes of a

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 113.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 113-114.

mother, her mature son is just like a small child. This is the reason Sachi calls her son in such a manner.

Let your Mother hold you,

Let me breastfeed you.

“Lon: asumna koubada prabhuna takhidrabada Sachi lamyaida haihattuna tukhare. Priyana haijei ema lengkhatlo. Ema echana kaplingeida ebungo lengkhibana hanlagani,ebungo tannasi hairabada, Sachi chetan fangduna hougatle. Meira ama semduna Priyada pire. Ebemma nangna prannath haina kou, eina Nimai Nimai kounge asum haiduna.

Thenglaba ahingda Sachi Priyana chenlackle maikei khangdana

Koujei Nimai haina

Priyana koujei prannath haina.

Chelli ban upanab samduna.

Awaba akiba leitana

Asumna chenlakpana Ganga gig hat youre

Meira thanduna yengbada charan chinha ure Priyana

Haijarke Sachi yengduna

Ema-eigi thawai oiba ebungodi Ganga lankharene.”¹¹³

The call of Mother Sachi was in vain. Sachi fell to the ground and began to cry. Priya told her to get up and said, 'There is no use in crying; my lord will be gone far; let's

¹¹³ Ibid., p.114.

chase him'. Sachi got up and prepared a torch. They stepped out with the call 'Dear Lord' by Priya and 'Nimai' by Sachi.

On that late night, Sachi and Priya rushed to Gouranga.

Sachi cried, 'Nimai

Priya cried 'Dear Lord

Passing through dense forests and groves.

Without getting tired, without any fear,

They reached the bank of the Ganga,

Stretching the torch to the vastness of Ganga,

Priya told Mother Sachi

It is certain that my Lord crossed the Ganga.

“Lon: sachina hai karamna khangbagene. Priyana hai charan chinha tarene. Sachina hai ghat haibasidi miyamna chatpani. Nabungogini haiba karamna khangbagene. Priyana haijei, sandhyagi sebada charanda jabokna leitengjakhiani, leingoi asida ngangra ngangranan churibasini ebungo magi charan chinha nattana kangi oigadagene. Asi hairamlaga Priya leingoida tukhare. Padachinha tariba leingoidu khubam khubam louraga kokta haptuna aroiba bilab tourakle.

“Eshei: Mangle mangle Priya eidi

Eigi punshi loiredo

Priya eidi siragani

Ebungogi premdi kanana piramgani”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 114-115.

Sachi enquired, 'How could you know? Many people passed through it. Priya replied, 'From his footprints. ' Priya had decorated his Lord's feet with red (Jabok) during her service in the evening. The footprints with colour were found in the sands of the bank. Narrating this, Priya kneeled on the shore and picked up the sand marked with footprints. She put it on her head and cried out loud.

I have lost everything,
Nothing is left for me to live,
I shall die,
There is no mercy from my Lord.

“Lon: Ashi hainaduna sachiPriya Gangagi ghat ta onna thoina kappi. Bhaktasingna tannraktuna laktuna Sachi Priyabu themduna ounaba thourangjari. Eikhoisuk yamba leiri. Ebungengada eikhoina thiduna purakkni waganu haiduna themmi. Priyadi matamsida chp leplaga Gangagi ghat adubu cheirakle gati leitrada. Gangagi ghat na ebungenga lalhankhibani nangdi ei cheiramlage. Nangi namingdi nadirya ghat haiduna numit thana thokliba makhei koklaganuko haina cheirammi. Hujik faoba nidarya ghat haiduna leiri. Asumna bhaktasingna them noudana purakle sudhabasthan amada wa tannaringeida nonganlakle. Bhakta kharana meikei mari sinduna thikhare. Nityaichandna sachida haijei, ema eina ebungobu puraktuna emada pigani. Asi haiduna Chandrasekhar, Damodar , Mukunda, Nityaichand, Bhakteswar hairiba bhakta mangasi katuwaromda laktuna keshaba bhartiga prabhuga leiramba uraduna nityaichanda na prabhubu konlaga haijei. Ebungenga ema amukta unarukhisi, aduga amuk laksine hairubada prabhuna sukta tadana hairke. Shripad lakpa fre gurudevada hangduna nangna thourang khra toubiyu eigi matam soihanbiganuko. Asi hairaga prabhu sam sengba loikhare.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 115-116.

The followers and well-wishers of *Gouranga* also rushed to the bank of the *Ganga*. They consoled *Sachi* and *Priya*. They assured them that they would find *Gouranga* and bring him back. Helpless, *Priya* stood up and cursed *Ganga* for letting his Lord pass. She cursed, 'This bank shall be known as *Nidarya Ghat* forever. Today, the place is known as *Nidarya Ghat*. The followers consoled them and brought them back. While resting on the way, morning approached. The followers spread in the four directions to search for *Gouranga*. One *Nityaichandra* promised *Sachi* that he would bring back *Gouranga Nimai*. *Chandrasekhar*, *Damodar*, *Mukunda*, and *Nityaichandra* approached *Katuwa*. They met *Nimai*, joined by *Kesava Bharati*. *Nityaichandra* asked *Nimai* to meet his Mother once. *Nimai* did not listen to him. Instead, he asked *Nityaichandra* to assist him in preparation for the path of renunciation. *Nimai* prepared to shave his hair.

"Lon: Madhu kouba nape tama thengnaduna prabhuna hai. Mahasai lao eigi samsi khara kokthokpiyu ei sannyas oirage. Madhu kouba napetna hai sauna, kadaidagi pakhangno numit chap yungbasida langnariba, chatlo chatlo ei ngammoi aada chatlo ei ngammoi. Mahasaoi keidoubage nangna eigi ningba asi khara thunghanluba haibada, taramdana sauna lakpada prabhu chap leptuna lei. Madhuna saobadu mama na uduna hangi. Karino ebungo nangna yamna sauna lakpabu kari tourabagene. Madhuna yengu ema aadagi pakhang ase numit chp yungba asida eibu langnabiri. Magi sam kokpiyu sannyas oirage hainese. Furukhige haiduna chei paiduna lakpada mama na hai. Madhu, leiriba nupasi yamana magun lei mana ningba thunghanlaga eikhoida afaba oibasui yai. Khra kokpiyuse hairabda. Madhuna mamana haiba matungenna thoraktuna famduna kokpada prabhugi sam hek sokpada magi khur adu maya khao khao hekta kelle, yadrene hairabda prabhuna ngsai mana prabhubu yeige chensinba , magi papi oiba thamoi sengdokpige haina . mahasoi nangi khurudugi mayada mantra sollu. Madhuna eidi mantradi heitene hairabada, prabhuna ei take haiduna (Hare Krishna) haiba mayek marisi ahumlak sollu aduga yagani. Hairabda madhuna khur mayada Hare Krishna

ahumlak sollaga kokpadadi yare. Prabhu sam kokle. Prabhu Ganga aasnan loiraduna chatkhre. Numit asidagi Madhu kouba napet tu magi napet ki thabk tokuna Hare Krishna sonduna param bhakta oikhi.”¹¹⁶

Nimai met a barber named *Madhu* and asked, 'O stranger, would you please shave my hair? I have decided to take the path of renunciation. ' *Madhu* refused and remarked that *Nimai* was a mad bachelor. *Nimai* insisted that the barber might fulfil his wish. *Madhu* paid no heed and angrily went away. *Nimai* stood helplessly.

Seeing *Madhu*'s angry face, her Mother, who had stepped ahead during the conversation, asked him, 'What happened, my son? Why are you so angry? *Madhu* replied, 'Look, Mother, the boy over there asked me to shave his head at this noon time. He is saying that he is taking the path of renunciation. I shall beat him with this stick. Her Mother stopped *Madhu* and asked her to fulfil *Nimai*'s wish. Her Mother felt that *Nimai* was no ordinary person. On the command of her Mother, *Madhu* agreed to shave *Nimai*'s hair. While attempting to shave the hair, the blades became functionless. *Nimai*, having understood the situation that it was because of the ill motive in the barber's heart to have decided to beat *Nimai*, the blades were not working. *Nimai* decided to help *Madhu* and said, 'Would you please spell some Mantra around the ground where you put your knees?'. *Madhu* replied, 'I don't know any Mantra'. *Nimai* asked him to spell Hare Krishna. *Madhu*, spitting out the words "Hare Krishna" three times, successfully shaved the hair of *Nimai*. *Nimai* took the Holy bath and left. From that very day, barber *Madhu* quit his profession and became a staunch devotee of Lord Krishna.

“Prabhu lakle keshav bhartida changduna mantra loure. Sannyas oire. Kesar kari ming thonsiba haiba khanlingeida aakash bani laorakle. (Shri Krishna Cheitanya) haina keshar ebungo jagatsi ochetan oiduna haiabadi tumduna leirabani. Ebungengana Krishna namrita khiktuna chetan pibiba, haiabdi houdokpiba, nangi namingdi Krishna

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 116.

cheitanya haiba namsi thollabani hairabada. Prabhuna guru dakshina katle, gurudagi bidai louraga brindaban ni haiduna chenhare.”¹¹⁷

Nimai went to his *Guru Keshav Bharti* and took the spell of renunciation. He became a *Sanyasi*. When it was about to decide on a new name for *Nimai*, a call from heaven came. *Nimai* was given the title *Shri Krishna Cheitanya* by heaven's call. It was reasoned that the world was in a deep slumber, and when *Nimai* springs holy water in the name of Lord Krishna, it would awaken the world. Blessed with the new name, *Nimai* made offerings to his Guru and bade farewell to leave for *Brindavan*.

Shrimatbahgabat Aarati

*“Aarati katchei changjei bhagawat puranbu
Govindaga Khennadraba Puran Athoibaba
Mayek amammna brahma gi mask oibibu
Parikhitpu chanbibagum chanbiyu nanaibu
Mapok khuding kaihanbinu pamjaribasibu
Nanai narsinghana pamjei govinda charanbu.*”¹¹⁸

Rough Translation:

Incense sticks are offered. O! *Baghwad Puran*,
You equate Lord Govinda, O! *Baghawad Puran*,
Every verse equates Lord *Brahma*,
Bless me, like You blessed King *Parikshit*,

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 116-117.

¹¹⁸ Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh, (Renowned Guru, *Nat Sankirtan*), interview, Kwakeithel Nganappi Thong, Imphal West, 15 June 2024.

Bless me to accompany you in every birth,
Bless *Narsingha* with the divine feet of Lord *Govinda*.

The *Brahmin* or priest conducts the death ritual of Meitei Hindus. Some verses from the *Bhagwad Puran* are spelt out. While beginning the spell, prayers are made to the *Bhagwad Puran*, seeking blessings.

Taal: Nam Taka

“Shri Krishna cheitanaya ningjadana
Lanbini jibabu kanan
Houkhre matam khanghoudene
Kari oiruni khangdrene
Shri Krishna cheitanaya Sonja ningjadana
Tanglaba mapokpu manghanlene
Pangmanlika manghanle
*Eigi haiba langna uplina.”*¹¹⁹

Rough Translation:

Seek the blessings of Lord Krishna,
He is the only means for salvation.
Time passed unaccounted,
Uncertain about the next

¹¹⁹ Shri Khangembam Gulapi Singh, Shri Shri Govinda Thouram Seireng (Nat Eshei), Ahanba Sharuk, p. 148

Seek the blessings of Lord Krishna.

Precious life is put to the test,

Such ignorance,

Trapped in selfishness.

The song urges us to pray to Lord Krishna all the time. Our mortal life is temporary, and the enjoyments, pleasures, and ties we have while living are useless. The truest path is to remember the Lord, as he is the destiny and the guide to destiny.

Taal: Men Awonba

“ Hari nattana kana lei jibagi

Pambei khangjinlu thijinlu panganu

Taibang mangalni yareklibani

Emung ngallakni kaoganu

Mitkap thorakkni loina mangkhini

Areppani khak khanlunu

Harina epani hari na emani

Lengdraba marupni ngakknu

Tellaba punshini mamlaba ahingni

Lambi lamfangnahanlaganu

Hari nangi taibang ase

Luhanlida khutsem ase

Fangamdraba mioibase

Fanglabani kaorenese

Una una udenese

Hubu haona charinese

Houba lomba eihaknise

Takna takna tadenese

Uriba lambi lamfangsingse

Thadokpa sukngam ngamdenese,”¹²⁰

Rough Translation:

Hari is the only means,
Seek the path; don't be ignorant.
Worldly life is a slumber,
Morning shall surely approach.
When the slumber ends,
Everything shall be found perished.

Hari is the Father, Hari is the Mother,
He is the truest Friend.
Life is a moment, the night is dark,
Don't lose the path.

Worldly life is His creation,
Filled with illusions,
You failed to remember,
That this life is most precious.

Refused to see the reality,

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 150.

Consumed the poison knowingly.

He is the beginning, He is the end,
Refused to listen to this preaching.
Reluctant to abstain from,
Temporary worldly pleasures.

While living on this earth, we are attached to worldly things. We forget that we are sure to die and continue leading a selfish life. The purpose of this life, which is a great gift of the Lord, is to remember Him and preach Him. The path to the heavenly abode starts during our lifetime, and it is based on our deeds that we attain salvation. The song urges us not to forget the Lord.

Prathana eshei (The song of Prathana)

“Rasheshori shri govinda pinabiyu charan seba

Matam leiba pumnamakta kaohanbinu anigi seba

Braja gopi eikhoidi ateı ama pamjade anigi seba nattana

Shriras mandalda radha govindana jagoi sabiyu ningthijana

“Jagoi saba tambiyu nanai eisu yaojage

Kunja kunja khusingda sannaba lila pumnamk

Tollaba nanaina tattna darshan fangjage

Nritya nikunjada anina punna nganbiyu

kunjagi thongda leijaraga punna darshan fangjage”¹²¹

O! Rasheshwori, O! Krishna, bless with your divine feet,

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 123.

Bless forever to serve You,
We, the Gopis of Brindavan, only wish to serve you,
Perform the Raas gracefully, O! Radha, O! Krishna.
Teach me, Raas, let me join you.
In every Raas at the divine pond and grove,
Bless me to witness it.
Grace at every divine pond and grove,
Bless me to witness it at the entrance.

In conclusion, this research does not seek to impose the Hindustani raga framework upon Meitei traditional music, nor does it attempt to indentify or equate specific ragas within the indigenous repertoire. The purpose of the study is not to engage in a classifactory or raga-detection in Meitei ritual songs.

The musicality of the Meitei ritual songs is distinct in nature and deeply rooted in indigenous ethnomusicological traditions. These songs function within own cultural, ritualistic, and community based systems. On the other hand, Hindustani music and raga system represent a highly structured and codified classical tradition governed by established theoretical principles. Due to these fundamental differences in structure, function, and aesthetic orientation, a direct comparison between the two systems lies beyond the scope and limitations of the present study.

However there remains potential for future research to explore comparative perspectives. It may be possible to examine certain musical elements, such as note patterns or tonal structures of Meitei rituals songs, through the analytical lens of Hindustani classical terminology. Such comparative work, if undertaken carefully, could contribute to a deeper interdisciplinary understanding without comprising the autonomy and identity of the indigenous musical.

5.3 Analysis of musical instruments used in the death ritual

Various musical instruments are used in the Meitei death ritual ceremony. These musical instruments are mainly used during *Sankirtan* song performances. The instruments used in *Sankirtan* are very popular in Manipur. These instruments can be divided into four types

1. Percussion group – 1. *Meitei Pung*, and 2. *Khun Pung*
2. Edeophone group – 1. *Mangang* 2. *Jhal* 3. *Kartal* 5. *Kangshi* 6. *Sharik*
3. Aerophone group (wind instrument) – 1. *Moibung*
4. Chordophone – 1. *Pena*

The following instruments are briefly described below.

5.3.1 *Khun Pung* and *Meitei Pung*

Pung is a musical instrument that is played by means of hitting or striking. In the death ritual ceremony of Meiteis, two kinds of *Pung* are used.

5.3.1.1 *KhunPung*



Fig 5.2: *Khun Pung* for *Sekmai*¹²²

KhunPung can be literally translated as community *Pung*. 'Khun' means village, and 'Leikai' means community. Both names are known as *Pung*: *Khun-Pung* or *Leikai-Pung*. *KhunPung* is also a percussion instrument, a kind of *Pung*. In *KhunPung*, two types are used: 1. A type of *KhunPung* that has been used in community ceremonies and important incidents since ancient times. 2. A type of *KhunPung* used in the death ceremony when a person in the community dies/ both these types are categorically described as under;

The use of this type of *Pung* was a necessity for every village or community in the Meitei society of Manipur. Due to the advent of time and modernity, the use of *KhunPung* is diminishing. In recent times, *KhunPung* is still used in places of Manipur such as *Andro*, *Sekmai*, *Khurkhul*, *Leimaram*, etc. In these places, this instrument is well preserved and used in community ceremonies. This instrument is used in events like the occurrence of death within the community, giving publicity for village meetings, warning about enemy invasion, giving information for the elopement of village girls, etc. The shape and style of this instrument are quite different from the ordinary *Pung*. This instrument nowadays is archived and preserved. This instrument is not commonly used to produce multiple notes, and in simpler terms, it is played only in simple beats, with no additional or modified notes used. The shape and size of this *Pung* are very big, with two faces that are similar in size. Due to the larger size of this *Pung*, conveyance is not

¹²² Field Visit to *Lai Haraoba* (Deity Pleasing Ritual) Festival, *Sekmai*, Manipur, 30 January 2023.

possible. It is kept at a conspicuous place in the village. It is not hit by bare hands, and 'Pungchei' (Stick used to hit *Pung*) is used.

To this day, *KhunPung* is used in death rituals at Sekmai in Manipur. Due to its size, the instrument is not convenient to carry from place to place. To carry it, it is tied with rope to a long piece of wood or bamboo and carried on the shoulders. The length of a *KhunPung* is generally 5.6 feet, and the diameter of each face is 3 feet.

KhunPung is generally made from trees like Wang or Uningthou. Its faces are made of leather derived from animal extracts, generally from bulls or cows.

Changing scenario:

The advancement of modern lifestyles and culture has led to the fading away of the use of *KhunPung*. Inconveniences in the conveyance of *KhunPung* and failure to preserve the same have led to the extinction of *KhunPung*. This instrument is not used in the ritual pavilions at individual houses and is not allowed to be kept there. For these reasons, a smaller type of *KhunPung* became very common. It led to the introduction of a small *KhunPung*, which can be used at the death rituals of individual residences. The uses of this small *KhunPung* (*Pung Macha*) are discussed as follows:

***Pung Macha* (Small *KhunPung*) used only in the death ritual:**



Fig 5.3: *Pung Macha* (Small *Khun Pung*) ¹²³

This type of *KhunPung* (*Pung Macha*) is reserved for death rituals that take place in a particular village. The use of this small *KhunPung* is similar to that of *Meitei Pung*.

¹²³ Field visit to Lairik Taba Ritual, Manipur, 8 December 2021.

In most villages mainly inhabited by the Meitei community, this instrument is commonly used. It is not allowed to be used in other ceremonies except for death rituals. Small *KhunPung* is used in funeral ceremonies when the dead body is brought from the house to the funeral site. It has also been introduced in the *Sankirtan* performance. Unlike the main *KhunPung*, this small instrument has been permitted for use at the ritual pavilion constructed at the deceased's residence.

One small *KhunPung* is kept in a conspicuous place, such as a community hall, for a particular village. When a person dies in that village, the small *KhunPung* is brought from that conspicuous place and used in the death ritual. This instrument is generally worn out as it is kept untouched for a long time until a person dies in that village.

On the day of the death incident, the small *KhunPung* is brought and used while marching the body for the funeral. From that very day onwards until the day before the main death ritual, i.e., *Shraddha /Lanna Thouram*, the family members of the deceased kept the instrument in a safe and sacred place. For every *Sankirtan* performance during the death rituals, the performers used this instrument. The performers should not bring their own *Pung* instrument. The performers worshipped this instrument before using it. On the very last day of the *Dasa Hon/Lairik Taba*, after prayers are offered for the instrument, one of the family members (usually male) hangs this instrument over his shoulder and returns it to the original place where it was brought. During this, he will always turn his back to the house, and in short, he should never turn his face towards the house. This norm has been strictly followed due to the firm belief that these acts should avoid such unfortunate incidents for the family members in the future. It is strongly believed that the spirit of the deceased always stays with the small *KhunPung* during the entire time of the death ritual. Therefore, this instrument is considered very sacred.

Meitei Pung:



Fig 5.4: *Meitei Pung*¹²⁴

Meitei Pung is a very popular percussion instrument of Manipur. It has been used in the region since ancient times. This instrument has been used in religious ceremonies, *Sankirtan* and special ceremonies performed at the Court of the King in the past.

The *Pung* instrument resembles a barrel in shape and has two faces. One face is called *Maru*, and the other is *Manao*. *Maru* is played/hit by the performer's left hand, and *Manao* is played/hit by the performer's right hand.

Pung is also categorized into two: 1. *Ariba Pung* and 2. *Anouba Pung*

Ariba Pung:

This type of *Pung* was traditionally used by a group of performers known as *Bangdesh Pala*, *Ariba Pala*, or *Bamon Pala*. This *Pung* is larger in size compared to modern ones (*Anouba Pung*). Horizontally, the length of the *Ariba Pung* is 68 cm, and it is about 86 cm when the length is measured along with the expanded portion in the middle.¹²⁵

Anouba Pung:

This type of *Pung* is used in modern times by performers popularly known as *Anouba Pala* or *Nat Pala*. The modern *Pung* is smaller in size compared to the original.

¹²⁴ Interview with Manipuri Pung Player Karam Tomba Meitei, Wangkhei Ayangpali, Imphal Manipur, 14 July 2024.

¹²⁵ Dr. Laishram Tejbati, p. 40.

The length of the *Anouba Pung* is 63 cm. The diameter of the right face (*Manao*) is 13.5 cm, and that of the left face (*Maru*) is 14 cm.¹²⁶

Process of making the leather of the *Maru* and *Manao*:

The two faces of a *Pung* are made with leather derived from cow skin. *Manao* (right face) is made of leather extracted from aged cows. The leather of a bull is not used. The face of *Maru* is made of leather extracted from a young calf. The thread that runs through the length of the *Pung* and binds together both faces is made of leather extracted from ox skin. The thread can also be derived from bull skin, whereas the skin of an ox is best suited.¹²⁷

***Kaf*:**

A black circle at the centre of both faces of a *Pung* is known as *Kaf*. It is derived from a mixture of iron residues and ground rice.

Preparation of *Kaf*:

The residues of iron manufacturing are ground with a hard stone, and a powder is extracted. A certain quantity of rice is boiled until it attains a sticky texture. The sticky rice is crushed and stirred until it becomes a gum-like substance. The iron powder and rice gum are then mixed proportionately. The mixture is used as *Kaf*.

The iron residues were collected from the ironsmiths. During the manufacturing of iron materials, such as swords and spears, heated iron was struck by hammers. In this process, iron pieces got scattered. These iron pieces or residues are known as *Yothi* in Manipuri.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

Process of rubbing/polishing the faces of *Pung* with *Kaf*:

Kaf is rubbed during sunny, hot days. Using the index finger, the *Kaf* is rubbed in a circular motion on the faces of the *Pung*. At regular intervals, the rubbed *Kaf* is polished by a particular small stone. The number of rounds of rubbing and polishing the faces determines the scale of the instrument. The thicker the *Kaf*, the lower the scale of *Pung*, and vice versa. The *Kaf* is uniformly spread in a circle.

***Khudop* (Ring):**

Two rings are used in *Pung* instruments, where the *Pungli* (threads) are bound. The rings hold the two faces of a *Pung* and are known as *Khudop*. They are made of bronze or brass.

***Pungli* /*Pung Mari* :**

The belt or thread that is bound to the two rings of *Pung* is called *Pungli* (*Pung mari*). It is also known as *Thangang Mari*. *Pungli* is used to hold the *Pung* by hanging it at the shoulder and neck portion of the performer. It is usually made of red cotton cloth, and its length is approximately 442 cm.¹²⁸ It is tied at both rings of *Pung*, and a knot is made at the middle portion to adjust the performer's comfortable position while hanging from his shoulder and playing the instrument.

***Pungyom*:**

It is a thin cover of a *Pung* instrument. It is made of a thin layer of white cloth that adorns the instrument at its mid-portion.

Wood:

The woods used in the manufacturing of *Pung* are *Wang* (Cashmere Tree), *Leihao* (Champak), *Leishang*, *Theibong* (Jack Tree), *Sharik Heinou* (a type of mango tree), *Urangmei*, *Tairen* (Red Cedar), etc.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

The *Wang* tree is most commonly used in the manufacturing of *Pung* as it produces a high-pitched sound. When dried, it becomes more solid, thereby making it lighter to perform the *Cholom* dance. The *Wang* trees, which grow on hillsides where the water level is low, are very preferable for making *Pung*.

The *Pung* is a very common musical instrument in Manipur. The *Meitei Pung* has been part and parcel of the ritual ceremonies performed from birth to death. In the Meitei death ritual ceremony, *Pung* is used from the first day onwards, that is, the day of death. This instrument occupies a space until the day of the main death ritual, i.e., *Shradha* or *Lanna Thouram*. In the death anniversary ritual (*Kumon*), *Pung* is used during the *Sankirtan* performance.

Pung has acquired a significant position in Manipuri culture. *Pung* is used in offering lamps to God. In modern times, *Pung* has been introduced into the light music form as well. The journey of *Pung* has gained various developments. Earlier, the skill of this instrument was learned from teachings offered at the residence of the Guru; whereas in recent times, the lessons of *Meitei Pung* have been included at the University level. These developments have led to the situation where *Pung* is not confined to rituals alone, as it is used in various musical performances and entertainment programs. In this way, *Meitei Pung* has been an integral part of the day-to-day life of Meiteis.

5.3.2 *Mangang*:



Fig 5.5: *Mangang*¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Field visit to *Dasha Hon* ritual, 6 may 2022.

The use of this musical instrument is earliest recorded during the reign of King Charairongba (1697–1748). *Mangang* is round in shape with a bowl-like expansion in the middle portion. The total surface diameter of the instrument is about 35 cm, and that of the bowl-like portion is 23 cm. It has a thread of about 15 cm.¹³⁰ This instrument is used in death ritual ceremonies from the first-day ritual of the funeral to the main death ritual at *Dasha Hon* (a sacred pavilion for death rituals) during the musical performance by *Sankirtan* artists.

Mangang is also used in *Aarti Puja* (Lamp Offering) at the temple of Lord Govindaji, *Sandhya Parikrama* (a Sacred clockwise circumambulation during dusk time), and *Kang Chingba* (Ratha Yatra Festival). This musical instrument is made of brass, which is known as *Senjen* in *Meiteilol* (Manipuri).

5.3.3 *Jhal*



Fig 5.6: *Jhal*

Jhal is a musical instrument used by the Meiteis of Manipur in rituals and religious ceremonies. It is an instrument used in pairs. It is made of bronze. The performer played it by banging or hitting each other where each of the pairs is held by both hands.

This instrument is believed to have been introduced in Manipur during the 18th century. The earliest record of using this instrument dates back to the reign of King Gambhir Singh, when this instrument was used in worshipping Lord *Govindaji*.¹³¹ In

¹³⁰ Dr. Laishram Tejbati, *Indigenous Musical Instruments of Manipur*, p. 90.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

significant religious ceremonies, such as *Mera Thagi Mangal Aarti* and *Hari Sayan* etc., this musical instrument is used.

The instrument is round in shape with a small cavity in the middle portion. A hole is made at the centre of this cavity portion where a thread is affixed to hold the instrument. The thread is usually made of twirled long yarns or twirled costumes of Gods / Goddesses. The diameter of the *Jhal* instrument is about 22-23 cm, and the length of the thread is about 7 cm.¹³²

In the death ritual of Meitei, this instrument is used in the *Ashti Sanchay* (5th-day ritual of the death ceremony). These instruments produce beats by banging on one another, which helps in rhyming the song of *Sankirtan*.

Kartal



Fig 5.7 : *Kartal*

It is a musical instrument used by male performers of *Sankirtan*. The manufacturing process of this instrument is by casting the bronze alloy in sand. The diameter of this musical instrument is about 13 cm. A thread made of twirled yarn, approximately 70 cm long, is attached and used as a handle.¹³³ The colour of the thread is red. *Kartal* is of the following types: 1. *Ariba Kartal* (Ancient), 2. *Anouba Kartal* (Modern) and 3. *Anouba Kartal Athaba* (Modern Thick *Kartal*).

5.3.4.1 *Ariba Kartal*

¹³² Ibid., p. 89.

¹³³ Dr. Laishram Tejbati, *Indigenous Musical Instruments of Manipur*. P. 91.

It was introduced during the reign of King Garibniwaz (1709-1748) in Manipur. It was used by *Bangdesh Pala* (the Oldest troop of *Sankirtan* performers).¹³⁴

5.3.4.2 *Anouba Kartal*

It was introduced during the reign of King Rajshri Bheigyachandra, and it was used in the form of *Sankirtan* called *Nat Sankirtan*, performed at the temple of Lord *Govindaji*. It was introduced during the period 1763 – 1798.¹³⁵

5.3.4.2.1 *Anouba Kartal Athaba:*

This form of *Kartal* was introduced during the period of King Churachand Singh (1891-1941). Since then, this musical instrument has been used in *Sankirtan* to this day.¹³⁶

Kartal is a musical instrument used during *Sankirtan*. In the death rituals of *Shraddha* and *Phiroi* (death anniversary ritual), the said instrument is held by the singers in their hands while performing *Sankirtan*. In the Manipuri Raas dance, this instrument is also used by male artists.

5.3.5 *Kangshi*



Fig 5.8: *Kangshi*

Kangshi is a round-shaped flat instrument included in the category of ideophone musical instruments. It is generally used during lamp offerings at Hindu Temples and

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 91.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 91.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 91.

rituals of feasts. It is made of brass. At an edge portion of the circle, a small hole is made to tie a thread for the purpose of holding the instrument.

Kangshi is a circular musical instrument with a flat surface, which falls under the category of an ideophone. It is played by hitting the flat surface. The musical instrument is mainly used in Hindu temples during sacred fire offerings and sacred feasts. This instrument is made of brass alloy, with a thread tied to a tiny hole at one edge. The thread is used for holding the instrument. A bamboo root or a piece of wood is used to hit the instrument and produce a vibrating sound. It has a diameter of about 20-23 centimetres and a thickness of 3 millimetres.¹³⁷

This instrument is played in a monotonous rhythm. In the death rituals of the Meitei Hindus, such as *Ashti*, *Shraddha*, the monthly feast offering (Thagi Din) and Phiroi, the said instrument is played when the sacred idol of Lord *Gouranga Mahaprabhu* enters inside the ritual pavilion and also when the idol exits at the end of the ritual. In these rituals, the instrument is also played during fire offerings and feast offerings.

5.3.6 *Sharik*



Fig 5.9: *Sharik*

Sharik is the traditional bell used in religious ceremonies and rituals. This instrument is cylindrical in shape and is played by hand through shaking. It is typically used in temples and during religious or spiritual rituals. *Sharik* has three categories;

¹³⁷ Dr. Laishram Tejabati, *Indigenous Musical Instruments of Manipur*, p.49.

1. *Sharik*, which is used by *Brahmins* in religious rites.
2. *Sharik*, which is attached to the tall pillars of Hindu temples.
3. *Sharik*, which is used by *Amaibi* (Priestess) in the *Lai Haraoba* ceremony.

There are some variations in size, shape, and style among the three categories of *Sharik*.

Sharik is generally used by the Priest (*amaiba*) and priestess (*Amaibi*) in the *Lai Haraoba* ceremony. In the sacred events of *Lai Ekoukhatpa* (summoning of God / Goddess from river/water body), *Nonganbagi Lai Houdokpa* (morning awakening of God / Goddess), *Numidangi Lai Sumba* (ritual for slumber of God / Goddess), *Saroi Khangba* (ritual for offering to evils / negative spirits), *Maibi Laimang Famba Laibou Chenba* (oracle by the priestess in spiritual medium), etc., which are parts of the *Lai Haraoba* ceremony, the instrument of *Sharik* is used. This instrument is used to welcome good spirits (or God) and ward off negative spirits. The *Sharik* used by *Amaibi* is approximately 5 cm in length, and its curved surface has a circumference of roughly 4 cm.¹³⁸ A pendulum of similar length is attached to the interior of the bell, which will produce sound by hitting the cylindrical part. A piece of metal wire in a spherical shape is attached at the neck of the bell where a piece of cloth is. This piece of cloth is used as the handle of the instrument.

With the advent of Hinduism in the region, the instrument began to be used in Hindu temples. *Sharik* of various sizes, from small to medium to large ones, are used in Hindu temples. The style of this *Sharik* is also different from the one used by *Amaibi* in *Lai Haraoba*.

The *Sharik* used by Hindu *Brahmins* is also slightly different in style. The cylindrical part is expanded at the opening tip. It has a length of approximately 8 to 11 cm, including the handle part; generally, it measures about 12-16 cm in length.¹³⁹ The

¹³⁸ Dr. Laishram Tejbati, *Indigenous Musical Instruments of Manipur*, p. 86.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

images of Lord *Brahma*, Lord *Vishnu*, *Hanuman*, etc., are imprinted on the handle area of the *Sharik*. The instrument is played at a rapid frequency, i.e. at a high tempo.

***Sharik* Achouba:**

These are the large-sized bells attached to tall pillars of Hindu temples. A long rope is attached to the bell, which will be used for ringing it. These types of large bells generally weigh around 800 kg.¹⁴⁰ This instrument is used in fire offerings and feast offerings at the temple.

In the death rituals, a small type of *Sharik* is used by *Brahmins*. This instrument is of significance in the death rituals of Meitei Hindus. The *Brahmins* use this instrument during the *Shradha*, *Phiroi*, and other offerings, such as the offering of sacred fire and food to the deity.

5.3.7 *Moibung* (Conch)



Fig 5.10: *Moibung*¹⁴¹

This musical instrument is played by blowing air from the mouth. This musical conch used in Manipur differs from the ones used in other regions. This musical instrument is played in pairs in Manipur. The literal meaning of *Moibung* is derived from

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁴¹ Field observation at Manipuri Nat Sankirtan Observation Day, conducted at Canchipur, Imphal, 4 December 2021.

the old Manipuri word '*Moika*', which means 'lips'. It, therefore, could mean a '*Pung*-like structure blown by lips. It is an organic extract derived from a particular white-coloured sea snail. It measures approximately 25 cm in length and 38 cm in width.¹⁴² This extract is termed *Moibung* in Manipur and is used as a musical instrument.

In ancient times, this musical instrument was used during battles. *Moibung* was also played to pay homage when the king stepped forth for external visits to foreign countries. With the advent of Hinduism in Manipur, *Moibung* began to be used in multiple other fields, such as in the ritual of Nahut Nareng (Ear piercing ritual of children), *Ratha Yatra*, *Shradha* (main death ritual), *Phiroi* (1st death anniversary ritual) *Govinda Aarti* (Lamp offerings to Lord *Govinda*), etc.

Playing style:

Moibung is played in pairs at once. In general, this musical instrument is played by a seated performer with his knees touching the ground, folding both his hands, keeping the instrument between his thumb and index finger, and thereafter blowing into it. When the situation demands it, the instrument is sometimes played in a standing position. The air breathed needs to be well preserved in abundance to play this instrument because a pair of *Moibung* is to be blown at once by applying air pressure.

The artists practised specific breath exercises, such as Pranayam (a type of breathing exercise). In this type of exercise, deep breaths are inhaled in a calm position. This type of breathing is also known as Diaphragm breathing because the inhaled air pulls down the diaphragm plate present in the lower portion of the thorax and expands the lower lungs. During this breathing exercise, the position of the breast is static. On the eve of playing the *Moibung*, the air is abundantly stored and released periodically and proportionately with the tunes in demand. When the air is not well stored, the instrument fails to produce proper musical sounds.

¹⁴² Dr. Laishram Tejbati, *Indigenous Musical Instruments of Manipur*, p. 73.

There are various observations regarding the introduction of the pair / dual *Moibung*. It is recorded that one (L) Gurumayum Guneshwar Sharma from Yaiskul Hiruhanba Leikai, Imphal, introduced the use of *Moibung* in pairs during the reign of King Chandrakirti (1850-1886). Secondly, it is also a matter of record that one (L) Telem Chaohal introduced the playing of the *Moibung* pair during the period of King Churachand. Thirdly, the *Moibung*, as a musical instrument, is said to have been introduced during the period of King Kiyamba (1467-1508).¹⁴³

In the death ritual ceremonies of Meitei Hindus, such as *Shradha* and *Phiroi*, this musical instrument holds an important position. This instrument is played at various stages of *Sankirtan*, which are termed *Raga Houba* (the Starting point of the musical fusion), *Raga Taba* (the stage when the proper form of *Sankirtan* music is presented), etc.

The sound produced by *the Moibung* of Manipur is quite different from that of other similar instruments used in other regions. The pair of *Moibung* produces such a sound that resembles a chase between the two notes produced by each *Moibung*. It is audible in a manner where one musical note tries to dominate the other. Metaphorically, it is compared with two butterflies flying upwards by encircling one another. The high and low notes produced by *Moibung* of Manipur are not common to other regions.

The playing of *Moibung* in *Shradha* (the main death ritual ceremony) is known as *Kasha Paotakpa*. *Kasha* refers to deceased ancestors, and *Paotakpa* means conveying a message. It is believed that the sound of *Moibung* gives a message to the ancestors in heaven that the soul of the departed is approaching.

It is also believed that the sound of *Moibung* could chase away evil or satanic spirits or negative energies. According to religious records, Goddess Lakshmi showered her blessings upon hearing the music of *Moibung*.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh, Meitei Nat *Sankirtan* Neinaba, p. 199.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

5.3.8 *Pena* (String Instrument)



Fig 5.11: *Pena*¹⁴⁵

Pena is a Manipuri folk musical instrument that has been used since ancient times. The instrument is played by plucking or rubbing the strings against one another. This musical instrument falls under the category of Chordophones, and in Indian classical music, it is categorized as a *sushir vadya*. The strings, derived from animal hair known as *Samei*, rub against each other and produce mesmerizing music that imparts joy and satisfaction to the listeners. The literal meaning of *Pena* is joy or pleasure.

Pena has been associated with the culture of Manipuri Meiteis since the evolution of humankind. In the ritual ceremonies that mark life from birth to death, *Pena* is always used. This musical instrument has two parts. Both these parts are given different names. One part, called *Pena Cheijing*, is played by the right hand, and another, called *Pena Maru*, by the left hand of the performer.

Parts of *Pena*:

1. *Pena Cheijing*: The part of the *Pena* that is played with the right hand while playing the instrument is called *Pena Cheijing*. This part is sacredly considered as Father Earth.

¹⁴⁵ Field visit conducted at Nongol Lairembi Haraoba, Patsoi Part 1, Imphal West, 13 March 2023.

2. ***Pena Maru***: This part is played by the left hand. It is sacredly considered as Mother Earth.

Types of *Pena*: `

According to size, the *Pena* instrument is divided into two types. They are given below:

5.3.8.1 *Khukhong Pena*:



Fig 5.12: *Khukhong Pena*¹⁴⁶

This is a small type of *Pena*. The *Pena Maru* is comparatively smaller in size, having a length/diameter of about 22 cm. *Pungmai* (a round plate attached to *Pena Maru*) has a diameter of about 5 cm. A sound hole at the plate (*Pungmai*) is about 3 cm in diameter. The length of the handle is about 10 cm, and that of the elongated tail is 17 cm. The diameter of its tail is 2.5 cm.¹⁴⁷

***Pena Achouba*:**

The size of *Pena Maru* in this type of *Pena* is bigger. Due to the differences in the sizes of *Pena*, the sound also varies. The *Khukhong Pena* (Small *Pena*) produces a lower

¹⁴⁶ Interview with R.K. Surjit Singh (Pena Artist), Porompat, Imphal East, 11 July 2024

¹⁴⁷ Dr. Laishram Tejbati, p. 51.

frequency (pitch), while *Pena Achouba* produces a higher frequency. In this type of *Pena*, the *Pena Maru* has a diameter of approximately 32 cm, while the *Pungmai* has a diameter of roughly 9 cm. Two *Cheikhok* (handles) are affixed to it. The length of the main handle is about 12 cm, and that of the elongated handle is 19 cm. The diameter of its tail is 3 cm.¹⁴⁸

The performer of *Pena* sings and plays the instrument together. The *Pena* singer is known as *Pena Asheiba*. Songs related to death rituals, called *Nongarol* and *Singumlon*, are sung using *Pena*.

Components of *Pena*:

Pena is made with a variety of components. The components of *Pena* are given below:

***Pena Maru*:**

In the earlier period, *Pena Maru* was commonly derived from a plant extract known as *Khomtumba* (*Tumba* is made from seasoned creeper fruits, which are handcrafted to produce bowls or pot-like structures, and *Khomtumba* is an extract from a bitter plant fruit) or extract from dried and seasoned papaya or extract from bamboo roots. In modern times, based on convenience, *Pena Maru* is commonly made from coconut shells.

The extracts from bamboo roots are still used. Based on the choices, both coconut shells and bamboo roots are used to prepare *Pena Maru*.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 52.

Process of making *Pena Maru* from bamboo root and Coconut shell:

The partly underground roots, which are left behind after the bamboo is dug out with the help of a convenient knife, the root(s) are sliced to produce a favourable shape. There is a requirement for a handicraft. The inner part of the bamboo root is scratched out, creating a hole inside. The outer surface is made smooth by making slices with a knife. The choice of bamboo root is also very particular, and any type of bamboo root cannot be used for making it. The extracted bamboo root also needs to be dried, and the drying process is not done in the sun but in a shady area. Therefore, the process of making *Pena* from bamboo roots is cumbersome. Such *Pena Maru* produces sound in a higher pitch.

Cococut shell:

Coconut shells are more convenient in terms of the time factor for making *Penamaru*. Favourable coconuts are available at the market, or they can be brought from other places. The husk part is first rubbed out, followed by skillfully extracting the water and the edible white part inside it. After this process, the shell is ready to be crafted for *Pena Maru*. Such *Pena*, where the *Pena Maru* is made from coconut shells, produces a sound of a lower pitch. It lacks the composition of the base.

Due to such conveniences, *Pena Maru*, made from coconut shells, is very popular.

Most of the *Penas* used today have their *Pena Maru* made of coconut shells. The colour of the *Pena Maru* is traditionally very unique. Its paint is derived from the oil extracted from a tree called *Khok-u*. After painting the said oily extract, the *PenaMaru* give out a unique blackish and multicoloured look. Due to the scarcity of such materials, readily available paints from markets are also used nowadays. Although the traditional process of painting from the said natural derivative has not become extinct to this day.

Pungmai:

Pungmai is the surface area that covers the *Pena Maru*. It is made of leather derived from animals. In earlier times, *Pungmai* was extracted from snakeskin, *Warukok* (bamboo shell), frog skin, squirrel skin, *Sanamba* (a cat-sized animal belonging to the cat family) skin, etc. At the present time, leather derived from cow skin is very common.

Process of extracting the leather:

The cow's skin will be dipped into water, and with the help of a knife, a rough surface will be sliced into a thin layer. Based on the size of *Pena Maru*, the leather is stuck in a circular manner.

For sticking the leather, glue is used. The glue is prepared with a mixture of rice, charcoal, *Leipaklei Maru* (a type of flower seed), and *Uhalmana* (a kind of plant leaf). These ingredients are well-ground and used to adhere to the leather. Nowadays, readily available glues from the market are also used.

Tengkhal:

Tengkhal is made from bamboo. It is part of *Pena* that is kept between the *Samei* (string) and *Pungmai*. It helps in creating space between the string and *Pungmai* by acting as a guard.

Uyek:

Uyek is the wooden extension of *Pena Maru*. It is generally made from the *Uningthou* tree. In the construction of the *Pena* instrument, only this part is made from wood.

Utong:

Utong is the bamboo tube that is attached to *Uyek*. It is made of a straight and small bamboo tube.

Chumbuli:

It is the rope that binds the *Samei* (strings), which is stretched along the utong. The *Pena* player adjusts the tune by applying water in this area. *Chumbuli* is not an ordinary rope; it is made from six pieces of thread.

Khonding Samei:

The string stretched along the *Pena Maru* and Chingjing, which rubbed one another to produce a sound known as *Samei*. The said *Samei* (string) is made from the hair of a horsetail. In ancient times, before the introduction of horsetail, a type of fibre derived from the Kewa plant was used as a string.

Kwaklei Mari:

It is the piece of cloth that binds at the end portion of *Pena Maru*. This piece of cloth with special designs and crafts is small near the *Pena Maru* and expands in size in the hanging part.

Nurakhwangchet:

Nurakhwangchet is the colourful fabric part attached to one end of the *Pena Maru*.

Chaying:

Chaying is that part of *Pena* that is played by the right hand of the *Pena* player. Its physical structure is similar to the divine symbol of Anji. This part is compared to Father Earth.

Sharik:

These are the small musical bells that hang around the upper-bending part of *chiying*. It produces a melodious sound when the *Pena* is played. Since ancient times, seeds of a particular plant called *Nongsharik* have been used as *Sharik*. *Nongsharik* is a small plant that grows around the lakes and fields. After its flowering season, the seeds appear in a bunch. These seeds are dried in large numbers. The dried seeds produce a

beautiful sound when they are shaken in the bunch. These dried seeds are used as *Sharik* in *Chaying*. Nowadays, metallic bells are also used as *Sharik*.

An individual who plays *Pena* performs a dual role. He sings as well as plays the instrument. The *Pena* singer is known as *Pena Asheiba*. In the death ritual ceremonies of Meitei, *Pena* is used in the performance of types of songs called *Nongarol* and *Singumlon*.

Notes of *Pena*:

There are seven musical notes in the *Pena* instrument, namely, Ya, Ri, Hei, Ru, Rei, Thei, and Yi.

1. Ya: When the strings (*khongding Samei*) are left free and played, the note so produced is known as Ya.
2. Ri: When the index finger holds the *khongding samei* and plays it, the note so produced is called as Ri.
3. Hei: When the *khongding Samei* is pressed by the index and middle finger and played, the Hei role is produced.
4. Ru: When the index, middle and ring fingers press the *khongding Samei* while playing, the 'Ru' note is produced.
5. Rei: When the little finger, ring finger, middle finger and index finger press the note, the sound produced is known as Rei.
6. Thei: All four fingers, i.e. index, middle, ring and little fingers, in their original positions pressed at a higher portion of *Khongding Samei*, 'Thei' is produced.
7. Yi: When the four fingers are pressed at a position a little higher than that of the Thei position, a 'Yi' note is produced.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Makhonmani Mongshaba, *Pena Music in Manipuri Culture*, pp. 63-64.

***Pena* in the death ritual:**



Fig 5.13: *Pena* Performance at *Lanna Thouram*¹⁵⁰

Pena occupies a significant position in the death ritual ceremonies of the Meiteis. Among the Meiteis who follow their indigenous religion, the practice of *Pena* was preserved in their death rituals. When a person dies in their family, the *Pena Pala* (*Pena* Performer) is called and made to perform the death ritual ceremony from the first day until the main death ritual. The performance of *Pena* in death rituals is an ancient practice of the Meiteis. The advent of Hinduism in Manipur had overshadowed this practice for a long time. However, the revivalist group of Meitei indigenous culture and religion has been promoting the same in recent times. When the death ritual is performed by *Pena*, no other musical instruments are required. *Pena* is performed in all the facets of the death ritual ceremony, such as the day of the funeral, *Lairik Taba* (Prayers for the departing soul performed till the main death ritual), *Mangani Leihul* (Fifth-day death ritual), *Lanna Thouram* (main death ritual), *Kumon Phiroi* (1st Death anniversary), etc. The *Pena* performer plays the instrument and also sings along with the music. *Sharik* (small musical bells) hung at *Pena Cheijing*, held in the right hand, are used for giving rhythms to the song.

¹⁵⁰ Field visit to *Lanna Thouram* Ritual, 28 December 2021.

5.3 *Sankirtan* Taal (Rhythmic Patterns)

Renowned teachers and thinkers in the subject developed and popularised the Taal of *Sankirtan* in Manipur. Similar to the Taal in Hindustani Sangeet, there are various taals in Manipur *Sankirtan*, each with its own related *Punglon* (methods of playing the Meitei percussion instrument, "*Pung*", i.e., *Theka*). Together with *Sankirtan*, these Taals were performed during Meitei funeral rites. In groups, *Sankirtan* is performed entirely as a devotional prayer accompanied by music and instruments. Not only the songs, but there are various ways of performing the *Pung* to complete the whole *Sankirtan* performance. There are different types of taal in every *Sankirtan* devotional song that is performed. The following were the different taal and *Punglon*:

The various taal and *Punglon* (*Theka*) are as follows:

***Tanchap* Taal**

Matra: 8

Tantha (*Tali*):1

Haidokpa (*Khali*):1

+			O			
Ghinat -	Dhen	Ta Ghinat	Ghinat	Ten	Ta	
Ta	-	-	- -	Ta	Then	Gargar ¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Kongsam Leibakmacha Singh, *Sankirtan gi Punglon*, p. 119.

Menkup taal:

Matra: 6

Tantha (Tali): 1

Phak (Khali): 1

+ 0

Ghin	-	Tang		-	Khit	Ta
Ten	-	Tang		-	Khit	Ta
Ten	-	Tang		-	Khit	Ta
Tah	-	Dhen		-	Ghin	Tar ¹⁵²

Menkup Akhetpi:

Dhin – Ten | Tah Ghin Dhen

Dhin – Ten | Tah Ghin Dhen¹⁵³

Menkup :

+ 0

Tang	–	Then		Tah	Khit	Ta
Tang	–	Khit		Tah	Khit	Ta ¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Shri Konsam Leibakmachia Singh, *Sankirtan Punglon*, p. 82.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 82.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 83.

Then	-	Then		-	Ta	-
Gar	Gar	Ghin		Ta	Khit	Ta
Then	-	Then		-	Ta	-
-	-	-		-	-	-
Then	-	Then		-	Ta	-
Gar	Gar	Ghin		Ta	Khit	Ta
Then	-	Then		-	Ta	-
Gar	Gar	Ghin		Ta	Ghin	Ta
Thendha	-	Dhen		-	Ta	-
Gar	Gar	Ghin		Ta	Ghin	Ta
Gar	Gar	Ghin		Ta	Ghin	Ta
Gar	Gar	Ghin		Ta	Ghin	Ta
Then	-	Then		-	Ta	-
-	-	-		-	-	- ¹⁵⁵

Menkup Mapi:

Matra – 8,

Tantha- 1,

Phak- 1

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 83.

- - Khit Ta | Tah - Dhen -

Ghin - Gar Gar | Dhin - Tang -¹⁵⁶

Menkup Setu:

Ten Tang - Trakhra | Ten Ta Khit Ta

Ten Tang - Trakhra | Ten Ta Khit Ta

Ten Tang - Trakhra | Ten Tang Khar Khar

Ta Dhen - Dhen | - Dhen Ta Khra

Khrang - - - | - - - -¹⁵⁷

Namtaka:

This *Punlon* is a crucial type of *Goudasampradai Punlon (Bol/Theka)* funeral rite (*Potloiba*). *Asthi*, *Mera gi sayon*, and funeral processions were some important applications for this *Punlon*. It is totally forbidden to perform this *Punlon* in any other rituals.

Namtaka

Matra: 14

Tantha: 1

Phak: 1

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 79.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 79.

+ 0
 - - - - | Tah - - | Khit - Ta - | Then - -
 Ghin - Gar Gar| Dhen - - | tah - Ghin - | Tang - -
 - - - - | Tah - - | Khit - Ta - | Then - -
 Dheh - Dheh - | Dhen - - | Tah - Khit - | Then - -
 Dheh - Dheh - | Dhen - - | Tah - - GarGar|Gargar
 GragraGragra¹⁵⁸

Matra: 12

Tantha: 1

Phak: 1

+ 0
 Dhen - Dhen - Dhen - | Dhen - Dhen - Dhen -
 Ghin Ta Khit Ta Ghin Ta | Khit Ta Ghin Ta Khit Ta
 Dhen - Tang - Ta - | Ghen - Ghen - Ta -¹⁵⁹

Chali Taal:

Matra: 8

Tantha (Tali): 2

Khali: 2

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 108

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 108.

+		0		+		0
-	Then		-	Then		Tah Dheh Dhen Ta
Tah	Dhen		-	Then		Tah Dheh Dhen Ta ¹⁶⁰

Jhari Taal:

“+					0	
-	-	Tang	-		Khit	– Tang –
-	-	Dhen	-		Ghin	– Dhen –
Gar	Gar	Dhen	Ta		Ghin	Ta Then -
-	-	Dhen	-		Ghin	- Dhen –
Gar	Gar	Dhen	Ta		Ghin	Ta Then –
-	-	Dhen	-		Ghin	– Dhen –
Gar	Gar	Dhen	Ta		Ghin	Ta Dhen –

Akhaiba

-	-	Dhen	-		Ghin	-	Dheh	-
Dhe	–	Dhe	-		Dhen	-	-	-

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p.116.

Dhen	—	Ta	Dhen		-	Ta	Dhen	—
Dhe	—	Dhe	-		Dhen	-	-	-
Then	—	Ta	Then		-	Ta	Then	—
Tah	Ghin	Then	-		Ghin	Ta	Dhin	Ta
Dhen	-	-	Tar		Dhin	-	-	- ¹⁶¹

Tintal Macha:

Matra- 14

Tantha (Tali) -3

Phak (Khali) - 1

“+ 0 2 3

Dhin - | Then - Ten Ta | Tah Khit - Ten | Tah Ghin Dhen Gargar

Khar Khar

Tang - | Tang - Tang - | Tang - Tang - | Tang - Tang -

Tang - | Khit Tah Khit Tah | Tang - - - | - - Khar Khar

Tang - | Tang - Tang - | Tang - Tang - | Tang - Tang -

Tang - | Khit Tah Khit Tah | Tang - - - | - - Gar Gar

Dhe - | Dhe - Dhe - | Dhe - Dhe - | Dhe - Dhe -

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 117.

Dhen - | Khit Tah Khit Tah | Tang - - - | - - Gar Gar

Dhe - | Dhe - Dhe - | Dhe - Dhe - | Dhe - Dhe -

Dhen - | Khit Tah Khit Tah | Tang - - - | - - Khar Khar

+

Tang - | Khit Tah Khit Tah | Tang - - - | - - Khar Khar

Tang - | Khit Tah Khit Tah | Tang - - - | Tang – Tang –

Khit - | Ta - Dhen - | Ta - Tang - | Khit - Ta -

Dhen - | Khit Tah Khit Tah | Tang - - - | Dhin - Gar Gar

Dhen - | Khit Tah Khit Tah | Tang - - - | Dhin - Gar Gar

Dhen - | Khit Tah Khit Tah | Tang - - - | Dhin - Gar Gar

Dhen - | Ta - Dhen - | Ta - Tang - | Khit - Ta -

Dhen - | Khit Tah Khit Tah | Tang - - - | - - - -

GarGar

Dhen - | Tat Ta Khit Ta | Khit Ta Ten - | Tah Ghin Tra Khar

Tang - | Tat Ta Khit Ta | Khit Ta Ten - | Ta - Tah -

- - | - - - - | - - - - | - - Gar Gar

Dhen - | Tat Ta Khit Ta | Khit Ta Ten - | Tah Ghin Tar Ghar

Tang - | Tat Ta Khit Tah | Khit Ta Ten - | Ta - Tah -
 - - | - - - - | Khit Ta Ten - | Ta - Tah -
 - - | - - - - | Khit Ta Ten - | Ta - Tah -
 Khit Ta | Ten Ta Khit Ta | Khit Ta Ten - | Ta - Tah -
 Khit Ta | Ten Ta Khit Ta | Khit Ta Ten - | Ta - Tah -
 Dhen - | - - Dhen - | Khit Ta Ten - | Ta - Tah -

+ 0 2 3
 Dhen - | - - Dhen - | Khit Ta Ten - | Ta - Tah -
 Dhen - | Dhe - Dhen - | Khit Ta Ten - | Ta - Tah -

2nd (*Anishuba*)

Khar khar

Tah Khit | Tat Ta Khit Ta | Dhen - - - | - - Khar Khar
 Tah Khit | Tat Ta Khit Ta | Dhen - - - | - - khar Khar
 Tah Khit | Tat Ta Khit Ta | Tah Khit Ta Ta | Khit Ta Ta Khit
 Tang - | Ta Ta Khit Ta | Dhen - - Ghin | Tar Gar Dhen Ta
 Dhen - | - Ghin Tar Gar | dhen - - Ghin | Tar Gar Dhen Ta
 Dhen - | Ta Ta Khit Ta | Khit Ta Ten - | Tah Ghin Tar Tar

Tang - | Ta Ta Khit Ta | Khit Ta Ten - | Ta - Tah -

3rd (*Ahumshuba*)

Khar Khar

Tang - | - - Khit - | Ta Ta Khit Ta | Khit Ta Ten Ta
Ta Khit | Ta Ta Khit Ta | Dhen - Ta - | Dhen - Gar Gar
Dhen - | Ta Ta Khit Ta | Khit Ta Ten Ta | Ghinnat - Khar Khar
Ta Khit | Ta Ta Khit Ta | Dhen - - Ghin | Tar Gar Dhen Ta
Dhen - | - Ghin Tar Gar | Dhen - - Ghin | Tar Gar Dhen Ta
Dhen - | Ta Ta Khit Ta | Khit Ta Ten Ta | Tah Ghin Tar Khar
Tang - | Ta Ta khit Ta | Khit Ta Ten - | Ta - Tah -

The Teental can be filled with different *Punglon*:

+ 0 2 3

Tang - | Khit Tah Khit Tah | Tang - Khit Tah | Khit Tah Khit Tah

Tang - | Khit Tah Khit Tah | Tang - Khit Tah | Khit Tah Khit Tah

Tang - | Ghin Ta Ghin Ta | Dhen - Ghin Ta | Ghin Ta Ghin Ta
 Tang - | - - - - | - - - - | - - - -
 Ghin - | Thet - Tah - | Ghin - Ta - | Then - Tang -
 Ghin - | Ta - - - | Dhen - - - | Dhin - - -
 Ta - | Then - - - | Dhen - Tah - | Khit - Ta -
 Tang - | - - Ten Ta | Ta - - Dhen | Tah Ghin Dhen GraGra

 Dhin - | Then - Ten Ta | Tah - - Dhen | Tah Ghin Dhen GraGra
 Dhin - | Then - - - | Ten Tang Khit Ta | Ten Tang Khit GraGra

 Tah - | Dhen - Gar Gar | Dhen Tah Ghin Dhen | Tah Ghin Thet -
 Dhen - | - - - - | - - - - | - - - - ¹⁶²

Charital Achouba:

Matra

: 14

Tali: 4

Phak (Khali): 3

¹⁶² Ibid., pp. 36-39.

$$+ \quad 0 \quad 2 \quad 0 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 0$$

Tang - | - KhraKhra | Ten Ta | Tah - Khit - | Gin - | Ten Tah

Tanchap :

Matra: 8

Tantha (Tali): 1

Phak (Khali): 1

$$+ \quad \quad \quad 0$$

Dhen Tah Khra Khrang | Ghin Ta Dhen Ta

Dhen Tah Khit Ta | Ten Ta Tang Tra

Dhin Tah - Tang | - Ta Ten Ta

Ten Tah Khit Ta | Ten Ta Tang -

Dhen Tah Khra Khrang | Ghin Ta Then Ta

Dhen Tah Khit Ta | Ten Ta Tang -¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 75-76.

Rajmel:

Ahanba Mapung (1st Part)-

Matra- 14

Tantha – 2

Phak – 2

- - Tang - | Ta Tang -

Ghin - Khar Khar | Tang Ghin - | Tah - Tang - | Ten Ta -

Tah - - - | - - - | - - Tang - | Ta Tah -

Ghin - Khar Khar| Tang Ghin - | Tah - Tang - | Ten Ta -

Tah - - - | - - - |¹⁶⁴

Anishuba MaPung (2nd Part)

+ 0 0 2

- - - - | Ghin - - | Dhen - - - | Tang Tang -

Dhen - - - | Tah - - | - - - - | - - - ||¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 61-62.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 62.

Lambighat Rajmel:

| - - Gar Gar

Dhen - Tah - | Tang - Ta - | Tang - - - | - - Gar Gar

Dhen - Tah - | Tang - Ta - | Tang - - - | - - Gar Gar

Dhen - Tah - | Tang - Ta - | Tang - - - | Tang - Ta -

Tang - - - | Tang - Ta - | Then - Dhin - | - - Gar Gar

Dhen - Dhin - | Tang - Ta - | Tang - - - | - - - -

Khit - - - | khar khar khar khar| khar khar khar khar| khar khar khar khar

Khar Gar Gar Gar |Gar Gar Gar Gar | Dhen - - - | - - Gar Gar¹⁶⁶

Rajmel Mapung (Main Part of Rajmel):

+ 0 0 2

| - - Gar Gar

Dhin - Dhin - | Dhen - Khit - | Dhin - Tang - | - - Ta -

Tah - Ta - | Then - Ta - | Tah - Tang - | - - Gar Gar¹⁶⁷

Rajmel Athaba (Last Part of Rajmel):

+ 0 0 2

Dhin - Dhen | - Ten Ta | Khit Ta Then | - Khar Khar

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 65.

Ten Tah Tang | - Tat Ta | Gin - Dhen | - Gin -¹⁶⁸

Punglon (Theka) of Raga Macha:

+

-	-	Khar	Khar		Ten	Ta	Then	-
Dhin	-	Khar	Khar		Ten	Ta	Ten	-
Tah	-	Khar	Khar		Ten	Ta	Then	-
Dhin	-	Khar	Khar		Ten	Ta	Ten	-
Tah	-	Khar	Khar		Ten	Ta	Then	-
Dhin	-	Khar	Khar		Ten	Ta	Ten	-
Tah	-	Khar	Khar		Ten	Ta	Then	-
Dhin	-	Khar	Khar		Ten	Ta	Then	-
Dhin	-	Khar	Khar		Ten	Ta	Then	-
Dhin	-	Tang	-		Khit	-	Tang	Khit
Tat	Ta	Khit	Tang		Khit	Tat	Tah	Khit
Tat	Tah	Khit	Tang		Gin	Tat	Tah	Gin
Tat	Tah	Gin	Ta		Then	-	Dhin	-
Ten	-	Ta	-		Tang	¹⁶⁹		

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 1-2.

The *Punglon* of *Raga Macha* can be divided into four (4) *Matras*.

Nuwa Raga:

Matra: 4,

Tantha (Tali): 1 and

Phak (Khali): 1

+		0	
-	-	Khra	Khra
Ten	Ta	Then	—
Dhin	—	Khra	Khra
Ten	Ta	Ten	-

It can be repeated.

+		0	
Tak:	-	Khra	Khra
Ten	Ta	Then	-
Dhin	-	Khra	Khra
Ten	Ta	Ten	-

Aroiba Saruk (Last Part)

+ 0

Tak: - Khra Khra

Ten ta Then -

Dhin - Khra Khra

Ten Ta Then -

Dhin — Khra Khra

Ten Ta Then -

Dhin - Taang -

+ 0

Khit - Tang Khit

Tat Ta Khit Ta

Khit Tat Ta Khit

Tat Ta Khit Ta

Ghin Tat Ta Ghin

Tat Ta Ghin Ta

Then - - -

Dhin - - -

Ten - - -
 Tak: - - -
 Tang - - -¹⁷⁰

Raga Achouba Punglon (Theka of Raga Achouba):

The sole important application of "*Raga Achouba*" was to signify the commencement of the *Shradha* and *Firoi* rituals.

Raga Achoubagi

Tal 1, fak 1, *Matra* 8

“+ 0

-	-	-	Ten		Ten	Ta	Tah	-
Tang	-	-	Ten		Ten	Ta	Tah	—
Tang	-	-	Ten		Ten	Ta	Tah	—
Tang	—	Gar	Gar		Dhen	—	Dhe	—
Ten	Ten	Ta	Tah		-	Tang	-	-
Khet	—	Dhen	-		Ten	Ten	Ta	Tah
-	Tang	Gar	Gar		Dhen	—	Dhen	—
Ten	Ten	Ta	Tah		-	Tang	-	-

¹⁷⁰ Khsetri Kriti Singh, *Oja Gurusingdagi*- 1, p. 1-2.

Ghin	Tah	Ghin	-		-	-	Ten	Ten
Ten	Ten	Ten	Ten		-	-	Ten	Ten
Tang	-	-	Ten		-	Tah	-	Tan
Tang	-	-	Ten		-	Tah	-	Tan
Tang	-	-	Tra		Ghin	-	Tah	-
Tang	-	-	Tra		Ghin	-	Tah	-
Tang	-	-	Tra		Ghin	-	Tah	-
Tang	-	-	Tra		Ghin	-	-	Tra
Ghin	-	-	Tra		Ghin	Tra	Ghin	-
Gargar	Gargra	Gargar	Gargar		Gargar	Gargar	Gargar	Gargar
Ghin	-	Tah	-		Tang	-	-	Tra
Ghin	-	-	Tra		Ghin	-	-	Tra
Ghin	Tra	Ghin	-		Gargar	Gargar	Gargar	Gargar
Ghin	-	Tah	-		Tang	-	Gargar	Gargar
Ghin	-	Ta	Tah		Ghin	Ghin	Ta	Tah
Ghin	-	Tah	-		Tang	-	Gar	Gar
Ghin	-	Ta	Tah		Ghin	Ghin	Ta	Tah
Ghin	-	Ta	Tah		Ghin	Ghin	Ta	Tah
Ghin	-	Ta	Tah		Ghin	Ghin	Ta	Tah
Ghin	-	-	-		Ten	-	Ta	-

Then	-	-	-		Tang	-	-	-
Ghin	-	Kharkhar	Kharkhar		Kharkhra	Kharkhar	Kharkhar	Kharkhar
Tang	-	-	-		Dhen	-	-	-
Ghin	Tra		Ghin	Tra		Dhen	-	-
Ta	-		Tah	-		-	-	-
Tang	-		-	-		-	-	-
Tang	-		-	-		-	-	-
Tang	-		-	-		-	-	-

Dhin	-	Ta	Tah		Ghin	Ghin	Ta	Tah
Ghin	-		-	-		Ten	-	Ta
Then	-	-	-		Tang	-	-	-
Ghin	-	Khar	Khar		Khar	Khar	Khar	Khar
Tat	-	-	-		Dhen	-	-	-
Khit	-	Ta	-		Ghin	-	-	-
Ghin	Tra	Ghin	Tra		Dhen	-	-	-
Ta	-	Tah	-		-	-	-	-
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	-	Tang
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	-	-

Tang	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
Ten	Ten	Ten	Ten		Ten	Ten	-	Tah
-	Tan	Tang	-		-	-	Tah	-
Khit	-	Khar	Khar		Khar	Khar	Khar	Khar
Tang	-	-	0		Tah	-	Khit	-
-	Khar	Khar	Khar		Khar	Khar	Khar	Khar
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	Khar	Khar
-	Kharkhar	Kharkhar	Kharkhar		Kharkhar	Kharkhar	Kharkhar	Kharkhar
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	Khar	Khar
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	Khar	Khar
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	Khar	Khar

+

0											
Tat	Tat	Tang	Tat	Tat	Ta		Tat	Tat	Tang	Tat	Ta
Tat	Tat	Tang	Tat	Tat	Ta		Ta	Ten	Tan	Da	Ten Ta
Ta	Ten	Tan	Da	Ten	Ta		Ten	Ta	Ten	Tah	Tah -
Khit	Ta	Ten	Ta	Tah	-		Khit	Ta	Ten	Ta	Tah -
Khit	Ta	Ten	Ta	Tah	-		Ghin	Ta	Tang	-	- -

The above *Punglon* (Theka) will be repeated three times.

Khit	Ta	Ten	Ta	Tah	-		Khit	Ta	Ten	Ta	Tah	-
Khit	Ta	Ten	Ta	Tah	-		Ghin	Ta	Tang	-	-	-
Khit	Ta	Ten	Ta	Tah	-		Khit	Ta	Ten	Ta	Tah	-
Khit	Ta	Ten	Ta	Tah	-		Khit	Ta	Ten	Ta	Tah	-
Khit	Ta	Ten	Ta	Tah	-		Ghin	Ta	Tang	-	-	-
Khit	Ta	Ten	Ta	Tah	-		Ghin	Ta	Tang	-	-	-

Ten	Khit	Tah	Khit	Tra	Khra		Ten	Ghin	Tah	Ghin	Tra	Khra
Ten	Khit	Tah	Khit	Tra	Khra		Ten	Ghin	Tah	Ghin	Tra	Khra
Ten	Khit	Tah	Khit	Tra	Khra		Ten	Ghin	Tah	Ghin	Tra	Khra
Ten	Ghin	Tah	Ghin	Tra	Gra		Ten	Ghin	Tah	Ghin	Tra	Gra
Ten	Ghin	Tah	Ghin	Tat	Ta		Ghin	Tat	Ta	Ghin	Tat	Ta
Ghin	Ta	Ten	Ta	Ten	Ta		Ten	Ta	Ten	-	-	-

+ 0

Tang	Ghin	Ghin	Tra		Ghin	-	-	-
Ten	-	Ta	-		Then	-	-	-
Tang	-	-	-		Ghin	Kharkhar	Kharkhar	Kharkhar

Tat	-	-	-		Dhen	-	-	-
Khit	-	Ta	-		Dhin	-	-	-
Ghin	Tra	Ghin	Tra		Dhen	-	-	-
Ta	-	Tah	-		-	-	-	-

						Khit	Ta
Tah	–	Khit	Ta Tah	–		Khit	Ta
Tah	–	Ghin	Ta Tah	–		Khit	Ta
Tah	–	Ghin	Ta Tah	–		Khit	Ta
Tah	–	Ghin	Ta Ta	–		Ghin	Ta
Tah	–	Ghin	Ta Tah	–		Tang	Khit
Tat	Ta	Khit	Tang	Khit	–	Tang	Ghin
Tat	Ta	Ghin	Tang	Ghin	–	Tang	Khit
Tat	Ta	Khit	Tang	Khit	–	Tang	Ghin
Tat	Ta	Ghin	Tang	Ghin	–	Tang	Khit
Tat	Ta	Khit	Tang	Khit	–	Tang	Ghin
Tat	Ta	Ghin	Tang	Ghin	–	Tang	Ghin
Tat	Ta	Ghin	Tang	Ghin	–	Tang	Ghin

+

Tat	Ta	Ghin	Tat		Ta	Ghin	Tat	Ta
Ghin	Tat	Ta	Ghin		Tat	Ta	Ghin	Ta
Ten	Ta	Ten	Ta		Ten	Ta	Ten	-
Tang	Ghin	Ghin	Tra		Ghin	-	-	-
Ten	-	Ta	-		Then	-	-	-
Tang	-	-	-		Ghin	-	Kharkhar	Kharkhar
Tang	-	-	-		Dhen	-	-	-
Khit	-	Ta	-		Dhin	-	-	-
Ghin	Tra	Ghin	Tra		Dhen	-	-	-
Ta	-	Tah	-		-	-	-	-
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
							Khar	Khar
Ten	-	Tah	-		Ten	-	Tah	-
Ten	-	Tah	-		Ten	-	Tah	-
Ten	-	Tah	-		Ten	-	Tah	-
Tat	Tat	Tang	Tat		Ta	Ta	Tang	-
-	-	-	-		-	-	Khar	Khar

+

Ten – Tah - | Ten – Tah –

Ten – Tah - | Ten – Tah –

Ten – Tah - | Ten – Tah

Tat Tat Tang Tat | Ta Ta Tang –

- - - - | Tang - - -

Tat Tat Tang Tat | Ta Ta Tang –

- - - - | Tang - - -

Tat Tat Tang Tat | Ta Ta Tang –

Tat Tat Tang Tat | Ta Ta Tang –

Khit – Tang Khit | Tat Ta Khit Tang

Khit – Tang Ghin | Tat Ta Ghin Tang

Ghin – Tang Khit | Tat Ta Khit Tang

Khit – Tang Ghin | Tat Ta Ghin Tang

Ghin – Tang Khit | Tat Ta Khit Tang

Khit – Tang Ghin | Tat Ta Ghin Tang

Ghin – Tang Ghin | Tat Ta Ghin Tang

Ghin – Tang Ghin | Tat Ta Ghin Tang

Ta Ghin Tat Ta | Ghin Tat Ta Ghin

Tat Ta Ghin Ta | Ten Ta Ten Ta

Ten	Ta	Ten	-		-	-	-	-
-----	----	-----	---	--	---	---	---	---

Tang	Ghin	Ghin	Tra		Ghin	-	-	-
------	------	------	-----	--	------	---	---	---

+					0			
---	--	--	--	--	---	--	--	--

Ten	-	Ta	-		Then	-	-	-
-----	---	----	---	--	------	---	---	---

Tang	-	-	-		Ghin	Kharkhar	Kharkhar	Kharkhar
------	---	---	---	--	------	----------	----------	----------

Tang	-	-	-		Dhen	-	-	-
------	---	---	---	--	------	---	---	---

Khit	-	Ta		-		Dhin		-	-	-
------	---	----	--	---	--	------	--	---	---	---

Ghin	Tra	Ghin		Tra		Dhen		-	-	-
------	-----	------	--	-----	--	------	--	---	---	---

Ta	-	Tah		-		-		-	-	-
----	---	-----	--	---	--	---	--	---	---	---

Tang	-	-		-		-		-	-	-
------	---	---	--	---	--	---	--	---	---	---

Tang	-	-		-		-		-	-	-
------	---	---	--	---	--	---	--	---	---	---

Tang	-	-		-		-		-	-	-
------	---	---	--	---	--	---	--	---	---	---

Gurughat

						Gar	Gar
--	--	--	--	--	--	-----	-----

Dhen		-	Ta	-		Then	-	Ghin	Ta
------	--	---	----	---	--	------	---	------	----

Ten		-	Ta	-		Ten	-	Ta	-
-----	--	---	----	---	--	-----	---	----	---

Tang		-	-	-		Ten	-	Ta	-
------	--	---	---	---	--	-----	---	----	---

+		0						
Ten	—	Ta	-		Tang	-	-	-
Ten	—	Ta	-		Ten	—	Ta	—
Tang	—	Khar	Khar		Ten	Ta	Tang	—
Ta	—	Ten	-		Ta	—	Tat	—
Ten	—	Ta	-		Tah	—	Tang	—
Khit	—	Ta	-		Tang	—	Khit	Ta
Tah	Ghin	Tra	Gar		Dhen	—	Ta	—
Then	—	Ghin	Ta		Ten	—	Ta	—
Ten	—	Ta	-		Tang	—	-	-
Ten	—	Ta	-		Ten	—	Ta	—
Tang	-	-	-		Ten	—	Ta	—
Ten	—	Ta	-		Tang	—	Tra	—
Ten	Ta	Tang	-		Ta	—	Ten	—
Ta	—	Tah	-		Ten	—	Ta	—
Tah	—	Tang	-		Khit	—	Ta	—
Tang	—	Khit	Ta		Tra	Ghin	Tra	Gar
Dhen	-	-	-		Ta	Tah	Gar	Gar
Dhen	—	Ta	Tah		Gar	Gar	Dhen	—
Ta	Tah	Gar	Gar		Dhen	—	Tah	Ghin

Gar	Gar	Dhen	- Tah	Ghin	Gar	Gar
Dhen	—	Tah	Ghin Gar	Gar	Dhen	—
Ta	Tah	Khit	Ta Dhen	—	Ta	Tah
+						
Khit	Ta	Dhen	- Ta	Tah	Khit	Ta
Dhen	—	Dhen	- Ta	Tah	Khit	Ta
Dhen	—	Ta	Tah Khit	Ta	Dhen	—
Ta	Tah	Khit	Ta Dhe	—	Dhen	—
Ta	Tah	Khit	Ta Dhen	—	Ta	Tah
Khit	Ta	Dhen	- Ta	Tah	Khit	Ta
Dhen	—	Dhen	- Ta	Tah	Khit	Ta
Dhen	—	Ta	Dhen -	Ta	Dhen	—
Ta	Dhen	—	Ta Dhen	—	Dhe	—
Dhen	—	Ta	Dhen -	Ta	Dhen	—
Ta	Dhen	—	Ta Dhen	—	Gar	Gar
Dhen	—	Ta	- Then	—	Ghin	Ta
Ten	—	Ta	- Ten	—	Ta	—
Tang	-	-	- Ten	—	Ta	—
Ten	—	Ta	- Tang	-	-	-

Ten	–	Ta	-		Ten	–	Ta	–
Tang	–	Tra	Khra		Ten	–	Tang	–
Tra	Khar	Ten	-		Tang	–	Tra	Khar
Ten	–	Tang	-		-	-	Ten	–
Ta	–	Then	-		Ghin	–	Ta	–

+					0			
Ten	–	Ta	-		Ten	–	Ta	–
Tang	–	Tra	Khar		Ten	–	Tang	–
Tra	Khar	Ten	-		Tang	–	Tra	Khar
Ten	–	Tang	-		-	-	Ten	–
Ta	–	Then	-		Dhin	–	Khar	Khar
Ten	Ta	Then	-		Dhin	–	Gar	Gar
Ghin	–	Ten	-		Ta	–	Then	–
Ghin	–	Khar	Khar		Ten	Ta	Tang	–
Khit	–	Ta	-		Then	–	Dhin	–
Ta	–	Ten	-		Ta	–	Tang	–
Ghin	Ta	Ten	Ta		Khit	Tang	Ghin	Ghin
Tang	-	-	-		Khar	–	Khar	–
Ten	–	Ten	-		Ta	–	Tah	–

Ghin	Tra	Ghin	Tra		Dhen	-	-	-	
------	-----	------	-----	--	------	---	---	---	--

+				0					
---	--	--	--	---	--	--	--	--	--

Gar Gar

Ghintah	Ghintah	Ghintah		Ghin	-	-
Ten	Ten	Ten		Tah	-	-

+

Tang	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
Tang	-	Khit	Tah		Khar	Khar	Ten	-
Ta	-	Tah	-		-	-	-	-
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
Tang	-	-	-		-	-	-	-
Tang	-	Khit	Tah		Khar	Khar	Ten	-
Ta	-	Tah	-		-	-	-	-
Tang	-	-	-		Khit	-	Ta	-
Tah	-	Khit	-		Ten	-	Ten	-

Tah	–	Khit	-		Ten	–	Ta	–
Dhen	-	-	-		Tah	–	Gar	Gar
Dhen	–	Ta	-		Dhen	–	Ta	–
Then	–	Ta	-		Dhen	–	Ta	–
Then	–	Dhe	-		Dhen	–	Ta	–
Tah	–	Khar	Khar		Ten	–	Ta	–
Tah	–	Khit	-		Ten	–	Ta	–
Tah	–	Khit	-		Gar	Gar	Dhen	–
Tah	Ghin	Then	Tang		Ghin	Tah	Gar	Gar
Dhen	-	-	-		Tah	-	-	-

From this Part, *Esheigi Raga* (Vocal Raga) will start.

+	0							
Ten	–	Tah	-		Ten	–	Tah	–
Tang	-	-	-		Tah	-	-	-
Ten	–	Tah	-		Ten	–	Tah	–
Tang	-	-	-		Tah	-	-	-
Ten	–	Tah	-		Ten	–	Tah	–
Tang	-	-	-		Ten	–	Tah	–

Tang	-	-	-		Tah	Ghin	Dhen	-
Tah	Ghin	Dhen	Tang		Ghin	Tah	Ghintra	Ghintra
Dhen	-	-	-		Tah	Ghin	Dhen	-
Tah	Ghin	Dhen	Tang		Ghin	Tah	Ghintra	Ghintra
Dhen	-	Tah	-		Ghintra	Ghintra	Dhen	-
Tah	Ghin	Dhen	Tang		Ghin	Tah	Ghintra	Ghintra
Dhen	-	-	-		Dhen	-	-	-
Khr	khar	Khar	khar		Khar	Khar	Khar	Khar
Tah	-	-	-		Tah	-	Khar	Khar
Tah	-	Khar	Khar		Tah	-	Khar	Khar
Tah	-	-	Tar		Ghin	Tra	Ghin	Ta
Tah	Ghin	Dhen	Tang		Ghin	Tah	Gar	Gar
Dhen	-	-	Tar		Ghin	Tra	Ghin	Ta
Tah	Ghin	Dhen	Tang		Ghin	Tah	Ghintra	Ghintra
Dhen	-	-	Tar		Ghin	Tra	Ghin	Ta
Tah	Ghin	Dhen	Tang		Ghin	Tah	Ghintra	Ghintra

Esheigi Raga gi Makhada tarrakkdaba Punglon (Punglon after Esheigi Raga)

+

Dhen	Tang	Ghin	Tah		Ghin	Ta	Dhen	Tang
------	------	------	-----	--	------	----	------	------

Ghin	Tah	Ghin	Ta		Dhen	–	Gar	Gar
Dhen	Tang	Ghin	Tah		Ghin	Ta	Dhen	Tang
Ghin	Tah	Ghin	tah		Dhen	–	Khar	Khar
Tah	Khit	Tang	Khit		Ta	Tah	Khit	Ta
Dhin	Khar	Khar	Dhin		Khar	Khar	Dhen	Ta
Dhen	-	-	-		Tah	-	-	-

Ten	–	Ta	-		The	-	Ta	–
Then	-	-	-		Tah	-	-	-
Ten	–	Ta	-		Then	–	Ta	–
Then	-	-	-		Tah	-	-	-
Ten	–	Ta	-		Then	–	Ta	–
Then	–	Ta	-		Tah	–	Then	–
Ta	–	Tah	-		Then	–	Ta	–
Then	-	-	-		Tah	–	Gar	Gar

+ 0

Dhin	–	Dhin	-		Dhin	–	Dhin	–
Dhen	-	-	-		Tah	–	Gar	Gar

Dhin	—	Dhin	-		Dhin	—	Dhin	—
Dhen	-	-	-		Tah	-	Gar	Gar
Dhin	—	Dhin	-		Dhin	—	Dhin	—
Dhen	—	Ta	-		Then	—	Ta	—
Dhen	—	Ta	-		Tah	-	-	-
Ten	—	Ta	-		Then	—	Ta	—
Then	-	-	-		Tah	-	-	-
Then	-	-	-		Tah	-	-	-
Then	-	-	-		Ta	-	-	-
Tah	-	-	-		Khar	Khar	Khar	Khar
Tah	-	-	-		Then	-	-	-
Ta	-	-	-		Ten	-	Ta	—
Tang	—	Khit	Tah		Khar	Khar	Tang	—
Khit	—	Tah	-		Ghin	—	Ta	—
Then	-	-	-		ghin	—	Ta	—
Tang	—	Khit	Tah		Khar	Khar	Tang	—
Khit	—	Tah	-		Ghin	—	Ta	—
Then	-	-	-		Ghin	—	Ta	—

+

0

Tang	–	Khit	Tah		Khar	Khar	Tang	–
Khit	–	Tah	-		Ghin	–	Ta	–
Then	-	-	-		Ghin	–	Ta	–
Then	–	Tah	-		Khit	–	Ta	–
Then	–	Tah	-		KHit	–	Tah	–
Then	–	Tah	-		Khit	–	Ta	–
Ten	-	-	-		Ta	-	-	-
Ten	-	-	-		Tah	-	-	-
-	-	-	-		Tah	-	-	-
-	-	-	-		Tah	-	Tah	–
Tang	–	Khit	tah		Khar	Khar	Tang	–
Khit	–	Tah	-		Ghin	–	Ta	–
Then	-	-	-		Ghin	–	Ta	–
Then	–	Tah	-		Khit	–	Ta	–
Then	–	Tah	-		Khit	–	Ta	–
Then	–	Tah	-		Khit	–	Ta	–
Ten	-	-	-		Ta	-	-	-
Ten	-	-	-		Tah	-	-	- „ ¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Kongsam Leibakmacha Singh, *Sankirtangi Punglon*, p. 7- 22.

Jhol Bhai:

This kind of *Punglon* (*Theka*) reveals the conclusion of the *Sankirtan*. When this *Punglon* is played and performed during the *Sankirtan*, it announces the conclusion of the event and shows that the *Sankirtan* was carried out effectively.

The *Punglon* of *Jhoi Bhai* is as follows:

Dhin	Dhenta	Dhin	Dhenta		Dhin	Dhenta	Dhen	Gragra
Dhin	Dhenta	Dhin	Dhenta		Dhin	Dhenta	Dhen	Ginnagra
Dhin	Dhenta	Dhin	Dhenta		Dhin	Dhenta	Dhen	-
Dhe	Tentha	Tentha	Then		Dhe	Tentha	Tentha	Then
Dhe	Tentha	Tentha	Then		-	Dhet	Dhe	-
Dhet	Dhe	-	-		Dhet	-	Dhe	-
Ten	Ten	Ta	Tah		-	-	Tang	-
Ten	Ten	Ta	Tah		-	-	Tang	-
Ten	Ten	Ta	Tah		-	-	Tang	-
Ghinn	Gar	Dhe	Tah		Dhe	-	Ten	Ten
Ta	Tah	-	-		Tang	-	Thet	-
Dhen	-	Ten	Ten		Ta	Tah	-	-
Tang	-	Ghinna	Gar		Dhet	-	Dhe	-
Ten	Ten	Ta	Tah		-	-	-	-

Tang ||¹⁷²

¹⁷² Elangbam Chaohal, *Cholom Pareng*, p. 135.

Chapter 6

Social Functions of Music in Meitei Society

Music occupies a profound and enduring position in the cultural, spiritual, and social fabric of the Meitei people of Manipur. It transcends mere artistic expression, becoming a vital force that shapes community identity, preserves ancestral memory, and fosters emotional, spiritual, and social connections. Deeply embedded within rituals, daily life, festivals, and communal activities, Meitei music functions not only as a form of entertainment but as a crucial instrument of cultural continuity, spiritual devotion, social bonding, and historical education. This essay explores the multifaceted and dynamic roles that music plays in Meitei society, underscoring its significance as a cornerstone of collective life.

1. Religious and Ritual Significance:

One of the most sacred and enduring roles of music in Meitei society lies in its intimate connection with religious observances and ritualistic practices. From the earliest moments of life to the solemn rites of death, music provides a spiritual soundtrack to the human experience. Traditional forms, such as *Nat Sankirtan* and *Meitei Eshei*, are performed during crucial rites of passage—birth ceremonies, matrimonial alliances, and funerary rituals — marking transitions in a person's life journey with profound spiritual and cultural resonance.

A striking example is the Lai Haraoba festival, a grand celebration dedicated to the *Umang Lai* (forest deities), where music is not merely an accompaniment but a spiritual offering. The performances of Lai Haraoba Eshei and the haunting melodies of the Pena, a traditional string instrument, serve both to appease the deities and to re-enact the cosmological origins of the Meitei people. These musical expressions carry deep mythological, philosophical, and historical meanings, transmitting sacred knowledge across generations through performative rituals. Likewise, during major Hindu festivals

like *Janmashtami*, *Durga Puja*, and *Ratha Yatra*, devotional genres such as *Bhajans*, *Kirtans*, and *Sankirtans* become vehicles of collective worship. These performances are deeply participatory, involving both trained musicians and lay devotees, thus reinforcing shared religious identities and communal faith through sound and song.

2. Oral Tradition and Historical Preservation:

In a predominantly oral cultural tradition like that of the Meitei, music serves as an invaluable medium for storytelling, historical preservation, and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Through melodic narratives, music becomes a living archive that preserves epics, legends, and collective memories.

The *Pena* is more than an instrument; in the hands of a *Pena Asheiba* (*Pena* minstrel), it becomes a narrative device through which age-old stories such as the romantic epic of *Khamba-Thoibi* and the heroic tales of Meitei kings are brought to life. Similarly, *Khongjom Parba*, developed initially to commemorate the valour of Manipuri warriors in the Battle of *Khongjom*, has evolved into a rich narrative art form that recounts royal chronicles, ancient myths, and socio-political sagas. It is often accompanied by the *Dholak*, and its emotional depth conveys not just historical facts but the moral and emotional essence of these events.

These musical traditions function as pedagogical tools, preserving cultural ethos, moral philosophies, and indigenous worldviews. In an era when written literature was scarce, the mnemonic power of music ensured that stories of origin, conquest, migration, and wisdom were preserved through oral performance, safeguarding Meitei heritage in the hearts and memories of the people.

3. Fostering Social Cohesion and Communal Harmony:

Music acts as a catalyst for social integration and communal bonding in Meitei society. It serves as an emotional and social glue, bringing individuals together in moments of joy, mourning, labour, and celebration. During vibrant festivals such as *Yaoshang* (a Manipuri form of Holi), the practice of *Thabal Chongba*—a communal

circle dance performed under moonlight to the beat of live music—creates a space where people of all ages and backgrounds engage in joyous interaction, breaking social barriers and reinforcing unity.

Community events, such as weddings, seasonal feasts, harvest celebrations, and village gatherings, are often accompanied by folk music genres like *Khullang Eshei* (field songs), *Nonglao Eshei* (rain songs), and *Naoshum Eshei* (lullabies). These songs convey a wide range of communal emotions, from hope and gratitude to sorrow and resilience, reflecting the collective experience of rural life. In doing so, music serves as a reflection of society's shared joys, struggles, and aspirations, fostering a strong sense of mutual understanding and solidarity.

4. Political Expression and Cultural Resistance:

Historically, music has also emerged as a subtle yet powerful form of political expression and cultural resistance in Meitei society. During periods of political suppression, colonial intrusion, or cultural erosion, music became a vessel through which dissenting voices could be expressed, identities affirmed, and community resilience reinforced.

Traditional songs were often laced with veiled criticisms, allegories, or symbolic resistance, circulating widely through oral channels and galvanizing collective consciousness. The performance of culturally rooted music itself became an act of defiance, a way of asserting ethnic pride and safeguarding cultural uniqueness in the face of homogenizing forces. In the contemporary era, Meitei musicians have embraced modern genres such as rock, rap, and fusion music to critique social injustices, highlight ethnic identity, raise environmental awareness, and comment on political instability. These contemporary expressions, while stylistically modern, continue the age-old tradition of using music as a mirror of society and a voice of the voiceless.

5. Moral Education and Ethical Formation:

Music in Meitei culture is not merely an aesthetic experience—it is a moral compass, a didactic tool through which values are taught and reinforced. From an early age, children are exposed to songs imbued with moral instruction, ethical teachings, and cultural norms. Lullabies often convey lessons about kindness, honesty, humility, and the consequences of negative behaviour, subtly shaping the character and worldview of the listener. These moral songs are reinforced throughout life in ceremonial contexts, communal singing, and theatrical performances. In a society where informal education plays a significant role, music becomes an accessible and engaging way to instil virtues and preserve social order.

In the richly textured cultural landscape of Meitei society, music is far more than a creative outlet; it is a vital organ of collective life. It functions as a sacred ritual tool, a custodian of history, a bridge between generations, and a catalyst for both personal and communal transformation. It nurtures the spiritual, educates the young, empowers the marginalized, and unites the community through its rhythms and resonances.

As Meitei society evolves, embracing new technologies and global influences, the music too continues to transform, yet it retains its deep-rooted significance as a vessel of identity, memory, and shared humanity. By preserving their musical traditions while embracing innovation, the Meitei people ensure that the voice of their Culture remains alive, vibrant, and resonant across time.

6.1 Socio-Cultural Relations and Music among the Manipuri/Meitei

Culture can be understood as the various ways that human beings adapt to their natural surroundings and social environments—how customs are created, learned, preserved, and passed down through generations. In the context of Manipur, this cultural expression is evident among its three major ethnic communities: the Meiteis, Kukis, and Nagas.

Historically, these communities have coexisted peacefully, with deep-rooted social, cultural, and economic ties. Festivals such as *Mera Haojongba* celebrate this unity, reinforcing the sense of shared heritage. There have also been instances of inter-ethnic marriages and the worship of common deities, which reflect the bonds between these groups. Economically, their relationship is evident in traditional markets like *Hao Keithel* and *Makimei Salikijang*, where people from the hills and the valley have long engaged in trade and mutual support.

Folk traditions also capture this spirit of oneness. A song often sung during *Lai Haraoba*, a key festival of the Meiteis, speaks to this unity. The lyrics, “***Chingda Taba Mahaige, Tamda Taba Mahaige, Wakon Tanoi Noi***,”¹⁷³ Express the profound idea that the people of the hills (*Ching-Mi*) and those of the valley (*Tam-Mi*) share a common origin and are deeply connected.

This shared identity is also reflected in the concept of the ancient Manipuri kingdom as a *segmentary State*—an entity composed of various clans and communities, unified by common customary practices and social frameworks.

In essence, the history and customs of Manipur reflect a long-standing tradition of interdependence, mutual respect, and cultural integration among its diverse ethnic groups despite their religious and geographical differences.

Mera Haochongba:

Mera Haochongba is one of Manipur's most cherished festivals, symbolizing the deep-rooted connection between the people of the hills and those of the valley. This annual celebration is a powerful reminder of the bonds of love, friendship, and solidarity that have historically united the diverse ethnic communities of the State. Observed on the fifteenth lunar day of the month of *Mera*—which typically falls in September or October—the festival emphasizes unity amidst diversity.

¹⁷³ Dr. Mrs Priyadarshini M Gangte, Socio Cultural Ties Among the Peoples of Hills and Plain in Manipur -1, The Sangai Express and Hueiyen Lanpao, p. 2/4.

The festivities feature a vibrant display of cultural expressions, including traditional combat dances, strength contests, sports, and artistic performances. These events not only entertain but also reflect the rich traditions and mutual respect shared between the communities. A key highlight of the festival is the grand feast held at the end, which fosters a sense of togetherness and celebration. Attended by the King of Manipur, village chiefs, and residents from surrounding hill areas, *Mera Haochongba* also carries significant ceremonial importance. One notable tradition is the exchange of gifts between the king and the village chiefs—an act that symbolizes mutual goodwill and a shared destiny. In a gesture of hospitality and unity, the king would provide *Mithun* (a prized bovine animal) meat to the visiting hill communities. This custom gave rise to the popular Manipuri saying "*Mera Sanduba*", meaning "the death of many mithuns," referencing the generous feasts that accompanied the celebration.¹⁷⁴ Above all, *Mera Haochongba* stands as a testament to Manipur's spirit of communal harmony. By bringing together various ethnic groups in a shared space of respect and joy, the festival continues to play a vital role in strengthening the bonds that tie the hills and the valley into one vibrant cultural fabric.

"Itaoshannaba' or 'Ngai Shannaba':

Another beautiful and enduring example of the deep connection between the hill and valley communities of Manipur is found in the tradition known as '*Itao Shannaba*' or '*Ngai Shannaba*'. In this context, *Itao* or *Ngai* refers to a friend in the truest, purest sense of the word, while *Shannaba* means to agree or come to a mutual understanding. This unique tradition symbolizes the forging of a special kind of friendship—one that transcends ethnic and geographical divides and reflects a commitment to lifelong brotherhood.¹⁷⁵

These relationships were not forgotten with time. Many elders from the present generation still fondly recall the stories their grandparents shared—stories filled with

¹⁷⁴ Lourembam Christopher, A Historical Examinations of Socio Cultural and Interconnection Among Ethnic Groups in Manipur, Research Paper, p. 7.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

affection and reverence for their *Itaos* or *Ngais* from the hills. These memories evoke a time when genuine friendship and fraternity formed the foundation of social cohesion across communities.

The practice of *Itao Shannaba* or *Ngai Shannaba* is a powerful reminder of how deeply personal relationships helped bridge divides, fostering a sense of unity that went beyond ethnicity or location. In today's world, where divisions often overshadow harmony, revisiting and revitalizing these traditional bonds can offer valuable insights and tools for promoting peacebuilding and inclusive development. Understanding and honouring such traditions not only strengthens the emotional and cultural ties within Manipur but also contributes to the larger vision of a harmonious and united future. As the State continues to face new challenges, drawing from these rich cultural practices could help nurture mutual respect, reinforce social cohesion, and celebrate the vibrant mosaic that defines Manipur. Further research into these relationships may provide a deeper understanding of how these time-honoured practices can still be relevant in promoting peace and inclusive growth in this diverse region.

One of the most well-known shared traditions is the story of the *Leirum Phi*, a large, coarsely woven shawl with a distinctive design, traditionally given by parents to their daughters during marriage. The origins of this cloth can be traced back to the reign of King Khui Tompok (154–264 AD).¹⁷⁶ According to the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, when Princess Nongmoinu Ahongbi of the Angom clan married King Khui Tompok, her parents gifted her a *Leirum* shawl. Since then, it has become a traditional part of Meitei weddings. Interestingly, the *Leirum Phi* also appears in another story involving a Tangkhul king, who is said to have presented the cloth as a gift when his daughter, the goddess Ireima, married King Irengba (984–1074).¹⁷⁷ These multiple narratives point to a long-standing tradition shared across communities. Over time, the design of the *Leirum*

¹⁷⁶ Imphal Times Desk, The Leirum Phi-in our cultural legacy, article, e-pao net, 08 June 2020.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

cloth evolved, with patterns preserved among the Tangkhul Nagas, demonstrating how traditions adapt while remaining rooted in shared origins. Today, the *Leirum Phi* symbolizes not just beauty and craftsmanship but also purity, unity, trust, and the enduring strength of inter-community relationships.

The long history of Manipur is marked by numerous instances of such interconnectedness. Across generations, the Meiteis and tribes such as the Tangkhuls, Kabuis, and Anals have engaged in rich cultural exchanges. Myths and legends from both the hills and the valley often speak of their mutual association, including relationships with the monarchy.

6.2 Meitei Music and Gender Roles

Meitei music exists as a rich and distinct art form in its own right. Like Meitei martial arts, *Thang-ta*, Meitei jagoi, it is also one of the various art forms that show the grandeur of Manipuri culture to the world. Meitei music includes the aspects and knowledge of Meitei traditional folk songs, *Meitei Nat Sankirtan*, Meitei ritual songs and all the musical instruments associated with them. The scope and place of music are so vast in society. Music is an essential part of human life, from spiritually related religious ceremonies to performances of festivities.

Earlier, the performance of religious rituals, including the playing of musical instruments, was all performed by men. Men have played a significant role in ritualistic ceremonies since ancient times. The male performers perform the Pung yeiba (beating the Pung) and sing the ritual songs for the religious ceremonies. In the early days, no women could enter the shrine for ritual performance or the shrine where a Sankirtan was performed, and they could not perform any ritual ceremony.

Regarding the case of how women's participation in the performance of a Sankirtan began with the request of the princess, who was deeply devoted to Shri Govinda, to her king Bhagyachandra, it is mentioned in Leimapokpam Lakpati's *Nat Sankirtan Neinaba*, Vol. III : “*Nat Sankirtansina mashak ama oina panduna Shrigovindagi Sebagidamkta*

Rajshri Bheigyachandragi Sana haktakta Pana marigi loishang Kanchipur konungda lingkhatlaba matam (Khristada 1780 gi matung khr: 1783 gi mamang) sigi matungda Shri Govinda bhaktida thawai lupchabi Rajashri Bhagyachandragi macha ebemma Tampha Wangmalon (Bimbabti, Manjari, Anupriya, Shija Laioibi) na mapabung Maharaj ta Shri Govindagi thougal fangnnba nupisingi eshei pala ama lingkhatnaba yathang nijakhi. Hairiba Tampha Wangmalonsina hangatliba wafamsi Kainadagi Theibong Khris: 1784 gi January Thad a yanluraga U du kanghanla Radhika gi Murti ama saraga Rasheshori haina mingthonduna Shri Govindaga Ebungo Ebemma ani Yogamurti latlaba chahidani. Meidingu Machaebemmagi aningbadu thungnanaba ayabadu pibibadagi Bimbabatina eshei handuna Nupi Pala ama lingkhatlaga Khris: 1785 ahanba oina khwai khangna Rasheshori Pala haina thonduna Shri Govinda Rasheshori anigi thougal fangjakhi."¹⁷⁸

Translation:

During the reign of Rajshri Bheigyachandra, *Nat Sankirtan* was an essential aspect of service to Shri Govindajee when the institution of four Panas was established at *Kanchipur Konung* (Royal Palace) (1783 -1783); after this, the daughter of king Bhagyachandra, Tampha Wangamlon (Bimabati, Manjari, Anupriya, Shija Laioibi), requested the king to establish a *Nupigi Esei Pala* (a group of women singers) to let women be able to participate in the service to Shri Govindajee. As requested by the princess, a jackfruit tree fell from *Kaina* in January 1784. It was dried, and subsequently, an image of Radhika was made and was christened as Rasheshori; thus, from then on, the images of Shri Govinda and Radhika came to be worshipped. As the king agreed to fulfil the princess's wish, Princess Bimbabati, as the lead singer, established a Nupi Pala. Thus, publicly, for the first time in 1785, a Nupi Pala, named *Rasheshori Pala*, served Shri Govinda and Rasheshori.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Shri Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh, Meitei Nat Sankirtan Neinaba, p. 128.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 128.

Thus, women began to sing in Sankirtan and other religious rituals, and a tradition of *Women Pala* engaging in ritual ceremonies and Sankirtan, which evolved in 1785, came into existence.

Instead of men participating in performances with them impersonating women, the trend of only women performing *Sankirtan* or other ritual performances came into since 1832 during the reign of King Gambhir Singh. However, playing the *Pung* or *Moibung* (Conch) was all performed by men as usual. They are still played by men till today in the Meitei society. Then, the formation of singing groups called *Pala* came into existence. 'Such a type of singing performance is called *Khubak eshei pala sheishak*, which is a solely all-women singing performance'.¹⁸⁰

During Ratha Yatra, i.e., Kang Chingba, there was a practice of performing *Khubak Eshei*. It was performed both by men and women. *Khubak esei* is a singing performance in which the singers sing by clapping their hands in rhythmic tune to their singing. The tradition of *Khubak Eshei* evolved further during the reign of King Chandrakirti.¹⁸¹ This form of singing performance was first introduced in Manipur by distinguished masters of the art form, like Oja Chingakham Nongthombam, Yumnam Chaohal, and Yaiskul Sanamacha.¹⁸² *Khubak Eshei* was one of the most popular singing art forms. As the trend of women performers performing the religious, besides the men alone, grew gradually, women began to perform such rituals like *Nahut Nareng Tamba* (karnabendhu Agya) and *Lugun Thangba* (Upanya Yagya) by the time of King Churachand.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁸¹ Naorem Harimati Devi, Manipuri Khubak Eshei, p. 2.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁸³ Shri Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh, Meitei Nat Sankirtan Neinaba, p.145.



Fig 6.1: Women performed in *Kumon Phiroi*¹⁸⁴

Nowadays, due to the ongoing development and advancement, many women performers have evolved in the field of ritualistic performances. In the performance of Meitei rituals like the ceremonies related to the birth of a child, *Angang Mana Hutpa* ritual (ritual ceremony of piercing a child's ear), marriage ceremony or festival rituals are performed by both men and women or jointly, disregarding the question of sex. However, the cases of women performing in ceremonies related to death rituals are rare. The male performers sing the death ritual song, play the Pung, blow the Moibung (Conch), or play musical instruments during the performance of death rituals. In some cases, as per the wish of the deceased family, women performing the ritual rites of *phiroi* can be found.

Regarding death rituals, they are performed mainly by men. Because of the dresses women wear, it is inconvenient for them to perform *Pung Cholom* or play the *Pung*. Wearing *Phanek* makes it very inconvenient to perform *Pung Cholom*. Monthly menstruation in women also hinders the performance of the events of a *Sankirtan*. Thus, this also diminishes their participation as performers in death-related rituals.

6.3 Preservation and Global Impact on Manipuri Meitei Music Traditions

The music performance of the Meiteis performed during the death rituals is an essential aspect of Manipuri culture. In the discussion of Manipuri Meitei music, traditional musical instruments *such as Meitei Pung, Khun Pung, Lai Pung, Pena,*

¹⁸⁴ Field visit to *Kumon Phiroi* ritual (1st Death Anniversary), Manipur, 19 May 2023.

Langdren, etc., are not only the main musical instruments of the Meiteis but also representative of Manipur itself. When we mention Manipuri music, not Meitei music, these musical instruments are vital in showcasing Manipur music tradition and Culture. The history and story related to musical instruments, as well as the mode and style of using them during performances, show and preserve the cultural identity of Manipur. Nowadays, various steps and initiatives have been taken to preserve such a rich culture and tradition of Meitei music by various sections of the society.

Guru Parampara (The Guru Tradition):

As one is born as a human being, death is an inevitable debt to human life, for which we have to perform the rituals of death of an individual as he dies. Since the death ritual is performed in accompaniment to music, the song sung during a death ritual is of great importance. As the ritual performance involves singing the death ritual song, there are numerous gurus or teachers who impart knowledge of the songs and how they are to be sung to their students. Thus, there is the tradition of students learning the songs and the details and decorum to be maintained and followed while singing the death ritual songs. The learning and teaching process is undertaken by maintaining a good and solemn teacher-student relationship, and this *Guru-Shishya* tradition has been instrumental in preserving the Meitei music culture to a great extent. Besides this traditional *Guru-Shishya* tradition of learning songs, nowadays, ritual songs can also be learned at the highest institutional level, such as a university.

Institutional Support: Such ritual music is prescribed as part of the syllabus for studies in higher academic institutions, including the Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy, Manipur; the Government Dance College, Manipur; and the Manipur University of Culture, among others, to preserve and popularize this type of music and songs.

Awards and Seminars: The government organizes various seminars and symposia in collaboration with cultural organizations, where many experts and distinguished

personalities in the field of music present their findings and share their knowledge on the subject. Besides, the Sangeet Natak Akademi also confers awards to distinguished personalities in the field of music in recognition of their contribution to the preservation, growth, and development of traditional music forms.

Global Recognition: Organized by the Cultural University, Sankirtan is performed in many foreign countries. In 2013, it was declared an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

6.4 Economic Growth and Social Balance among the Meitei Musicians

The artists and performers engaging in ritual practices receive remuneration for their services in these ceremonies. As the death ritual is inevitable and must be performed according to the customs and traditions of the society, family members and invitees to the ritual ceremony offer remuneration money as gifts in recognition and honour of their service in the ritual. This provides fair economic support to musicians and performers, helping them to make a living and pursue the art form as a profession of their choice. Besides this, in order to preserve and bring more development to the art form, artists and performers are given monetary and other aid from the government. Moreover, Sankirtan and other music forms are being taught as an art form at the Manipur University of Culture. It is evident from the above facts that musicians, artists and performers can secure fair economic and social security if they genuinely learn and pursue Meitei music as a profession.

6.5 Challenges and Opportunities for Future Research In Meitei Music

While the research has lacked written documents, this has been a significant problem throughout the research. The researcher has also relied on field data, including personal interviews and observations of rituals and performances, as research documents to support the findings of this research. Some of the problems the researcher went through in collecting the research documents are:

1. During the performance of the death rituals, prior approval needs to be taken to take photos or videos of the proceedings of a death ritual.
2. While the family is mourning the deceased and charged with emotion, it is quite inconvenient to seek approval for observations of the proceedings.
3. The songs sung in the rituals contain many archaic and loan words, which make them difficult for the listener to understand and decipher.
4. It is challenging to transcribe the classical musical notations of Meitei traditional songs, which are sung during rituals.

The Manipur University of Culture is taking great responsibility to popularise and promote further development of the Meitei music art forms. As a step to promote the art forms for future generations, new departments solely dedicated to the study of each art form have been established at the university level, with the formulation of proper and updated syllabi on the subject. Additionally, the Manipur State Akademi is sponsoring fellowships and scholarships to encourage new research on Meitei music from interested and worthy individuals. The Manipur State Kala Akademi, Shri Shri Govindaji Temple Board of Manipur, Manipur Sahitya Parishad, and Sangeet Natak Akademi honour distinguished and celebrated personalities in the field of Meitei music by presenting awards in recognition of their contributions to the growth and development of Meitei music.

Some of the noted and celebrated personalities who have been honoured with the highest awards for their contribution to Meitei are:

1. S. Thanil Singh, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, 1994, for his contribution to Nat sankirtan as a Pung Yeiba. He also received the Manipur State Kala Akademi Award in 1980.
2. Shrimati Y. Ranjana Devi, Sangeet Natak Award, 1997, for her contribution to Nat Sankirtan.

3. Shri Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, 2001, for his contribution to Nat Sankirtan.
4. L. Ibohalmacha Singh, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, 2009, for his contribution to Nat Sankirtan.
5. Ningthoujam Shyamchand Singh, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, 2016, for his contribution to Nat Sankirtan.

Conclusion:

In the first chapter, i.e., the introduction, a brief overview of Manipur is given. Manipur is a beautiful small State situated in the northeastern part of India, with a central valley surrounded by nine hills. It is inhabited by both hill and valley people, with Meiteis predominantly residing in the valley, while the other tribes mostly reside in the hills. The changes in Meitei culture after the advent of Hinduism in Manipur, among the Meiteis, are also discussed here. It tries to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Meiteis by deeply analyzing the various aspects of Meitei music.

The second chapter is a review of the literature. Here, Theses, Books, and research articles related to my research topic are discussed and analyzed. Following this, the research gap, area of study, methodology, and objectives of my research are outlined in this chapter.

In the third chapter of the thesis, a brief introduction to the Meitei community is given by analyzing the cultural rites of the Meiteis from birth to marriage. From the moment a woman is confirmed pregnant, at the third (3), fifth (5), seventh (7), and ninth (9) months of the pregnancy, for the well-being of the child, rituals are held to ward off the child from any evil. According to the Meitei belief system, a feast is served to the pregnant woman, with her maternal family members bringing pots, pans, and other items to the pregnant woman's house. This highlights the health and well-being of the pregnant woman and the responsibility of the born child, which must be shared by both the paternal and maternal families of the woman. Earlier, after the full term, the process of childbirth was all carried out by local *Maibis*. Nowadays, due to advancements in social and medical life, the process of childbirth is carried out by doctors and nurses in hospitals instead of the *Maibis*. However, the ritual of *Epan Thaba* (first feeding of a child after birth), which is performed on the sixth day of the birth of the child, is performed by *Maibis*. After the birth of the child, the placenta and umbilical cord are buried on the right side of the house, in the case of a boy, and on the left side in the case of a girl. While

burying these, the ground is not pounded as per the Meitei traditional belief, doing this would make the child deaf for life. Burying the umbilical cord and placenta on the right and left sides of the house indicates that the child will protect the house in life. After this, on the 6th day after the birth of the child (on the day of *Epan thaba*), in the morning the *maibi* performs the ritual of feeding the child, after this she leaves foods for evil spirits for the well being the child and then she puts the child on a *Yangkok* and moves the yangkok with the child on it over a *Meiphu* or a *Phunga Lairu* by saying the words ‘will you take your child or the *Yangkok*’ to the mother of the child to which the mother answers that she will take her child rather than the *Yangkok* and then gives *Dakshina* to the *Maibi* and takes the child from the *Maibi*. This tells that in this world, there is no more precious thing than a child to the mother. In the evening part of the ritual, members of the maternal family bring finely prepared sweets and fruits and bless the child with them. According to Meitei Hindu custom, a *Brahmin* performs the *Swasti Pooja* ceremony for the well-being of the child. At twilight, as part of the ritual, the maternal uncle of the child performs the arrow-shooting ritual to ward off evil spirits.

In the Meitei belief system, after the birth of a child, the house of the family of the child is considered unclean. Thus, according to Meitei tradition, there is sanctification of the house and its family members on the 10th day after the child's birth by a *Maiba*(priest). In contrast, for a Meitei Hindu, the sanctification ritual is performed by a Brahmin on the 12th day after the child's birth. After this, there is the ritual of *Chak-umba*, which is performed in the sixth month for a boy after the child's birth, but for a girl, it is performed in the fifth or seventh month. In this ritual, the mother of the child feeds the child with seven different types of fishes to the child, firstly for the long life of the child and then to make the child understand the Almighty God; *Leimarel Shidabi*, the Mother Goddess of the Earth; the five souls of the body; the father and mother of the child; and food for knowledge.

After the *Chak Umba ritual*, other rituals, such as *Nahut Nareng Thouram* (ear piercing) or *Sham Kokpa* (shaving the child's head), are subsequently performed. These

rituals are performed on auspicious days when the child is between three and five years old. All these are performed to lead a brighter life and the well-being of the child. This is called *Chura karan* in the Meitei Hindu tradition. The ritual is performed in accompaniment of sankirtan and other rituals. This performance of the ritual develops the spiritual life of the child.

In Meitei custom, before the solemnization of marriage, which is one of the crucial moments in the life of an individual, such rituals like *Mangol kaba*, *Yathang thaba*, *Waroi pot puba*, *Heijing kharai puba/ Heijingpot* are performed. On the day of marriage, ritual hymns, songs, and sankirtan are performed to bestow blessings on the bride and groom.

In the fourth chapter of the thesis, the rites related to death are discussed. In Meitei tradition, before the death of an individual, there is the tradition of *Pham sennaba* in which a *Maiba* (traditional Meitei priest) keeps in strict observance of the condition of the dying individual, or a Brahmin recites the glory of the Lord as a way for the deliverance of the dying individual or the song *Phamang Eshei*, etc, is sung. However, certain changes can be seen in this regard nowadays. In certain cases, the practice is performed at all, with social and medical advancement, dying individuals are no longer kept at home under the observation of a *Maiba* or Brahmin, but they are mostly taken to the hospitals. Thus, this results in the present society neglecting and discarding the observance of the traditional practice of *Pham sennaba*. The different forms of funeral practices in the past were air, water, fire, and earth funerals. Of these, the funerals practised are the fire and earth funerals. Mostly, the fire funeral is practised nowadays. The rituals involved in a death ceremony are broadly divided into six

1. *Potloiba*, 2. *Dasha Hon*, 3. *Mangani Leihun/Ashti*, 4. *Lanna Thouram/ Shraddha*, 5. *Thagi luk katpa*, and *Kumon Phiroi*. The activities involved on the funeral day are: making a coffin, taking the deceased's body out of the house, and keeping it at a place in the courtyard called *Khangenpham*, and most of the family's activities are performed here. The funeral is performed in accompaniment with musical instruments like *the Pung*,

Cymbal, or, in certain cases, the *Pena*. The funeral process begins with *Sheishakpa* singing the funeral song, accompanied by a *Brahmin* (for Meitei Hindus), and a *Beita* performing the necessary rituals. After everyone present at the *khagenpham* offers flowers and *Dakshina*, the dead body is taken to the site where the body is to be cremated with the funeral song. On the day of the funeral, members of the local community voluntarily join the funeral procession to share in the pain and sorrow of the deceased's family.

For those who believe in the Meitei Hindu religion, there are two ways of dying: 1. *Preta* and 2. *Lamboiba*. Most of the *Shradha* perform the *Lamboiba* practice nowadays.

The practice of *Dasha Hon / Lairik Taba* is performed daily until the day of *Shradha*. Nowadays, it is only done on the first and last day before the *Shradha*. However, it is mostly performed according to the convenience of the deceased's family. During the days of the performance of *Dasha Hon/ Lairik Taba*, important episodes from such old Meitei manuscripts like *Wakoklon Thilel Amailol Pukok Puya*, *Ponbi Lang*, etc., related to the birth of a man, the reason for the death of a man, where the soul of a man goes after his death, are narrated to the listeners joining the *Dasha Hon* as per the wish of the deceased family. For the Meitei Hindus, Chapter 8 of the *Bhagavad Purana* is mostly narrated to the listeners. It is the common belief that listening to the stories and songs can bring solace to the pain and sorrow that the family is facing.

Mangani leihun /Ashti is performed 5 or 6 days after the funeral. In archaic Manipuri, it is called '*Tangja Luphouba*'. In the Meitei Hindu tradition, it is called '*Ashti Sanchay*'. After the *Asthi* performance, the five elements – fire, water, air, earth and sky, which make up the body, return to their respective selves. It is believed that the Lord plays the drama of life by perching on the five elements of the human body. The practice of offering flowers to the five elements of the human body is called *Mangani Leihun Tamba*. On this day, prayers are offered to the elements by offering flowers and fruits.

Lanna thouram/Shraddha ceremony is the grandest ritual performed of all the death rituals. Performing this ritual means that half of the rites for the deceased are complete. By performing *Sankirtan* or death ritual songs with *Pung*, Cymbals, or *Pena*, accompanied by offerings of flowers, fruits, and sweets, the *Lanna Thouram* or *Shraddha* ceremony aims to ensure that the soul of the deceased receives deliverance and attains the abode of the Supreme Lord.

The *Lanna thouram/ Shraddha* is performed by erecting an open shed in the courtyard. The ceremony is performed from morning till evening in two parts. The most important part is that of the morning, which includes the ritual called *Bheg katpa*, and the second part includes the singing of the death ritual song / *Sankirtan*. Since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the security crisis arising from inter-community conflict, which began on May 3, 2023, the *Shradha* ceremony is now concluded in the morning with certain adjustments in ritual practices in some cases nowadays. In the Meitei Hindu tradition, there are two types of shraddha ceremony practices: 1. *Preta* type of *Shradha* and 2. *Lamboiba* type of *Shradha*. Of the two, the commonly practised type nowadays is the *Lamboiba* type *Shradha*. *Preta* type of *Shradha* is performed so that the soul of the deceased would return or reincarnate in the family again. The *Preta* type of shraddha ceremony has more elaborate rituals than the *Lamboiba* type of *Shradha* ceremony.

Most people cannot afford to perform the *Preta* type of *Shradha* because of the high cost involved in the ceremony like arranging a Bed, Mattress, Ulmirah and Kitchen items etc. and also the necessity to perform the daily ritual of *Kira thangba* and *Pinda dan* from the day of funeral till the day of the *Shradha*. However, such things are mostly excluded in the *Lamboiba* type of *Shradha*. Once a man becomes a monk, he only needs the basic necessities of life to survive. Most who believe in the Hindu religion can resort to the *Lamboiba* type of *Shradha* as it is cost-effective and less complex compared to the *Preta* type of *Shradha*. For those who believe in the Meitei tradition, the desire of the family for the deceased's soul to be reborn is reflected in the song sung at the *Kumon Phiroi* (1st Death Anniversary), which is the last ritual for the deceased individual. This

ceremony is almost identical to the ritual ceremony observed by the Meitei Hindus. In the Meitei Hindu tradition, a Brahmin, Beita, perform all the rituals, while they are performed by a *Maiba* in the case of a traditional Meitei ceremony. Nowadays, there is an increasing tendency among the Meiteis to perform the *Shradha* as per the traditional religious norms.

The monthly feast called *Thagi Luk katpa/ Thagi din* is performed a month after the death of the individual. On the day of the *Thagi Din*, a feast is prepared in the name of God and is offered to the soul of the deceased. The ceremony begins with *Larik Taba* (narrating stories from the scriptures) and the offering of flowers to God by family members and individuals invited by the family for the ceremony. No song performance is involved in the ceremony. For well-to-do families, this ceremony of feasting is held every month for a whole year. However, families with limited income mostly conclude the ceremony simply by offering an *Athenpot* (a plate arranged with fruits, vegetables, and other food items) to the *Mandir* of a Brahmin in the case of Meitei Hindus. In contrast, the traditional Meiteis offer the *Athenpot* at the sacred place of *Lainingthou* in the family's house.

As the last rite of death, the ritual of *Phiroi* is performed on the completion of one year from the death of the individual. It is performed to make sure that the soul of the deceased individual resides in peace at the abode of God.

Everybody has basic knowledge of the rites performed from birth to the death of an individual. However, most individuals are unaware of the subtle and deeper essences behind the performance of these rituals. This research is an attempt to bring greater knowledge about the customs and practices related to these rituals to a broader audience.

The fifth chapter of the thesis discusses the musical component associated with the death rituals. The music associated with the death ritual is discussed in two broad ways: 1. Those associated with followers of traditional Meitei religion, and 2. Those associated with the followers of Meitei Hinduism. The death ritual is performed in six

stages: 1. *Potloiba numit* (Funeral day), 2. *Dasha hon/ Lairik taba* (Listening to the narration on human life from scriptures or old Meitei manuscripts), 3. *Mangani lehun' Ashti sanchay*, 4. *Lanna thouram/Shradha*, 5 *Thagi din* (offering of monthly feast), and 6. *Kumon Phiroi*. Of the six rituals, there is accompaniment of music in the ritual performance, except that of *Thagi Din*, in which no music is involved during this ritual performance. Of the rituals, the *Lanna Thouram/Shradha* is considered most significant. For followers of the traditional Meitei religion, songs for ceremonies are sung on themes such as *Nongaron* (the soul's ascent to heaven after death) and *Nongumlon* (the soul's return to earth or life). For followers of Meitei Hinduism, songs like *Nimai Sannyas* and *Man Shikha* from *Nat Sankirtan* are sung as part of the *Shraddha* ceremony. The songs are sung or performed to ensure that the soul of the deceased resides peacefully at the abode of God and so that the soul is reincarnated into a better life in its next incarnation. The performances also ensure that the family members of the deceased individual get relief from pain and sorrow and get peace of mind.

The taals used in the singing are – Menkup, Tanchap, Teental and Namtaka. The role of music during the performance of death rituals is very significant and essential.

Pung, cymbals, kartal, Conch, bell and *Sharik* (a type of bell) are the musical instruments used during the ritual ceremony among the followers of Meitei Hindus. However, for the followers of traditional Meitei religion, performing the ritual of *Lanna Thouram* by a *Pena pala* is gradually increasing in society. In this ritual, the *Pena*, a string musical instrument, is used. The *Pena* style of singing is singing with humming during the performance. The *Pena* singing style is sung following a rhythm of its own.

The voice modulation and singing style of the *Sankirtan* practice in Manipur differ from those in other parts of India. The *Sankirtan* singing practice in Manipur has its own unique style. The singers employ the technique of *khollik* in their singing, which gives their presentation a unique quality. *Khollik* is different from the *Murki*, *Khatka* of Indian classical music, or *Vivtrato* of Western music. *Khollik* style of singing can be found

in the Manipuri *Nat sankirtan*, as well as in the traditional *Khullang Eshei* or *Pena* style of singing.

In a Nat Sankirtan performance, when a song is sung on a high-pitched note, it is sung with a high nasal tone. The song is most often sung on a high-pitched note. To maintain a long breath while singing on a high pitch note for an extended period, singers must train and master the art of balancing their breathing during the song.

Cholom: *Cholom* is a solemn form of dance performed by only men. However, women have also begun to perform this dance nowadays. This is a dance that depicts the inner essence of devotion and love for the Lord. The old masters of the *Cholom* tried to mesmerized the audience by imitating and enacting the gracefulness of nature in their *Cholom* performance, for instance, they imitated and enacted the graceful rhythmic movement of an elephant, the rhythmic movement of crane by lowering its backing and lifting its leg and the graceful movement of a lion etc in their performances.

They try to express the inner essences of human life through their rhythmic performance. This is one of the essential parts in the performance of a Sankirtan. The *Cholom* performance tries to depict the inner essence of devotion and love expressed in the song of the *Sankirtan*. This can create a greater sense of devotion and love for the divine Lord while watching the Sankirtan performance.

In the sixth chapter of the thesis, Social functions of music, the socio-cultural relationship, the importance of gender roles with regards to the rituals and the preservation of the essences of the rituals against the growing influence of changes and development in the society. At present, most of the death rituals are mainly performed by men. In rare cases, women performing the *Phiroi* ritual as per the wishes of the deceased's family can be found. The physical structure and monthly periods in women make it inconvenient for them to perform in most of the death rituals. Thus, the number of women performing the rituals is less compared to men. Individuals engaging in ritual

performance or who devote themselves to such performance art enjoy social recognition, as well as economic support in society.

As for the socio-cultural relationship, the analysis of rituals tries to show the social and cultural relationship that the Meiteis have with other communities of Manipur. When ritual ceremonies like Lai Haraoba are closely observed, it can be seen that the Meiteis have a close relationship with the other tribes of Manipur. Ritual festivals like *Mera Houchongba* also establish the close socio-cultural relationship that the Meiteis have with other tribes.

Various steps have been taken to preserve and develop such Meitei performance art forms; syllabi on them have been prescribed for studies in higher institutions, such as the University. Artists and performers are encouraged by giving them institutional support through scholarships and fellowships. Many awards have been instituted and presented to distinguished individuals for their contributions to the field of Meitei music art. However, giving more recognition and also ensuring more support to the artists and performers would enable the preservation and exposure of the Meitei performance art forms to a wider audience throughout the world.

The real challenge, however, is withstanding the challenges of social change. Change resulting from development and growth in society has always been a major issue in maintaining the core essence of traditional intake. It cannot be denied that, in order for a society to survive, it must evolve in tandem with changes and also adapt to them for its survival. Social change always poses a threat to the existence and survival of the long-standing norms, values, symbols and beliefs of a custom or tradition. For example, the overexposure and ready availability of popular culture always influence the minds of people in society, thereby affecting the existence of long-standing traditions and customs within the society. Thus, this makes it even more imperative for scholars, academicians, and other experts in the subject and field to work more on the survival and existence of the long-standing traditions and customs with their core essence intact, for the future. It is with this hope that the present research was undertaken to further the preservation and

growth of Meitei music, a long-standing tradition, by increasing awareness and knowledge of it among a wider global audience. It would be interesting and invaluable to Meitei music if researchers in the future study the influences of popular culture on traditional Meitei music and the changes that Meitei music has undergone over the ages.

Bibliography

- Devi, D. S. (2014). RELIGIOUS PRACTICE AND BELIEFS PRACTICES AMONG THE MEITEI IN MANIPUR. *International Research Journal of Human Resources and Social Sciences* , 1 (5), 48-55.
- Devi, R. P. (2024). A Cultural Bridge in Meitei Community's music, heritage and society. *Naad Nartan Journal of Dance and Music* , 64-66.
- Manna, S. (2020). THE EMERGENCE OF GAUDIYA VAISHNAVISM IN MANIPUR AND ITS IMPACT ON NAT SANKIRTANA. *International Journal of Research - GRANTHAALAYAH* , 8 (7), 130-136.
- Sana, R. S. (2020). A Historical Study of Manipuri Vaishnavite form of Dance: Nat Sankirtan. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research* , 7 (11), 939-946.
- Singh, S. R. (2021). PENA: THE TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF MANIPUR. *VOICE OF RESEARCH* , 10 (2), 42-47.
- Singh, S. R. (2021). PENA: THE TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF MANIPUR. *Voice of Research* , 42-47.
- Christopher, L. (2025). A Historical Examination of Socio- Cultural and Economic Interconnection Among Ethnic Groups in Manipur. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3(2), 1-13.
- Ningthoujam, D. S. (2022). Historical development of physical education movement in Manipur. *JETIR*, 9(1), 31–42.
- Satyadita, R. (2019). *Manipuri Nat Sankirtana: A comprehensive study with special reference to its music* (Ph D Thesis, Delhi University).
- Chabungbam, J. D. (2022). *Hindu Dharma Changlakpadagi Manipuri (Meitei) Gi Harao Kumheida Honglakliba Mashak* (PhD Thesis, Manipur University).
- Yumlembam, G. D. (2013). *Manipuri Jagoi Ras: Hourakpa amasung Chaokhatlakpa* (PhD Thesis, Manipur University).

Shagolshem, L. C. (2022). *Meitei Lainingi Pokpa, Shiba Amsung Luhongbagi Thourasing* (Doctoral dissertation, Manipur University).

Khoidongbam, G. Devi. (2021). *Manipuri Culture Da Minggou* (PhD Thesis, Manipur University).

Achoubisana, S. (1997). *Pena Anoi*. Imphal: Manipur State Pena Loishang.

Bheigya, S. S. (2021). *A Brief History Of Manipur(Pre-History to 1972 A.D.)*. Imphal: Sapam Hera Foundation.

Chaobhal, E. (2019). *Cholom Pareng*. Imphal: Elangbam Chaobha Singhl for Angomningthou Preservation and Documentation Centre.

Devi, K. R. (1978). *Nat Manjuri(Ahanba Saruk)*. Imphal: Kumari Ranjana .

Devi, K. R. (1982). *Nat Manjuri (Anisuba saruk)*. Imphal: Guru Amubi Nitya Vidyalaya.

Devi, L. (2002). *Lois Of Manipur (Andro, Khurkhul, Phayeng and Sekmai)*. New Delhi: A Mittal Publication.

Devi, N. H. (2017). *Cultural Heritage Of Manipur*. Imphal: Pechimayum Modhu Singh.

Devi, N. H. (2017). *Manipuri Khubak Eshei*. Imphal: Pechimayum Modhu Singh.

Devi, N. H. (2018). *Arangphamgee Mathou*. porompat: Pechimayum Modhu Singh.

Devi, N. H. (2018). *PENA (The Meitei Traditional Folk Fiddle)* (2nd ed.). Imphal: Pech Publishing House.

Ghosh, S. (2019). *Hindu Concept Of Life and Death*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal .

Haorokcham, S. I. (2004). *Nat Sankirtan Gee Taal*. Imphal: Shri Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh.

Haorokcham, S. I. (2009). *Nat Sankirtan*. Imphal: L. Lakpati Singh fr Guru Gulapi Nata Sankirtan Academy.

- Jaychandra, L. (2022). *Manipuri Sankirtangi Hourakpham Amashung Mashak*. Imphal: Naharol Sahitya Premee Samiti.
- Khwairakpam, Y. (2020). *Sekmaida Pokpa Shiba* (1st ed.). Imphal: Dr. Devendra Singh.
- Laishram, R. (2020). *Early Meitei History(Religion, Society and The Mnaipur Puyas)* (2nd ed.). New Delhi: Akansha.
- Leibakmacha, S. K. (n.d.). *Sankirtan Punglon*. Imphal: Khomdram Selungba Singh.
- Lukhoi, C. (2022). *Taibang Epak Lallamdai*. Imphal: Oinam Ongbi Lembi (Chana Lembi).
- Mangang, N. M. (2024). *Eikhoigee Thouramlon(Anouba Hapchillaba Chaothoklaba Taretshuba Khutnam*. Konsam Jiten (Nongdamba) Mangang.
- Mangang, S. Y. (2012). *Ee Kangkhulda Epal Thaba* . Imphal: Sagolshem Khogendra (Malemnganba)Mangang.
- Mayanglambam, K. (2020). *Liklamda Chatlu Kangkhunda Maru Thao Matamgee Khonglei Takpa Puyagee Paotak (Anisuba Saruk)*. Imphal: Kirankumar Mayanglambam .
- Mayanglambam, S. (2019). *Folklore Gee Taibangda* (2nd ed.). Imphal: Cultural Research Centre.
- Meitei Eshei*. (1981). Imphal.
- Meitei, L. T. (1997). *Thouram Pareng Ashuba* (3rd ed.). Imphal: Thokchom Ibemhal Leima.
- Nilbir, S. (2015). *Erat Thouram Thounirol Lairik*. Imphal: G.M. Publications, Keishamthong.
- Ningthouja, I. (2014). *Meitei Pena Meiheirol Puwari*. Inphal: Ningthoujam Ongbi Ibeni Leihou Nunghou Shanglen Pena Loishang.
- Nipamacha, N. (2013). *Nimai Sannyas* (4th ed.). Bishnupur: Thokchom Ongbi Nongthombam Ningol Premila Devi.
- Parratt, J. (2017). *The Koils Of Pakhangba (A Culture History of Meeteis)*. New Dlhi: A Mittal Publication.
- Rajmani, D. H. (2005). *Meitei Punglon (Sheigonnabi)*. Imphal: Sanathong.

- Sanajaoba, N. (2018). *Manipur Past And Present (The Heritage And Ordeals Of a Civilisation) (VOLUME-II) Philosophy, Culture and Literature* (2nd ed.). New Delhi: Krishan Mittal.
- Sharma, A. C. (2020). *Sankirtan Bichar (Meitei Nongaron)*. Imphal: Sapana Aribam of Khongman Mangjil, Imphal on behalf of APDC Uripok.
- Sharma, A. C. (2021). *Manipuri Nat Sankirtan Bichar (Ahumshuba Sharuk)*. Imphal: Sapana Aribam Khongman Mangjil.
- Sharma, S. K. (2013). *Manipurda Gauriya Veishnav Dharma* . Kodompokpi Mayai Leikai (Mekola): Shri Kongbrailatpam Manglemchandra Sharma .
- Singh, D. L. (2020). *The Meitei 'Maibis'(Shaman) Of Manipur*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House.
- Singh, D. P. (2022). *Pena (Muisic in Manipur Culture)*. Imphal : Jain Book Shop Publication .
- Singh, L. B. (2017). *Manipuri Khunung Ishei* (2nd ed.). New Delhi: Sahitya Academi .
- Singh, L. K. (2019). *Meeyoibana Shradha Karma Sholliiba Karigino?* (3rd ed.). Imphal: Ranjita Publication.
- Singh, L. L. (2003). *Meitei Nat Sankirtan Neinaba (Anisuba Saruk)*. Imphal: Shri Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh, Guru Gulapi Nat Sankirtan Academi.
- Singh, N. (2024). *Culture Of Manipur*. New Delhi: Sunmarg Publishers and Distributors.
- Singh, N. B. (2006). *The Meitei Society (A Study Of Traditional Life Circle Ceremonies)*. New Delhi: M.P. Misra.
- Singh, N. J. (2012). *Religious Revitalisation Movements In Manipur*. New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House.
- Singh, N. K. (2023). *Manipuri Gaudiya Vaishnav Dharma Amasung Tin Prabhu*. Imphal: The Cultural Forum .
- Singh, N. S. (2004). *Nat Sankirtan Sheishak Sheihou*. Imphal: Ningthoujam Shyamchand Singh.
- Singh, N. S. (2004). *Nat Sankirtan Sheishak Sheihou*. Imphal: Ningthoujam Shaymchand Singh.

- Singh, S. E. (2002). *Cholom* . Imphal: Shri Elangbam Chaobal Singh.
- Singh, S. K. (2010). *Shri Shri Govinda Thouram Sheireng*. Imphal: Guru Gulapi Nat Sankirtan Academy.
- Singh, S. K. (2013). *Nat Sankirtan* (2nd ed.). Imphal: Shagolshem Kalidaman Singh.
- Singh, S. K. (2017). *ShriShriGoura Govinda Thouram Sheireng*. Imphal: Guapi Nat Sankirtan Academy.
- Singh, S. L. (2002). *Meitei Nat Sankirtan Neinaba (Ahanba Saruk)*. Imphal: K Ibohal Sharma.
- Singh, S. L. (2002). *Meitei Nat Sankirtan Neinaba (Ahanba Saruk)*. Imphal: Shri Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh, Guru Gulapi Nat Sankirtan Academi.
- Singh, S. I. (2009). *Meitei Nat Sankirtan Neinaba (Ahumshuba Sharuk)*. Imphal: Guru Gulapi Nat Sankirtan Academy.
- Singh, S. N. (n.d.). *Ariba Manipuri Sahitya Etahas (History Of Old Manipuri Literature)*. Imphal: Shri Ningthoujam Khelchandra Singh.
- Singh, T. I. (n.d.). *Nat Sankirtan gee Punglon*.
- Sudhir, H. (2020). *Social History Of Manipur* (2nd ed.). New Delhi: Sunmarg Publishers and Distributors.
- Tejbati, D. L. (2014). *Meitei Arangpham Phamba*. Imphal: Takhellambam Shantikumar Singh for Ashangba Communication Imphal.
- Tejbati, D. L. (2022). *Manipuri Natka Mari Leinaba Esheigi Khutlaishang (Indigenous Musical Instruments of Manipur)*. Imphal: Tejbati Enterprises, Shanti Publications.
- Wairokpam Bhagirath Singh, S. (2010). *Shri Shri Bhaktirsamritsindu (tritiya khanda)*. Imphal: Guru Gulapi Nat Sankirtan Academi.
- Yumnamcha Budhichandra, *Thaloi Nongkhailon*. Yumnamcha Budhichandra, Enat Kanba Amasung Semagt Sagatpa Lup Nambul Mapal Huidrom Leikai.
- Nongthombam Naran, (1974). *Angang Epan Thaba Thouram Pareng Ashuba*.
- Ningombam Manijao, (1986). *Ponbi Lang*. Imphal: OK Store.
- Bhogeshor Singh, (1995). *Sanamahi Laikan*. Imphal: Tamar Publication.

Dr. Makhonmani Mongshaba, (2022). *Pena Music in Manipuri Culture*. Imphal: Jain Book Shop Publication.

Kshetri Kirti Singh. *Oja Gurushingdagi*.

Imphal Times Desk. (2020, June 8). The Leirum Phi—in our cultural legacy. *e-pao.net*.

Gangte, P. M. (2013, March 3). Socio Cultural Ties Among the Peoples of Hills and Plain in Manipur -1. The Sangai Express and Hueiyen Lanpao, p. 2/4.

Loktongbam, M. (2018, July 28). *Folklore genres of Meitei community*. *e-pao.net*.

Government of Manipur, Directorate of Information and Public Relations. (2023). *Manipur Diary 2023*. Government of Manipur.

Appendix A: Fieldwork Documentation



Fig A1: Floral offerings and musical performance at *Potloiba Numit* (First Cremation Day) in Meitei tradition.



Fig A2: Funeral procession carrying the deceased to the crematorium for the final rites.



Fig A3: Monetary offerings to the Performers at the Cremation area.



Fig A4: The deceased laid out on the cremation platform, awaiting the final rites at the crematorium.



Fig A5: Mourners taking a ritual bath for purification after the cremation rites.



Fig A6: *Arangpham* orchestrating and arranging every ritual element throughout the ritual ceremonies.



Fig A7: *Wari Lairik liba* (recitation of the holy book) performed on the day of *Mangani Leihun* (Ashti).



Fig A8: *Lairik Toubu* (recitation of the holy book) performed on the day of *Kumon Phiroi* (first death anniversary).



Fig A9: *Mangani Leihun Thouram* (Ritual for the *Ashti*).



Fig A10: Floral offerings laid around the deceased's photo in the mandap during *Lanna Thouram* (Shradha).



Fig A11: Brahmin performing Aarti during the *Ashti Sanchay*



Fig A12: *Arangpham* presenting *lei chandan* and ceremonial cloths to performers at the ritual's commencement.



Fig A13: Mourners, invitees, and relatives gathered in the *mandap* during *Lanna Thouram* (*Shradha* ritual).



Figure A14. *Arangpham* presenting ceremonial cloths to performers during the *Lanna Thouram* rituals



Fig A15: *Arangpham* presenting *kwa tanga* (betel leaf and areca nut on a banana leaf) to *Pena* performers as a ceremonial offering to commence the *Lanna Thouram* rituals.



Fig A16: Mourners offering flowers to the deceased's photo at the *Sheija* and to the Almighty God in *Kumon Phiroi*, as part of Meitei memorial rites.



Fig A18: Monetary offering to the music performers during *Kumon Phiroi* (first death anniversary).



Fig A19: *Luk Houba* (Preparing Food) for the Grand meal of *Kumon Phiroi*



Fig A20: *Luk Phangba* (Invited guests and family members being served meals) as part of the *Kumon Phiroi* death-anniversary observances.



Fig A21: Nat Sankirtana Maha Yagya Performance, Starting part of Nat Sankirtana Maha Yagya



Fig A22: Performers performing Cholom, a part of Nat Sankirtana, Maha Yagya



Fig A23: Group Picture with the Nat San Kirtan Performers and Committee members after performance on the 284th Birth Anniversary of Raja Shri Bhagyachandra at Bhakta Ashram Ground, Moirangkhom Bokulmakhong, Imphal.



Fig A24: Participating 284th Birth Anniversary of Rajashri Bhagyachandra at Bhakta Ashram Ground, Moirangkhom Bokulmakhong, Imphal.



Fig A25: Drum leather for Khun Pung, stretched and sun-dried on a tree, a traditional preparation method commonly practiced in Sekmai.



Fig A26: Performer blowing the *Moibung* (conch) during Nat Sankirtan Observation Day.



Fig A27: Engaging with local elder members during the ritual.



Fig A28: Meeting and interacting with *Arangpham* during ritual preparations.



Fig A29: Meeting and interacting with *Brahmin* during the *Shradha* ceremony.



Fig A30: Group Picture with the Nat Sankirtan Performers after *Shradha* ceremony.



Fig A31: Informal interview with Local youths of Sekmai village, Sekmai, 30 January 2023.

Appendix B: Interview



Fig B 1: Interview with Guru Leimapokpa Lakpati Singh (Senior Guru of Manipuri Nat Sankirtan and Director of Guru Gulapi Nat Sankirtan Academy), 25 June 2023.



Fig B 2: Interview with Guru Leimapokpa Lakpati Singh (Senior Guru of Manipuri Nat Sankirtan and Director of Guru Gulapi Nat Sankirtan Academy), 05 June 2023.



Fig B 3: Recording of *Nat Sankirtan* Composition performed by Guru Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh with his disciple during interview at Kwakeithel Nganappithong, Imphal, 15 June 2024.



Fig B 4: Recording of *Pena* Composition performed by Rk Surjit during Interview at Porompat, Imphal East, 14 July 2024.



Fig B 5: Interview with Rk Surjit Sing, Senior performers of Pena, Guru at Jawaharlal Nehru Dance Academy, Imphal, 25 July 2022.



Fig B 6: Recording of *Meitei Eshei* Composition performed by Aheibam Tolen Meitei (Vocalist of Meitei Eshei) during interview, Takyel Khongbal, Imphal, 17 June 2024.



Fig B 8: Recording of Meitei Eshei composition Performed by Yambem Umakanta Meitei, Meitei Eshei performer and Karam Tomba Meitei, *Pungyeiba* (Mridanga player) percussion palyer and Guru during interview, at Tera Yambem Leirak, Imphal, 13 July 2024.



Fig B 9: Interview with Karam Tomba Meitei (Performer and Guru of Manipuri Pung), Wangkhei Ayangpali, Imphal, 14 July 2024



Fig B 10: Interview with Khwairakpam Nilamani Khunlakpa (Head of the Sekmai Village), Sekmai, 19 November 2022.



Fig B 11: Interview with Laimayum Dhananjoy (Pandit of Sekmai village). Sekmai, 19 November 2022.

List of Publications:

1. Soibam Monica Chanu, & Kumar Sargam. (2024). Pena Performance: Assessing The Ritual Among Meitei Of Manipur. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(4), 7637–7643. <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i4.2620>
2. Soibam Monica Chanu, & Kumar Sargam. UGC-CARE Listed ISSN: 2349-4654 Volume: 13, Issue-1, January 202 Manipuri Dance and Raas Leela Painting. Swar Sindhu: National Peer-Reviewed/Refereed Journal of Music A UGC CARE listed Journal ISSN 2320–7175 (O) | Volume 12, Issue 01, January-June, 2024 <http://swarsindhu.pratibha-spandan.org> © The Author(s) 2024
3. Soibam Monica Chanu, & Kumar Sargam. (2024). Nat Sankirtan in Meitei Shraddha Ceremony. Naad-Nartan Journal of Dance & Music UGC-CARE Listed ISSN: 2349-4654 Volume : 13, Issue-1, January 2024
4. Soibam Monica Chanu, & Dr. Kumar Sargam. (2026). Music on Spiritual Approach in Meitei Death Rituals. Naad-Nartan Journal of Dance & Music UGC-CARE Listed ISSN: 2349-4654 Volume : 14, Issue-1, January 2026.
5. Kumar Sargam, Soibam Monica Chanu, Dr. Vishweshwari Tiwar & Rashmita Saikia. (2023). Transcendent Melodies: Nat Sankirtan and the Spiritual Voyage of the Meitei in Manipur. Advanced Engineering Research and Applications, International Edited Book ISBN: 978-981-18-7125-2.

List of Conferences:

1. A Sacred Music of Meitei: An Auspicious Celebration in the Death Ritual, “Indian Arts: Tradition Vs Modernity”, 7th 3- Day International Conference and Concert, 18th- 20th September, 2025, Naad Nartan & Ministry of Culture, Govt, of India, Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Lucknow, Tauryatrikam Publication.
2. Nat Sankirtan in Meitei Shraddha Ceremony, “Music, Society and Everyday Life”, 6th 3 – Day National Conference and Concert, 26- 28 September 2024, Naad Nartan & Ministry of Culture, Govt, of India, Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Lucknow, Tauryatrikam Publication.

3. Women and Music among the Meitei: An Analysis of Shraddha Ceremony, Two-Day International Conference on Indian Music (ICIM 2023). 6-7 November, 2023, School of Liberal and Creative Arts (Films, Theatre and Music), Lovely Professional University, Punjab.
4. Music as Mental Wellbeing in the Death Rituals of Meitei People of Manipur, “Changing Paradigms of Mass Communication amidst Digital Age” National Conference, 25th -26th November, 2022 organized by School of Journalism, Films and Creative Arts – I, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab.

List of workshops:

1. Three Day Workshop on Perspectives on Manipuri Culture (With special focus on Manipuri Dance), 21th- 23th January, 2021, at Manipur University, Canchipur. Organised by: Department of Dance & Music, UGC STRIDE COMPONENT-1, Manipur University, Canchipur.
2. Sangeet and Yoga in Our Life, National Webinar, June 21, 2022, Organized by: Department of Music, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Shri Guru Ram Rai University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand.