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No. IV.

THE RELIGION OF MANIPUR.

BY COL. J. SHAKESPEAR.

(Read at Meeting, May 21st, 1913.)

I PROPOSE to commence this paper by a statement of the position of affairs. As regards religion in Manipur at the present time, I shall not, except incidentally, refer to the religion of the many hill tribes who live round the lovely valley. Manipur figures as a Hindu state in the list of the Feudatory states of India, and Hinduism is the State religion, but when we have said this we have by no means stated the whole case, for alongside of Hinduism we have the worship of the *Umanglais* or Forest gods and various other distinctly non-Hindu cults, which are practised by good Hindus as well as by those who have not yet abandoned the faith of their forefathers. As a matter of fact even the best Hindus in Manipur, except perhaps a few of the most holy Brahmans, cannot be said to have abandoned the ancient faith; rather, they accepted the Hindu Pantheon in addition to the old gods of their own country.

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The state of affairs is closely paralleled in Burma, in the Malay States, and in Java. The resemblance is closest in the case of Burma, for there, as in Manipur, only one conversion has taken place. We find the state religion, in Burma Buddhism, and in Manipur Hinduism, existing side by side with the more ancient faith. To quote from Sir J. George Scott's great book *The Burman his Life and Notions*¹: "Notwithstanding that Buddhism has been the established religion in Burma since shortly after the third great council at Patalipootra in 241 B.C., and that the purest form of the faith exists, and is firmly believed in, yet, throughout the whole of A-shay Pyee [The Eastern Country] both in Independent and British Territory, the old geniolatry still retains a firm hold on the minds of the people. . . . As a simple matter of fact, it is undeniable that the propitiating of the nats is a question of daily concern to the lower class Burman, while the worship at the pagoda is only thought of once a week." Similarly, in Manipur, although most of the inhabitants of the valley profess Hinduism and are strict in observing many of its customs, they are also ardent supporters of the *Umanglais*, who seem practically identical with the Burmese *Nats*. As in Burma, the *phungyis* are respected and well looked after, and the images of Buddha never lack loving care, while at the same time the little house of the village *nat* is duly decorated with flowers and replenished with simple offerings,² so in Manipur. Krishna is devoutly worshipped and Brahmans are maintained, while at the same time every village has at least one sacred grove, the abode of the local god, who has his own priests and priestesses. In the Malay States we find matters more complicated, for there, as Mr. Skeat says, "Just as in the language of the Malays it is possible by analysis to pick out words of Sanskrit and Arabic origin from amongst the main body of genuinely native words, so in their folklore one finds Hindu, Buddhist, and Muhammadan ideas

¹ Vol. i (1882), p. 276. ² H. Fielding Hall, *The Soul of the People*, p. 251.

overlying a mass of apparently original Malay notions.”³ But substituting Mahomedan for Hindu and Buddhist, the Malays seem to be in much the same position as the Manipuris and the Burmans, for Mr. Skeat remarks a little lower down :—“ It is necessary to state that Malays of the Peninsular are Sunni Muhammadans of the school of Shafi’i, and that nothing, theoretically speaking, could be more orthodox (from the point of view of Islām) than the belief which they profess. But the beliefs which they actually hold are another matter altogether, and it must be admitted that the Muhammadan veneer which covers their ancient superstitions is often of the thinnest description.”

In one particular the *Umanglais* of Manipur are better off than the *Nats* of Burma, for they are officially recognized and some of them receive tax-free lands for their maintenance, and are every bit as much honoured as the Hindu gods. Each set of divinities has its own ministers. Krishna and the other Hindu gods are served by Brahmans, while the local gods have their own priests and priestesses, known as *maibas* and *maibis*. The Raja is the recognized head of both religions. As a Hindu the Manipuri calls in the Brahman on occasions of births, marriages, and deaths, and observes the Hindu festivals, but in sickness he consults the *maiba* and he worships the gods of hills and rivers of his country as his forefathers did before him. I may here point out that Hinduism is far less antagonistic to the ancient faith of Manipur than Buddhism was to that of Burma or Mahomedanism to that of the Malays. To a Hindu, whose Pantheon contains an unlimited number of beings more or less divine, the inclusion of the godlings of any tribe with which he comes in contact is a matter of no great difficulty. Dr. Barnett has justly remarked,—“ Hinduism is not one homogeneous growth of religious thought ; it is neither a single tree nor a forest of trees sprung from

³ *Malay Magic*, Preface, p. xii.

the same stock. It is on the contrary an aggregation of minor growths, some of cognate origin, some of foreign provenance, all grouped together under the shadow of one mighty tree. It is an influence which has taken possession of well nigh all the roads by which man approaches the unseen in India, its churches are as well the stately Cathedral, where scholars and princes worship, as the humble shrine where villagers offer wild flowers to some god born of their own rude hearts, or the wayside spot haunted by some random godling, who may have dwelt there long before the Hindus came into India, or may have arrived there last week." ⁴ The attitude of the Brahman towards the gods of the savage races with whom he comes in contact seems to me somewhat similar to that of the Vicar of Bray. Whatever they may be, and whatever the rites of their worship, he is ready to accept them as one or other of the Hindu gods or godlings and to instal himself as high priest.

The Manipur chronicle, which is a very interesting history of the State from the very earliest times, commences with a pedigree, thus: Naran begat Brahma, Brahma begat Marichi, and so on through five generations to Chitraketu, who had one million wives and reigned in Mahendranagarh. The youngest of the million partners of Chitraketu had only one son, whose granddaughter Chitrangada became the wife of Arjun, the third son of Pandu, by whom she had only one son, Babrubahon, who changed the name of Mahendranagarh to Manipur. From Babrubahon the pedigree is carried through three generations to Hemanga, who died childless, but his widow Bhanumati worshipped the sun and obtained two divine eggs, one of which took the form of Taoroinai, known later as Pureiromba (of whom you will hear more when we come to the *Umanglais* or forest gods). Pureiromba, taking the other egg in his mouth, descended to earth. On the way he was asked by

⁴ *Religions Ancient and Modern: Hinduism*, p. 1.

all the gods whither he was going, but, having the egg in his mouth, he could not speak clearly (whence the name Purei-romba, bringing -stammering). The place where Taoroinai descended is pointed out close to the entrance to the present Palace grounds. Bhanumati received this divine egg brought by Taoroinai and took great care of it, and from it issued Pakhangba, the divine ancestor of the present ruling family of Manipur, which is thus clearly descended from the ancient Lunar dynasty of Hindustan. The Manipuris therefore have an ancient Hindu pedigree, but the modern introduction of the Hindu religion, a revival as the Manipuris call it, occurred according to their chronicles in the year 1626 of the Shak era (equivalent to 1704-5 A.D.), when we read "A Brahman Goshami named Muni arrived from Assam with 22 men, and the Raja Chorairongba and all male and female members of the Royal family, with all the ministers and the Sirdars, fasted on the 5th Boisak, Wednesday, and performed the religious ceremony of taking advice of the spiritual guide, the holy man Muni Goshami." In 1708-9 we read of temples being built for Krishna and Kali, but in the following year we read of a masonry temple being built for Panthoibi, one of the best known of the Goddesses of the indigenous faith, and immediately after this the collapse of Kali's temple is recorded, and it was not rebuilt for five years. In 1717-8, Chorairongba's successor, who became known as Gharib Nawaz, is said to have performed the ceremony of taking advice from his *guru*, and in the next line we read that "he also performed some religious ceremonies at the house of the God Senamahi, with all his wives and servants," Senamahi being one of the *Umanglais* and to this day the household god of the Manipuris. In 1723-4 the same ruler ordered the destruction of the houses of the nine *Umanglais*, but six weeks later we find him detailing Brahmans to attend on four of these local gods. In the following year Gharib Nawaz dug up the bones of his ancestors and conveyed

them to the Chindwin and burnt them there, since which date cremation has been universally adopted. These vacillations of the rulers were evidently due, in part at least, to the unpopularity of the new religion, for we constantly read of the Raja and his ministers performing ceremonies to induce the people to take the holy thread, and thirty-five years after the first introduction of the new faith we read "Tungashai performed the ceremony of taking the holy thread, and on that auspicious day many, many villages also performed the same ceremony; even those who were unwilling to take the holy thread were forced to take it by royal order." It is clear that the spread of Hinduism was slow, and was only achieved by a compromise with the ancient faith. Doubtless the limitation of diet imposed on their followers by the Brahmans had much to do with the unpopularity of their doctrines, for previous to their conversion the Manipuris were evidently consumers of flesh and strong drinks. In 1630-1 we read of the Raja worshipping his god by sacrificing 100 goats, 100 rams, 100 mithan, 100 pigeons, 100 buffaloes, 100 hogs, 100 geese, 100 ducks, 100 fowls, and 100 dogs, and, judging from the practice in the case of sacrifices to the *Umanglais* at the present time, we may safely infer that the flesh of the victims was eaten by the worshippers. The Chronicle also contains social references to the consumption of intoxicants; for instance, in 1680-1 we read that the Raja spent the whole night drinking in the house of one of his officials, and during his absence his own house was burnt down. Prior to 1823 Manipur suffered much from raids made by the Burmese, who, according to the Chronicle, twice carried off 30,000 captives, and Colonel McCulloch writes, "of those not made captive, some escaped to British provinces, some managed to subsist themselves amongst the Hill people, and some amongst the marshes in the southern part of the valley."⁵ The princes of the royal family, and probably many of the

⁵ *Account of Munnipore and the Hill Tribes*, p. 11.

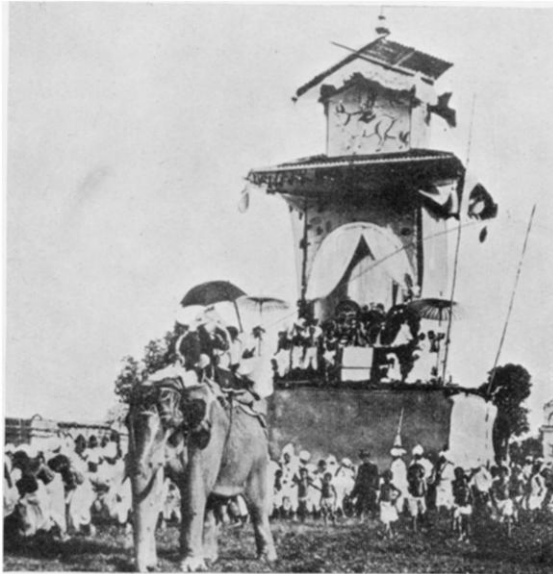
better-class Manipuris, escaped to Cachar, and I think this enforced sojourn in a country which had recently come under the influence of the Brahmans must have strengthened the hold of Hinduism on the exiles. I cannot refrain from quoting Mr. E. A. Gait's account of the conversion of the Raja of Cachar. "At Khāspur it [the process of Hinduization] proceeded rapidly, and in 1790, the formal act of conversion took place: the raja, Krishna Chandra, and his brother Govind Chandra, entered the body of a copper effigy of a cow. On emerging from it, they were proclaimed to be Hindus of the Kshatriya caste, and a genealogy of a hundred generations, reaching to Bhim, the hero of the *Mahābhārat*, was composed for them by the Brāhmans."⁶

I have made so many references to the Chronicles of the Manipur Kings that it seems necessary to say a few words regarding them and their value as history. When discussing this question with my friend Mr. Hodson he expressed an opinion that, while the Chronicle can not be considered history, it is certainly very good tradition. The Chronicle begins with a date equivalent to 392 A.D. Up to the year 1431 the entries are extremely brief, and I think that, as regards that portion, Mr. Hodson's estimate is too favourable; from 1431 to about 1700 his estimate seems very fair; but, after that, I think more credit may be given to the book. I have come across two striking proofs of the truth of the latter part of the Chronicle. The excavation and consecration of a large tank are recorded in the years 1725 and 1726, part of the ceremony being the placing of images of Krishna and Kali in the tank. In 1906 the tank was drained, and the images were found at the foot of the consecration post, exactly as recorded 180 years before. Again, in 1905, in the course of enlarging another tank, we found unmistakeable evidence that the river had at some previous time run to the west of the royal enclosure instead of to the east, as it now does, and, on referring to the

⁶ *A History of Assam*, p. 251.

Chronicle, I found two entries dated 1630-1 and 1662-3, the first describing the cutting of the present channel and the second the completion of the work by the filling up of the old bed. These are valuable evidence of the truth of the latter portion of the Chronicle, but almost more convincing are its contents, for, had it been entirely fictitious, written to order at a late period after the triumph of Hinduism, surely the records of the ancient religion and of the process of conversion to the new faith would not have been so full. I think therefore that we may safely place considerable reliance on the latter portion of the Chronicle.

I must now refer briefly to the form in which we find Hinduism in Manipur. Though the Manipuris have accepted the Vaishnavite doctrines, they have rejected entirely certain Hindu customs; for instance, child marriages are unknown, and women even of the highest classes go about freely, unveiled; widows are free to re-marry, and are subject to none of the restrictions imposed on them in other parts of India. I think you will agree with me that in rejecting these particular customs the Manipuris have shown great wisdom. I am sure that any one who knows anything of Manipur will admit that, had the observance of these customs been insisted on, Hinduism would have made no progress, for the Manipur woman has clear views as to her own importance and would never have submitted to being deprived of her liberty. In other respects also the Manipuris have introduced modifications. It is of course well known that on various occasions a good Hindu has to be ceremonially shaved; in fact, as Babu Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya in his great book on the Indian castes has said, "A Hindu cannot celebrate any religious ceremony without first shaving; the barber is an important functionary in Hindu society." Now, when the first Brahmans came to Manipur, they appear to have brought no barbers with them, so that a difficulty arose as to complying with the



1. CHILDREN DRESSED AS KRISHNA AND RADHA
FOR *RĀS LĪLĀ* SACRED DANCE.
2. RAJA'S JAGANATH CAR AT *RATH JĀTRĀ* FES-
TIVAL.

To face p. 416.

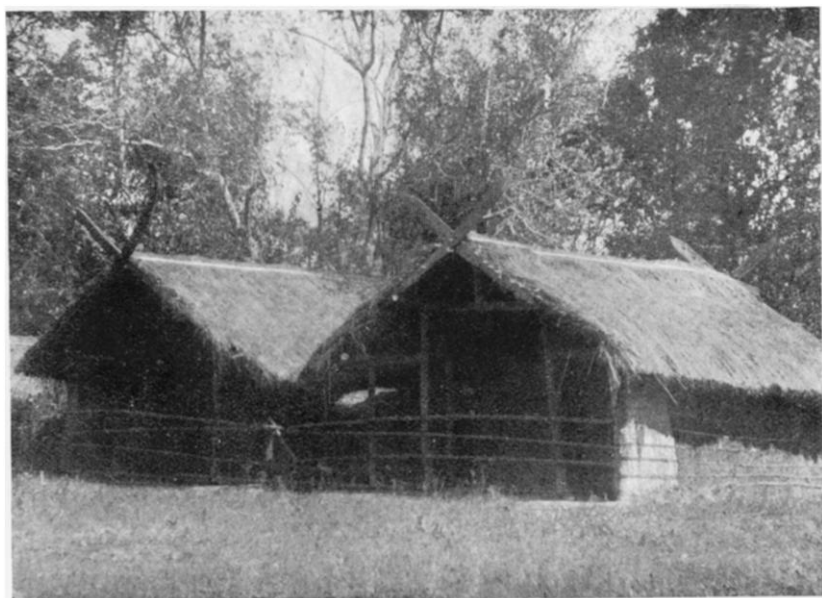
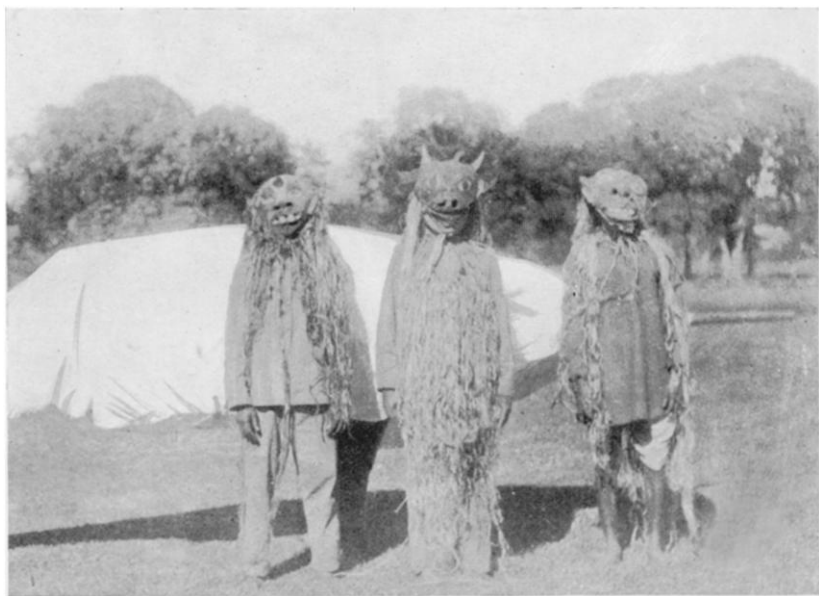
requirements of the new religion in the matter of shaving. This was got over temporarily by importing five barbers, but, as the number of converts increased, it soon became impossible for five barbers, however diligent and expert, to attend to them all, and some new arrangement had to be made. Each of the barbers had a certain number of villages assigned to him, and to each of these he sent the implements of his trade and in return demanded a small fee in rice from each holder, and the payment of these fees is held to satisfy all the requirements of religion. This system exists still. The supremacy of the Raja is another point which must not be overlooked; although there is a Brahman Somaj to which all questions regarding Hindu rites are referred, yet its orders require the approval of the Raja before they become effective. In matters of diet the Manipuri is very orthodox, and in many matters is more particular than Hindus generally are in these days. This is due partly to the isolation in which, till recently, they lived, and partly to their desire to mark the difference between themselves and the Hill tribes, whom they despise.

The Manipuri is a very cheerful person, fond of any form of amusement, and he has accepted gladly all the festivals of the Hindu calendar, but to show his independence he observes them a day later than other Hindus. He indulges largely in religious plays and dances illustrating incidents in the life of Krishna (Plate VIII.). The fight with the Demon and the mighty crane sent by the wicked Kansa to slay the boy Krishna is a favourite subject. The first part of the ceremony is conducted indoors, and strangers are not admitted. At its conclusion the boy representatives of Krishna, Balaram, and their cowherd companions, in gorgeous costumes, march out into some open space where the images of Krishna and Radha have been placed on a stage before which the boys dance and play at ball as their prototypes are said to have done in days long gone by in the jungles of Brindaban. The crane and

several demons appear (Plate IX.). The former is a man wearing a huge framework covered with white cloth, bearing some resemblance to a crane. The demons have bull-headed masks and dresses made of ropes of jute. They burlesque the actions of the dancers, and indulge in rough play with each other. Finally, first the chief demon, and then the crane, are attacked by the boys, who belabour them so with their wands that they have to be rescued by the stage managers. There are many such religious plays and dances, and every temple has a dancing house attached to it. To build a temple and a dancing house, and maintain a Brahman, is the great object of a well-to-do Manipuri. Children are specially trained to dance these sacred measures correctly, and, as each festival approaches, the juvenile performers may be seen hard at work rehearsing under the supervision of professional teachers.

The Brahmans of Manipur are reputed to be learned and devout, and are distinctly conservative. Among the elderly people there are many really devout Hindus, and large numbers of them may be seen patiently plodding up and down the steep inclines of the road leading to Silchar, on their way to the various holy places of Hindustan. There is much genuine love of Krishna, and among the younger generation, which has had the advantage of a free education, a general desire to know more of the principles of the religion which they profess. I cannot agree with Mr. Hodson's verdict that, judging by what they do, we must class the Meitheis as animists.⁷ Whether you call them Hindus or not depends entirely on which definition of a Hindu appeals to you. The difficulty of defining a Hindu is well known. To quote from *The Pioneer* of December 14, 1912,—“Mr. Gait suggested tests whereby Hindus might be detected from Animists, but it is a remarkable fact that the Census Superintendents of Mysore, Travan-

⁷ *The Meitheis*, p. 97.



1. DEMONS AND BODY OF CRANE IN *SAN-JENBA*
(COW-HERDING) PLAY.
2. *LAI-SANGS* OF PUREIROMBA AND HIS SON
CHINSONGBA AT ANDRO.

To face p. 418.

core, and Cochin are unanimous in rejecting these tests as an authoritative Shibboleth when applied to a South Indian population. Each has endeavoured to formulate his own test. As remarked in a previous article, the Cochin Superintendent decided that the crucial point was the recognition of caste as a socio-religious institution. The Travancore Superintendent seems to think that belief in Karma is the determining factor; and Mr. Thyāgaraja Aiyar lays down the following definition: "A Hindu is a Theist believing in the religious evolution which will some day, but surely, through worship of God in his various forms, (according to the worshipper's ideal) and through good works in his present life, or series of lives, land him in the Godhead, compared with whom nothing is real in this world." In a paper read before this Society on Nov. 15, 1911, Mr. Crooke stated that,—“On the whole, it may be said that reverence for the cow and passionate resistance to its slaughter are the most powerful links which bind together the chaotic complex of beliefs which we designate by the name of Hinduism” (*Folk-Lore*, vol. xxiii., p. 279). The Manipuris certainly are Hindus according to the last test. I think that the educated among them would pass as Hindus by the tests of Travancore and Mr. Thyāgaraja Aiyar. As regards belief in caste, too, the Manipuri would pass as a Hindu, if you accept his own definition of caste.

In order to explain this, and to facilitate the following of the pre-Hindu beliefs which I am about to describe, I must briefly touch on the composition of the Manipuri population. Various clans fought for the supremacy of the valley; all these were closely allied, although constantly at war. Of these clans that called Meithei came out the conqueror, and that name is now applied to all the clans. But, besides the clans known now collectively as Meithei, there were other clans in the valley whom the Meithei conquered but did not admit into the Meithei confederacy. These are now known collectively as Loi, and, though all

the Meithei are now Hindus, many Loi villages still follow the ancient faith, and the Meithei worship the gods of these Loi villages as much as the Loi themselves. The Meithei population is subdivided into seven *salei*, which represent the original clans, and each *salei* is further subdivided into many *yumnaks* or families. The different clans included under the name of Loi are also subdivided into *yumnaks*. All Meithei consider themselves of one caste, and only intermarry with other Meithei, but breaches of this rule can be condoned, if not for the actual offenders certainly for their descendants. The trades of blacksmith, goldsmith, brassworker, and worker in bell metal and copper are each restricted to a particular family, but there is nothing to prevent a member of one of these families engaging in any other occupation. It is almost certain that all these are imported trades, and the founders of these families were either imported by former rulers or persons sent to Cachar and Assam to learn trades. The Chronicles record that in 1661-2 "Three men were sent to Cachar and two to Assam to see," *i.e.*, to pick up information, and we have seen that barbers were imported. None of the indigenous trades are restricted to any particular family; carpentry, fishing, weaving, etc. are open to all. Although the four trades mentioned are closed to the general public, they are not cut off as regards marriage or commensality. The blacksmiths are rather looked down on, and it is possible that in time they may be excluded from commensality. I am informed that all Meithei can eat together, but, as eating with strangers is dangerous, one Meithei seldom eats with another unless he knows him well and is sure that he is not in any way unclean. Whether two Meithei will eat together depends chiefly on the amount of friendship between them. Eating with any but Meithei is strictly prohibited. Outsiders, except Mahomedans and sweepers, can be admitted into the Meithei community with the approval of the Raja. In fact the approval of the

Raja is sufficient to cover most social and religious irregularities. No one who knows anything of the Manipuris and the tribes which surround them will deny that the introduction of Hinduism has done much for them. It has made them into a nation of teetotallers, cleanly in person and polite to the verge of ceremonious. After all, I think that a close study of the history of many other communities which are now considered of unsullied Hindu descent would reveal that they had all been through very much the same stages as the Meithei, and that their Hinduism is only better than that of the Manipuris because it is a little older.

I now come to the ancient religion of the country, the worship of the *Umanglais*, or Forest gods, and other lesser supernatural beings, such as the *Sa-roi-nga-roi*, evil spirits which are always on the lookout to injure human beings; the *Helloi*, beautiful female forms which lure foolish men into waste places and then disappear, leaving their victims bereft of reason; and *Hingchabis* or witches. Originally there were only nine of these Forest gods and seven goddesses, but these have now increased to 364, and the pundits claim that from their books they can trace the pedigree of every one of these 364 divinities back to one or other of the original nine gods or seven goddesses. It is said that the Raja Khāgenba, who reigned between 1597 and 1652, appointed five *gurus* to reduce to writing all that was known regarding these deities and other supernatural beings. The pundits own thick piles of unbound sheets of rough paper of local manufacture covered with archaic Manipuri characters, which are said to be the work of these old-world compilers, and it is from these records that I have obtained much of my information; but I have also picked up much of interest from the village folk, who are freer of Hindu influences than the learned men. The increase in the deities is said to have occurred in three ways. In some cases a god is said to have children; Wāngpurel, the guardian of the South, is said to have

fallen in love with a girl belonging to the Old Kuki clan called Anal, and to have assumed a human form and married her in the most prosaic way, after serving for her the customary three years. He carried her off to his golden palace in the river near Shuganu, where she bore him several sons. In other cases it seems that the same god or goddess may be worshipped under different names in different places, while some deities are said to be emanations from greater gods. There are cases in which Rajas have been deified after death, but the pundits maintain that their spirits were emanations from one of the original nine gods.

The pundits gave me the following names of the original nine gods: 1, Athingkho Guru sidaba, the creator of the world out of chaos. This god is said to have been the first great cause, whence all things and beings have emanated. He is said to be identical with Lai-ningthau-ahanba, *i.e.*, the eldest chief of the gods, and Pākhangba the mythical snake ancestor of the Meithei royal family. 2, Athiya Guru sidaba, god of the void above, also called Chāk-khāba. 3, 'Ashiba Guru sidaba, the controller of all living beings, said to be identical with Khumlangba, the god of the iron workers of Kakching. 4, Thāngjing, the great god of Moirang. 5, Mārjing. 6, Khong Ningthau, identical with Khobru, the guardian of the north, whose abode is on the top of a lofty peak, known by his name, which rises above the northern end of the valley. 7, Thongngārel. 8, Nong Ningthau, chief of the rain. 9, Senamahi, the household god of the Meithei. The word *guru* is an importation, and it seems to me that much of the contents of the pundits' books is of a considerably later date than that to which they are ascribed, and, in spite of the learned way in which they studied them, they were not always able to reconcile the statements they extracted from them; for instance, having given me Senamahi as one of the original nine gods, they told me on

another day that Senamahi was the son of Yumjau *Lairema*. However, the fact remains that the *Umanglais* are always spoken of as nine in number, and the *Lairemas*, or goddesses, as seven, and at every sacrifice offerings for these sixteen deities are laid out as I shall describe later.

The greatest of all the gods is Pākhangba. He is the mythical ancestor of the Meithei kings, and is the first king mentioned in the Chronicle. I have already given you his pedigree. He is said to have assumed the form of a god by day, and by night he used to be a man. He reigned 120 years. In describing the crest he has adopted, His Highness the present Raja speaks thus of this divine ancestor: "Pākhangba was an incarnation of God and born in the family of Babrubahon. He reigned for many years, and during the Burmese invasion, when Manipur was almost depopulated, he appeared once in Nunjing tank in the form of a snake, and thus destroyed the Burmese by some miraculous power. So the form of Pākhangba is given in the crest to show that he is the sole protector of this land." Pākhangba had the miraculous power of being able to sink into the ground and reappear at some spot many miles away; these places are known as *sarung*, and are held very sacred.

There are eight gods distinguished from the rest by the title of *Māgei-Ngākpa*, *i.e.*, Watchers of directions. These include Khobru the guardian of the North, Wāngpurel the guardian of the South, Nongpok Ningthau chief of the East, and Hāng-goi Ningthau who guards the West. The remaining four are not placed at the intervening points of the compass, but two, Mārjing and Chingkei, have their abodes in the North-east, and two, Thāngjing and his son Santhong, have theirs in the South-west. Mārjing is the special god of horses, and, when worshipping him, a pony is offered, instead of a buffalo or pig as in the cases of other gods. These greater gods are supposed to exercise special protective powers over certain tracts

of country, and are therefore sometimes spoken of as *Lam-lai*, gods of the countryside.

In the good old days the eight *Māgei-Ngākpa* were worshipped annually on behalf of the Raja, and thus sickness and trouble were kept out of the valley of the Meithei. The custom was discontinued when the administration of the country was assumed by the British Government, and the present ruler has not revived it. Besides these gods there are others, whose name extends beyond the village in which they specially dwell. Such are Khumlangba, the god of the ironworkers of Kakching; Pureiromba and Panam Ningthau, gods of the Loi village of Andro; Sorārel, the god of the sky, who is specially worshipped at Phayeng, another Loi village; Panthoibi, a very popular goddess; and many others. In addition to these each *yumnak* or family has a special *Lai* or *Lairema*, who is worshipped by all its members. These are evidently deified ancestors, real or imaginary. I have referred to Pākhangba, the ancestor and god of the royal family. The Longjam *yumnak* worship Longjam *Lairema*, a girl of the family, who was carried up to the sky by Sorārel, who threw down her clothes, so that her relatives might know what had become of her. Konthaujam *Lairema*, the goddess of the Konthaujam family, was also carried off by the same amorous deity, who, to console her, promised that as long as she remained with him none of her kin should die. This promise in some way became known to her relations, and, in order to entice her to descend to earth, they killed a dog and cremated it with all ceremony beneath a sevenfold canopy, so that the girl was unable to detect the deception and became very distressed, fearing that some beloved relative had died. Sorārel tried to reassure her, but she would not be comforted, and insisted on returning to her home. In spite of being warned by Sorārel of the consequences, she shared in the family meal, and therefore could not rejoin her divine

spouse.⁸ The Khumal Lambom worship Nautinkhong Ningthau, who married Keiru-hanbi, a daughter of the Khumal king, by whom he had two sons, from the elder of whom the Lambom claim descent. In Shuganu I found five *yumnaks*, the gods of which had no special names, being merely known as *Apokpa*, i.e. ancestor. In Andro, the Loi village to which Meithei were sometimes banished for various crimes, I found that the families of these exiles had no special gods. Though they kept the family name they were held to have lost all claim to share in the worship of the family god, and they are equally ineligible to join in that of one of the indigenous divinities of their new home. In some cases we find that *yumnaks* which are not in any way connected have the same god, and I think this is due to the desire, not unknown in other lands, to claim aristocratic descent.

I must now turn to the seven goddesses. The following are the names given in the pundits' books, but they are not generally known : 1, Lei-khak-bi-yā-rel, from whom sprang the Ningthaujau clan. She also gave birth to Sing-sing-yai-nu, from whom sprang all trees, grasses, etc. Thursday is her birthday. 2, Lai-i-bi-a-hum-nu, the ancestress of the Angom, mother of Ireima-thon-thangnu, from whom came water and cotton. Her birthday is Monday. 3, Thung-woibi Thoiyinu, ancestress of the Luang clan and mother of Priprinu, who produced gold and silver, and also Noinu Thumleima, the goddess of the salt wells. Her birthday is Friday. 4, Mangwoibi Thongthangnu, ancestress of the Khumal and mother of Lemlei-ngā-nā-nā-woibi, who produced iron and all fishes. Her birthday is Tuesday. 5, Chitnu-laima, ancestress of the Moirang clan and mother of Piyainu Pisamnu, who produced fire. Saturday is her birthday. 6, Theirei-longbam-chanu, ancestress of the Ngangba clan and also mother of the winds and

⁸ In the Naga village Marām, I found several traditions of men being taken up by the sky god.

of Laimon-phau-woibi, the mother of rice. Sunday is her birthday. 7, La-phubi Leimanu, ancestress of the Chenglei clan and mother of the earth. She was born on Wednesday, on which day no land is sold. As I have said, the names of these ladies are not in general use, and, as Mr. Hodson has told us in his book on *The Meitheis*, these clans have also male gods. But every one knows that there are seven goddesses, and offerings for them are laid out whenever a sacrifice is made.

Every god and goddess has a *lai-pham*, i.e. a god's place, a spot specially sacred to him or her at which ceremonies in the deity's honour are performed. Most of the more important gods are said to reside on hilltops, but, for the convenience of their worshippers, they also have abodes in more accessible spots. Sacred spots are found on the tops of ridges, where a heap of stones or some other mark informs the passers-by that they are on holy ground, and each makes an offering, be it only a leaf from a bush beside the road. The greater gods have sacred groves near to the villages of their special worshippers; inside the grove is an open spot, at one end of which is the *lai-sang*, god's house (Plate IX.), and on either side are long open sheds in which the villagers sit, males on one side and females on the other, all arranged in due order of seniority, during the *lai-harauba* or "pleasing of the god," a ceremony which usually takes place once a year. There are various taboos connected with these groves and the *lai-sangs*. At Andro, Panam Ningthau's *lai-sang* can only be opened on Sunday, and repairs must also be done on that day. In case of repairs, or even entire rebuilding, the work must be finished entirely in one day. This rule is also observed in the case of Nongpok Ningthau's house at Lāngmeidong, but not in case of that of Panthoibi at Wāngu. During the time occupied in the repairs, the god has to be accommodated in a *lei-hul*, a bunch of sacred grasses and flowers, which he is persuaded to enter, and which is then placed in the grove at a short



1. LITTER WITH EMBLEM OF KHUMLANGBA.
2. MAIDEN DANCERS AT KHUMLANGBA'S *LAI-HARAUBA*.

To face p. 426.

distance from the house. None of the produce of these groves, not even the leaves or grass, may be removed or made use of, except in the service of the god, but at Andro I was told that Panam Ningthau objected to products of his grove being used even in his own service. No bird nor beast may be killed in one of these groves.⁹ I was once requested to dismount, as the people said they did not know whether the *Lai* would like my pony to enter his grove; this struck me as curious, as the gods are polo-players, and a stick and ball are kept in every *lai-sang*, and occasionally, when the *Lai* takes possession of a priestess at the *lai-harauba*, he makes the old lady play a mock game all by herself. In some cases the gods are represented by images or some material object. Panthoibi at Wāngu resides in an image of wood, which I am told has some resemblance to a human form, but has horns. This is kept in a separate little house hidden in the interior of the grove, whence it is brought on the occasion of a *lai-harauba*. As a rule there is no sacred image, but at a "Pleasing" a brass mask draped with cloth is used to visualize the god to his worshippers. Khumlangba, the god of the ironworkers, is represented by a piece of iron, said to have been brought to Manipur by their ancestors (Plate X.). Panam Ningthau, of the Loi village of Andro, is a special guardian of the Meithei Raja, who, on the occasion of his *harauba*, sends a mithan or a buffalo, which is sacrificed, being killed by a blow of an axe. The villagers, who have not yet become Hindus, eat the flesh, after offering parts to the god. Besides his regular grove in the village, this deity has two other sacred places; one is a cane brake, and, should a tiger enter this and roar, some dire misfortune awaits the Raja, who, on being informed, sends a pig and a cock. The former is sacrificed, and the latter is taken by one of the Aheibom family, (whose members are servants of the god), to the cane brake and released a short distance

⁹ Cf. *infra*, p. 438.

within its mysterious precincts. Should the bird ascend a small mound, flap its wings, and crow lustily, all is well, but, if it remains quiet, the worst may be expected. This is the only occasion on which the sacred place may be entered; should any daring person enter at another time, he would assuredly be killed.¹⁰ In years in which the *harauba* is not held, five pigs are offered to Panam Ningthau in his other grove, which is a little way outside the village. The lesser godlings, though they have each a *lai-pham*, have no grove or *lai-sang*.

The principal feature in the worship of these *Umanglais* and *Lairemas* is the *lai-harauba*, the "pleasing of the god." I have written elsewhere a full account of Khumlangba's "Pleasing,"¹¹ and therefore will not again describe the ceremonies in detail. The ceremonies differ considerably, but in every case the spirit of the god has to be enticed from some stream. As most of the gods are hill deities, it struck me as curious that they should have to be enticed from water, but my enquiries only elicited the reply that of course all *Umanglais* came from water. The object of this ceremony of enticing is to bring the god into a state of activity. I was told that the gods are eternal and ever-present, but that in ordinary times they are in a state of quiescence, and by this ceremony they are persuaded to show their power by taking possession of their favoured worshippers. The *harauba* is also thought to strengthen the god and make him more capable of helping his worshippers. Possession is described as the god mounting on the head. Any person may become possessed, but only while the gong is beating during a *harauba*, i.e. at the time when the worshippers are worked up to the highest pitch of excitement. The gods and goddesses prefer to be served by women, and, therefore, should a man become possessed

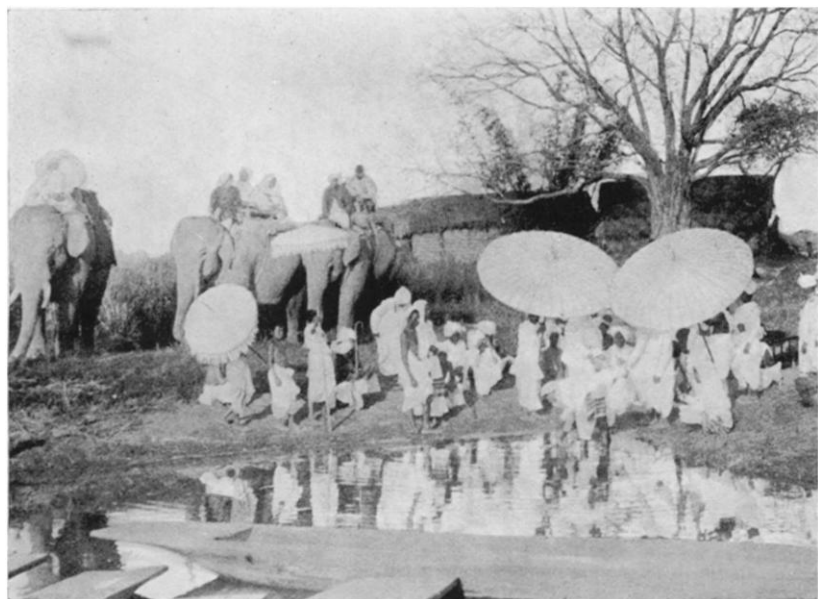
¹⁰ Cf. H. Fielding Hall, *The Soul of a People*, p. 255.

¹¹ *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, etc.*, vol. xl. (1910), pp. 349-59. Cf. Plates X. and XI.

while dancing at a *harauba*, he is styled a *maibi*, i.e. priestess, in contrast to *maiba*, a priest, and when dancing before the god he will wear woman's clothes. Such a person is subject to certain taboos ; he may not eat any fish which has spines on its head, as such fish are offered to the god in place of the buffalo of pre-Hindu days. He must only use clean fire, i.e. fire made with flint and steel, or by friction of a band of cane drawn across a piece of dry wood. Should his fire go out and he have no means of making clean fire, he must take a light from the fire of a neighbour and ignite a small heap of sticks, and from that ignite another heap, and repeat the process seven times, the last fire being considered clean. The signs of possession are frantic dancing, wild babblings in an unknown tongue (which is called prophesying), and final collapse in a state of unconsciousness. On the occasion of the present Raja assuming the reins of government, a *lai-harauba* was held on a very large scale, and one of the many *maibis* present became possessed and prophesied at great length. It was clear that the matter was taken very seriously by all present, especially by His Highness, and great satisfaction was expressed when the aged pundit who alone was able to interpret the strange tongue announced that the meaning was favourable. A person who has been possessed is instructed by the older *maibis* and *maibas* in all the lore of the *Umanglais*. The *maibas* are responsible for the proper performance of all the rites, but do not actually take part in the *lai-harauba*, the gods preferring female dancers (Plate X.) ; yet the village officials dance before them. If a woman becomes possessed, she is enrolled among the *maibis*, and in token of her superiority she occupies henceforth the right side of the conjugal couch.

I have seen two methods of enticing, and there may be others. At Kakching, where the great god Khumlangba was being "pleased," the aged *maibi* entered the river holding in her hand a brass vessel containing the leaves of

two sacred plants, which had been previously offered to the god in his house. Having waded out into the centre of the stream, the *maibi* moved slowly to and fro, tinkling a small bell, while on the bank another *maibi* tinkled a bell and chanted in company with some *maibas*. Suddenly the priestess in the river stumbled and fell, and then rose with the brass vessel full of water. Khumlangba had come. The vessel with its sacred contents was placed in a litter, and carried up to the *lai-sang*. At Moirang, where dwells the god Thāngjing, the procedure was different. The Moirang *ningthau* and his wife were seated under umbrellas by the stream which runs through the village (Plate XI.). In the lap of each was an earthen vessel containing 20 gunmetal coins, a betel nut, and a *pān* leaf, the top being covered with leaves from which project bunches of leaves surmounted by white flowers. To the neck of each jar a cotton thread was attached, the remainder being wound upon a bobbin. The *maibis* sprinkled the water with rice flour and roasted rice called *puk-yu*, *wai-yu*. Seven short lengths of bamboo were stuck in the mud beside the water, and these were sprinkled with rice and water. This was an offering to the seven *Sa-roi-nga-roi*, evil spirits always on the look out to injure mankind. The chief *maibi* then came forward and entered the water, carrying a parcel wrapped in leaves containing a duck's egg, a little gold and silver, and a lime. She first flipped the water with her fingers thrice, to remove any evil influences, and then immersed the parcel. After withdrawing it she threw it into the stream. This operation was repeated with another parcel, and then with two together. The first two parcels were for the gods of the rivers and lakes, known as Ike Ningthau and Irai Leima. When the *maibi* threw the offerings, she murmured,—“We give you this to eat. We know you as Muba and Mubi (Black Ones).” Every Manipuri has a pet name, and the *maibi* used these nicknames of the god and goddess to show



1. ENTICING THĀNGJING AT MOIRANG.
2. KHUMLANGBA'S ORCHESTRAS (WITH *PENNAS*)
AND MARRIED DANCERS.

To face p. 430.

her affection. The two parcels which were thrown in together were for Thāngjing and his wife. The male *maiba* now took the two pots from the laps of the chief and his wife, and danced a measure on the bank in company with the female *maibi*, who held a bunch of sacred leaves, called *lāngtereī*, in one hand while she tinkled a small bell with the other. The *pennas* (Plate XI.) were played while this dance was being executed. When it was concluded, the female *maibi* took the earthen pots, and entering the water moved them gently about, taking care that no water should enter the pots. She then sprinkled a little water on the upright leaves, and returned the pots to the chief and his wife, who rose and stood by the water, holding the pots in slings of white cloth which they wore round their necks. The bobbins were now taken by the female *maibi*, who held them with some *lāngtereī* leaves in her right hand. The threads were unwound, and she advanced into the stream tinkling the little bell in her left hand, as shown in Plate XI.¹² Then she stooped and gently moved the *lāngtereī* leaves about in the water, the male *maiba* holding up the threads so that they might not get wet. The female *maibi* now intoned a long incantation, interspersed with prayers to Thāngjing to manifest himself and bless the country. She got more and more excited, chanted quicker and quicker, and then suddenly stopped; Thāngjing had come. Rising, the *maibi* passed her hand up the strings, moistening them up to the earthen pots. The chief and his wife now got into their litters, holding the earthen pots in their laps. The *maiba* and *maibi* walked in front, holding the ends of the threads, which were further supported by two or three women. The procession went to the *lai-sang*, just before reaching which it passed over some rice placed on some leaves and some burning reeds to purify the performers. The earthen pots were taken into

¹² The seven little bamboo tubes stuck in the ground at the water's edge, on the extreme right of the Plate, contain the offerings to the *Sa-roi-nga-roi*, (p. 430).

the *lai-sang*, and placed before the god's seat. The *långterei* leaves were placed in the pot carried by the chief, and were kept in the *lai-sang* till the next *harauba*. (The threads are roads to facilitate the god's passage from the water to the pots.) During the *lai-harauba* all concerned in it must use clean fire, which is made by drawing a band of cane quickly backwards and forwards across a piece of dry wood, the hot dust being caught on a piece of tinder. Dancing before the god is a great feature of every *harauba* (Plate XII.), and there is always a processional dance, the performers circling round chanting the praises of the god and recounting the benefits he has conferred on mankind. The male and female performers, especially the clowns and the *maibis*, frequently indulge in an exchange of filthy abuse, which provokes much mirth, and is said to please the god. In Imphal, the capital town, the leaves or fruits into which the spirit of the god has been enticed are carried round by two old men, dressed in white, attended by umbrella bearers (Plate XII.), and by married women and girls carrying the *Lai's* utensils, and with the *maibi* dancing in front. Some gods are tricky and perverse, refusing to be conveyed quietly to their houses, and, taking possession of the bearers of their litters, they drive them hither and thither in a series of mad rushes. (Plate X. shows the bearers of such a litter, decorated with plumes of peacock's tail feathers, in which is carried the emblem of Khumlangba.) At the *harauba* of certain gods, who are supposed to have been spouses of the amorous goddess Panthoibi, a curious farce is enacted, which I have described fully elsewhere, in an account of Khumlangba's *lai-harauba*,¹³ so I will not repeat it here.

Panthoibi is a very popular goddess in Manipur. In fact she is by far the best known of all the female divinities. The pundits tell me that she originated from the spot near the State Police ground in Imphal where three big inscribed stones now stand. Unfortunately the inscriptions are so

¹³ See Note II.



1. DANCE OF VILLAGE OFFICIALS AT THĀNGJING'S
LAI-HARAUBA.
2. IMPHAL GOD-CARRIERS WITH UMBRELLA-
BEARERS.

To face p. 432.

much worn that is impossible to decipher them. The Tangkhul Nāgas also claim this spot as their place of origin. The pundits admit the truth of this legend, and say that the common origin was the cause of associating a Tangkhul with Panthoibi in the farce I have just alluded to. They say that Panthoibi went in search of Nongpok Ningthau, and found him at the site of the present Tangkhul village known as Ukhrul, which they declare is a corruption of *okna-pham*, i.e. place of meeting. This admission of the pundits is interesting, as showing that there is some connection between the Tangkhuls and the Manipuris. Both physically and mentally the Tangkhuls resemble the Manipuris more closely than any other of the hill tribes do. The exchange of abuse between the sexes is said to have originated from the opprobrious epithets which Panthoibi bandied with Nongpok Ningthau. These two deities are gradually becoming identified with Durga and Mahadeo of the Hindu pantheon.

During a *lai-harauba* the sexes usually keep apart, in some cases the men all sleeping together throughout the festival. This is a taboo which is almost universal among the Nāga tribes. In some cases we find sacrifices still performed, but this generally occurs in Loi villages which have not yet embraced Hinduism. At the village of Langmeidong, though the inhabitants are Hindus, we find a pig killed at Pākhangba's *harauba*, and a pig and two fowls at that of Nongpok Ningthau, and there are also annual sacrifices to these deities, in connection with the crops, of a fowl and a goose. The flesh of these animals is eaten by children who have not yet taken the thread, and the people admit that before their conversion every one used to share in the feasts. The arrangements of Panam Ningthau's *harauba* are rather unusual. It takes place on a special ground situated on the northern edge of the village of Andro. There are five houses around this ground. In the *sanglen* or great house, which is the god's, a sacred fire is

kept constantly burning, whence the first fire in a new house must be lighted. In front of the *sanglen* is the dancing ground. The population of the village is divided into two sections, termed the Ahallup and the Naharup *pannas*. Each section has two houses, in one of which the married people collect, while in the other, called the *kāngjeng*, the young folk of both sexes assemble. The population, having assembled in the proper houses, proceeds in four processions to the dancing ground. The married people of the Naharup or younger *panna* must on no account pass immediately in front of the house of the Ahallup. At this *lai-harauba* only inhabitants of the village are allowed to be present. The unmarried girls stand in two rows and clap hands while the procession of the god marches round and round. This procession consists of two men carrying hollow bamboos, two men carrying large palm leaf fans, and two men carrying Panam Ningthau's *dahs*, followed by the married men singing. You will notice that this god prefers to be honoured by men. I could not get any explanation of this divergence from the custom of the other gods. Before the commencement of the *harauba* the Aseibom family carry the clothes of the god with some sacred flowers in a litter from his *lai-sang* to the *sanglen*, preceded by girls carrying his utensils and men carrying his *dahs*. *Kabok* or parched rice is piled up in the *sanglen* before the god's seat, and sometimes he scatters it, which portends sickness and trouble; the initiated profess to be able to trace the footsteps of the god in the scattered grain. At Moirang during the annual festival in honour of two female *Umanglais* known as Aiyang Leima, *kabok* is poured out of a basket in a conical heap which is left till the morning, when it is inspected by the *maibas*. If the top of the cone is found to have flattened, then there will be high winds; if narrow crooked channels appear on the sides of the cone, troubles and sickness will come; if the channels be straight, war is certain; but if the heap remains unaltered

all will be well. The *Umanglais* are credited with the power to cure sickness. The *maiba* is called on to specify to which particular god offerings had better be made, and then the patient, or some one acting on his behalf, takes some rice, plantains, sugar cane, and a cock or hen according to the sex of the sick person, to the *lai-pham*, and after praying to the god the fowl is released and the other articles left before the deity's abode.

Before leaving the *Umanglais* and *Lairemas* I will describe two interesting ceremonies which I witnessed last summer. The young Raja came to me in a state of considerable anxiety, saying that he feared that some serious misfortune was about to happen to him, as he had received information that a certain stone, which he had erected at Santhong's *lai-pham*, had got out of the perpendicular and that an iron plate covering certain articles buried at Kanachaub's *lai-pham* had come to the surface. After some conversation, I gathered that the Raja wished me to accompany him to see the ceremonies. All arrangements had been made for our journey when news was brought that the *hangjaba* of Shuganu had died of cholera. Wāngpurel, the great god of the South, whose shrine is at Shuganu, and who is sometimes spoken of as the father, and sometimes as another form of Kanachaub, is said to reside in the *hangjaba*, who is the secular and religious head of the village. Opinions were divided as to the meaning of this sudden death ; some said that the god had taken him, and that no further misfortune was to be expected ; others feared further catastrophes. After a delay of some days we started and went first to Moirang and thence to the sacred grove of Santhong, which is situated in the middle of rolling grass lands some three miles from that village. Before describing the ceremony, I must tell you something of the history of the stones. Khagenba, who first reduced the *Umanglai* lore to writing, is credited with having erected the first of the six stones, as he was advised by the five *gurus* that this act

Beneath the cloth on which the clothes (16, 17) of Santhong and his wife were laid, two pieces of iron are said to be buried on which the feet of the god rest. The Raja, the Moirang *ningthau* (who is the chief pundit), and the *maiba* having taken the places assigned to them, a small piece of gold was affixed to the right horn of the buffalo, and a piece of silver to the left. Then the *maiba* commenced a long oration in praise of Santhong, and, calling for his assistance, at intervals he sprinkled water from the pot (5) in front of him to the right and left by means of a wisp of grass. When the *maiba* had finished, the Moirang *ningthau* rose and knelt by the stone of the present Raja, his grandson, and producing a little book read therefrom some secret charms. At intervals he smoothed the stone down with both hands. This completed, the offerings were removed, and the young Raja came forward, and, standing in front of the stones, tested his fortune by throwing two small discs, one of gold and one of silver, on to a plantain leaf. The first two throws were not very satisfactory, as the silver disc fell slightly nearer to the stones than the golden one, but on the third try the two discs fell quite close together, the golden being between the silver and the stones; this was said to be a very lucky throw, and the Raja was well satisfied. A small hole was now dug some three feet in front of the Raja's stone to a depth of six or eight inches, and when water welled up in the cavity every one was pleased; but, had milk taken the place of water, their satisfaction would have been greater, whereas, had a rush of air taken place when the hole was dug, the omen would have been bad. In this hole the *maiba* now placed two iron pegs with crutch-shaped tops, driving them a short distance into the ground and then, placing a small cross-bar of iron in the crutches, he placed a thin iron sheet about six inches square behind the pegs, and pressed it down till the top was level with the cross piece, which was a few inches below the ground

level; then he placed two more pegs, with a cross-bar, behind the iron plate to keep it in position. The hole was then carefully filled in, partly with earth taken out of it, and partly with fresh earth dug from a spot close by. (The object of placing the plate was to keep off evil influences.) The pig and the cock were now taken behind some bushes and killed there by two men of the Muntuk (Tikhup) clan. The entrails and liver were examined, for from them the future can be foretold. The discs used by the Raja were buried beside his stone. The *maiba* took all the offerings, including the buffalo, but the pig and the fowl were eaten by the two men who killed them. The ceremony of erecting a stone is the same, except that the stone is laid on a cloth beside the offerings to Santhong and his *Lairema*, and after the Moirang *ningthau's* oration it is placed in position by the Raja and the *maiba*. In Plate XIII. the six stones appear under the cloth, and the first three figures from left to right are the Raja, the Moirang *keirungba*, and the Moirang *ningthau*, with the cloth 18 in front of them.

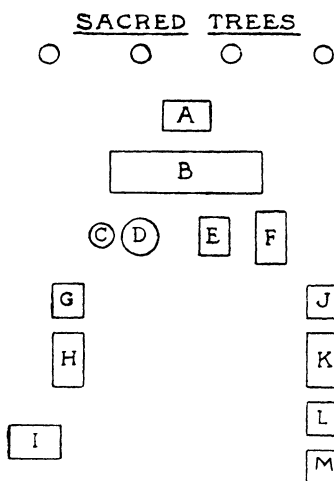
I was told that shortly after the performance of these ceremonies the Raja's stone rose about two inches out of the ground, which was looked on as a very good omen. The custom of erecting a stone or a post or some other object during one's lifetime, in order, as the people say, "to make your name big," is very common among the inhabitants of these hills, and I think these stones at Santhong's *lai-pham* must be classed among such memorials, though the ceremonies connected with them have a more distinctly religious flavour than is found among those of cognate clans. From Moirang we went to Shuganu. Before any ceremonies could take place, a new *hangjaba* had to be appointed, for Wāngpurel is said to reside in the *hangjaba* of Shuganu and without his permission it is dangerous to approach the sacred places. I may here mention that every *Umanglai* is supposed to reside in



1. CEREMONY AT SANTHONG'S *LAI-PHAM*.
2. MANIPUR STATE ARROW-THROWER.

To face p. 438.

some person, generally the head of the village or of the family which worships him in particular. These individuals must be treated with respect, and are subject to certain taboos. Until the present occasion, the reigning chief, or even his substitute for the time being, the Political Agent and Superintendent of the State, has appointed the *hang-jaba*, without consulting the god, and I am told that the god has never expressed displeasure at the choice. But the Raja thought he would give the god a chance of expressing his own views; so the five principal officials of the village were paraded in front of Wāngpurel's *lai-sang*, and were enjoined to proceed circumspectly to the bamboo altar at the far end of the house and make obeisance to the god, and then to return. On their completion of the tour one was said to have been selected by the *Lai*, I think it was the one who was slightly in front when the party made its obeisance. Curiously enough the one chosen was the very man whom the Raja had told me he wished to appoint. The new *hangjaba* was now instructed to take proper care of the shrine, and not allow any Rajkumar to approach it, for, should one of the royal family contrive to worship there and offer gold and silver, he would certainly aspire to the throne, and might cause endless trouble. From Wāngpurel's grove we went by boat some three miles down stream, and after a somewhat rough scramble we arrived at Kanachaubā's sacred place, which I should find it hard to identify again, for there was no clearing and nothing to distinguish it from any other spot in the jungle. Here we found all preparations made. Only a select few were allowed to approach the place, the remainder having to wait some distance off, out of sight and hearing. We had been strictly enjoined to keep silent, as, should any one except the officiating priests speak, the most dire consequences would ensue. The "lay out," to borrow a term from the game of patience, is shown in the following plan:—

K. Shuganu *hangjaba*.

M, N. Attendants,

O. A fowl.

- A. Spot where golden models were buried.
 B. Cloth on which clothes of *Lai* and *Lairema* were laid.
 C. Pot of rice.
 D. Three dried plantain leaves containing rice, betel nut, *pān*, plantains, sugar cane, and some flowers and fruit, offered to the 5 *gurus*, and laid down first of all, to purify the spot.
 E. Plantain leaf on which are laid cucumbers and other vegetables offered to Kana-chauba.
 F. A cloth on which was a cloth knotted to represent a man (a sort of rag doll).
 G. Moirang *keirungba*.
 H. Moirang *ningthau*.
 I. The Raja.
 J. *Maiba*.

The various performers having taken up their positions, the head *maiba* commenced his long oration, which was the same as he pronounced at Santhong's shrine. This is mostly in obsolete Manipuri, and the Raja told me that he could not understand it. I caught the names of various animals coupled with numbers of months, and was told that the *maiba* enumerated all the animals and the number of months in which each was formed in its mother's womb by the power of the god. This oration is used on every occasion of sacrifice, without regard to which particular god is being addressed; from which we may infer that the *Umanglais* are thought only to be different forms of one almighty Creator. When the oration was completed, the Moirang *keirungba* produced three small models in gold of boats and paddles, and two discs, one of gold and one of silver. The models were placed on a brass tray beside the *hangjaba*, while the discs were given to the Raja. The Moirang *ningthau* now took up a position before the offerings, and from a paper read in a whisper a long charm of great power. When he had finished, he

took up the rag doll (F) and threw it over the edge of the level space on which the offerings were laid out. The iron plate, which had become displaced, was now pointed out, lying beside the left-hand tree. A hole was then dug just in front of the god's clothing, and in this the golden models were placed with the plate on top of them, and the hole was then refilled with earth. The Raja now placed an offering of five rupees on the cloths, and then threw for luck with the discs, his second throw being completely successful. The discs were placed beneath a stone just beyond the hole in which the models had been buried, and on top of it some leaves were placed. The release of the cock finished the ceremonies as far as we were concerned, but, after we had left in our boats, the *maiba*, the *hangjaba*, and the *lai-ma-nai* (i.e. slave of the god) remained behind to perform a dangerous rite. In this the *maiba*, holding in his hand an unbaked earthen pot, containing rice and vegetables, called on Kanachaubu to accept it in place of the Raja and the country, and then entered the water, waded out some distance into the stream, and sat down. If all is well, the god gently takes the pot from his hand and he rises up and comes to shore, but if the god be angry he will hold the unfortunate priest below the water and, if he be not rescued by his friends on the bank, he will certainly be drowned. In order to know when to interfere, the *hangjaba* and *lai-ma-nai* hold their breath from the time they see their friend disappear below the water, and when they can hold it no longer they dash in and pull him out, thus saving his life. But he is often punished by the irate deity, who makes him vomit blood. Fortunately all went well, and the trio soon rejoined us in the village. In the evening the *lai-ma-nai* sacrificed a pig before Wāngpurel's shrine, killing it by compressing its windpipe between two pieces of wood. The liver was then taken out and examined. If black spots are found, the worst is to be expected; if much good red blood is

found, all is well. On this occasion a curious white veining resembling ears of rice was found, which was thought to be a good sign. The flesh of the animal was eaten by such people as had not become Hindus. The *hangjaba*, being a Hindu, may not eat, but he must smell the cooked flesh, thus ceremonially sharing in the feast. A buffalo is given to the god, and his servant the *lai-ma-nai* makes good use of it. With reference to the rag doll which is thrown away during the ceremony at Kanachaubá's *lai-pham*, I was expressly told that it was meant to represent a man offered in place of the Raja, and may be symbolic of a human sacrifice. Some years ago in the course of my work I had to take down a statement of a man who had been made a *lai-ma-nai* or slave to this very god Wāngpurel. I repeat it exactly as I took it down. "I received twenty-six rupees and a buffalo about one or two years old. I am a Moirang man. I was taken to Shuganu by the Raja and the Senaputti. I was taken to Wāngpurel's *lai-sang*. Then the *maiba* and the Raja said many charms, and a little blood was drawn from my foot, from the sole, and some of my hair, finger and toe nails were cut off and laid before the *Lai* and buried in the *Lai's* place. I was then let go, but I was unable to walk, I had been sitting so long, from daybreak till sunset, in such an awkward position that I could not move. I was not tied. I was told that it would spoil matters if I moved. A letter came round asking who would become a *lai-ma-nai*. I was told that I would be exempt from land revenue, forced labour, etc. This happened when the Raja was first going to Ajmir." Further enquiries elicited the fact that in the good old days, before the State was taken over by Government in 1891, if matters were not going well, a consultation of the *maibas* would be held, and, if they decided that the god required food, men would be told off to seize some solitary wayfarer after dark, in some unfrequented spot, and draw from the sole of his foot a

little blood and clip his hair and nails, as was done to the *lai-ma-nai*. The victim would be then released, the blood etc. being buried in the *lai-pham*. Those on whom this operation was performed are said to have always died soon after of a wasting illness. I have also been told that once a man was actually killed, and his blood, hair, and nails taken to Tegnopal, on the Burma road, and buried there, beneath a stone, in order to strengthen the god of that place, so that he might be able to drive back the evil spirits from Burma, from whose onslaughts the country was thought to be suffering. This offering of the extremities of the victim to the god is common among all the clans in the neighbourhood of Manipur. You will remember that Pākḥāngba, who is the Chief of all the *Umanglais*, is a snake divinity, so that in this particular the Manipur custom is wonderfully like that of the Khāsis when they worship the *thlen*, for a full description of which I refer to Colonel Gurdon's book *The Khāsis*, from which I extract the following (pp. 98-100): "There is a superstition among the Khāsis concerning *U thlen*, a gigantic snake which requires to be appeased by the sacrifice of human victims, and for whose sake murders have even in fairly recent times been committed." "Its craving comes on at uncertain intervals, and manifests itself by sickness, by misadventure, or by increasing poverty befalling the family. . . . It can only be appeased by the murder of a human being. The murderer cuts off the tips of the hair of the victim with silver scissors, also the finger nails, and extracts from the nostril a little blood . . . and offers these to the *thlen*." If the victim cannot be killed outright, "he cuts off a little of the hair, or the hem of the garment, of a victim, and offers these up to the *thlen*." The victim of such an outrage is said soon to fall ill, and gradually waste away and die.

The Manipuri has three household deities, the principal of which is Senamahi, to whom the south-west corner of each house is sacred. In this corner a mat and a bamboo

vessel are kept for the god's use. Although every Manipuri worships this god every day in his own house, yet for a Rajkumar to do so, offering gold at one of the regular *lai-phams*, is tantamount to claiming the throne, and in the old days, when a capability to seize and hold it was the chief qualification for the throne that a Rajkumar required, very strict precautions were taken that none should get a chance of approaching any of these shrines. Senamahi has already been mentioned as one of the original nine *Umanglais*, and also as the son of Yumjau *Lairema*, but why he is a special royal god I have not been able to find out. But he is not the only one; I have already mentioned Wāngpurel, to whom the same prohibition attaches, and there are some others. In the centre of the north wall of each Manipuri's house is the shrine of Yumjau *Lairema* or Laimaren. Here an earthen pot full of water, with a lid, is always kept. The third deity in the house is Phunga Lairu. In each house there are two fireplaces, one for cooking and one for warmth. The latter is called Phunga, and is placed in the centre of the house, and to the west of it is a hollow containing an earthen pot; the hollow is roofed over with a clay dome, in the centre of which is a small hole through which offerings of rice are dropped into the pot. At this place also offerings are made to Phunga Lairu in case any member of the household be sick.

Sorārel, the sky god, is specially worshipped at the Loi village of Phayeng, where in April the *maiba* strangles a white duck and white pigeon in honour of this god. The flesh of the birds is cooked and eaten by four men who are chosen for the purity of their lives and who, for the day of the sacrifice and the preceding night, are isolated in a specially prepared house, where they cook their own meals, using "clean" fire made by flint and steel. During their isolation they must not touch any female, nor have any dealings with their families. Sorārel is claimed by the people of Phayeng as an ancestor, and in Andro, the people

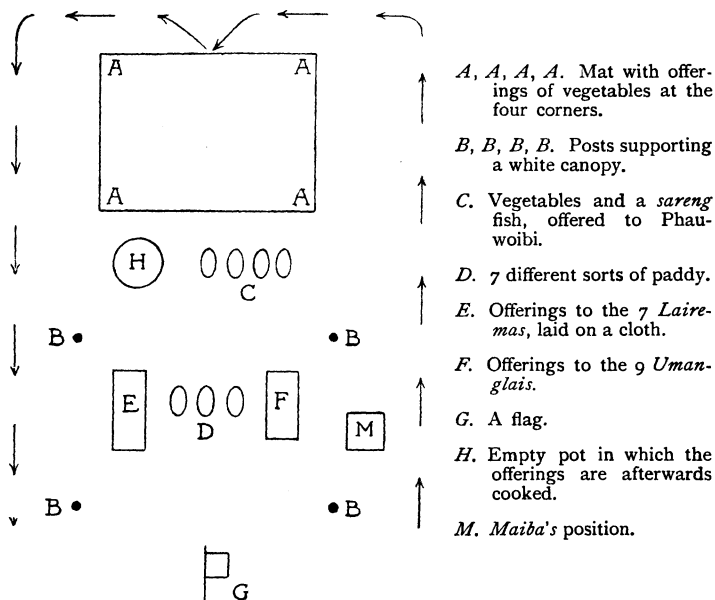
of which admit relationship to those of Phayeng, we found a curious custom. During the Manipuri month of *Mera*, lights are hoisted every evening on long bamboos by some persons, but for very different reasons. In youth, when the blood runs warm, the ardent lover hoists his light as an appeal to Sorārel to take pity and soften the heart of his worshipper's coy mistress. You will remember that Sorārel himself is said to have had an eye for beauty and a way with the ladies, so that the lovers ought not to appeal in vain. Late in life, when the world is losing its attractions, an elderly worshipper hoists his light as a plea to the sky god to have mercy on his servant, who, to emphasize his devotion, abstains from eating fish during that month. Those who are acquainted with Hindu customs will note that the Manipuri month of *Mera* coincides with the Bengali month *Kartik*, when good Hindus for other reasons also hoist lights at night. In Andro also we find a monthly worship of the sun, moon, and stars. Eight households taken in rotation have to provide, on the last day of each moon, the following articles,—two pots of rice beer and two fowls (one of each for the sun and one for the moon), a sort of cake made of hard boiled eggs, an egg, and as much roasted fish as they can, some vegetables, and salad. At sunrise all the title holders of the village make obeisance to the rising sun, and then, after offering him the articles, proceed to eat them themselves, assisted by any who care to get up so early. The ceremony is called *thā-si-lātpā*, worship of moon and stars.

There are some interesting ceremonies connected with cultivation. Rice is the main article of food, not only of the Manipuris, but also of the hill folk, and therefore it is only natural that religion enters largely into the various processes of its cultivation. The special *Lai* of the rice is called Phau-woibi, which name is composed of *phau*, unhusked rice, and the verb *woiba*, to become, the final *a* being changed into the female termination *i*. Although

Phau-woibi is classed as a *Lai*, she is not reckoned among the *Umanglai*, and is really more the Spirit of the rice. Ploughing must commence on the Hindu festival of Panchanami. However unfit the ground may be for ploughing, a small area must be ploughed on that date. There is, nowadays, no special ceremony at this season, but the pundits from their books described to me the procedure which ought to be carried out by the Raja before ploughing is commenced. Phau-woibi is first invoked, and offerings of plantains and other fruits and vegetables are made to her at each corner of a specially prepared piece of land, which is divided into three plots, in each of which a little paddy is sown. If all plots flourish equally, the year will be uniformly good ; but, if the first plot sown thrives best, the latter portions of the year will not be so good as the first ; similarly, if that sown last does best, the cultivators are encouraged to hope that, however badly the year may begin, it will end well.

Before a cultivator cuts his crop he must place offerings of fruits and vegetables for Phau-woibi at each corner of his field, and the following ceremony should be performed. It is seldom carried out now, the cultivator contenting himself with calling his friends to help in the harvest and erecting a flag in the middle of the field. He has to provide food for all his helpers and, before they eat, one, the oldest present, is selected as *phau-rungba*, i.e. master of the rice, and he makes an offering of a portion of the eatables about to be consumed to Phau-woibi. The complete ceremony as given me by the pundits is as follows, referring to the plan :—

[Plan



Everything having been prepared and correctly placed, the *maiba* takes up his position at M and pronounces the following *mantra* or invocation:—

“Yoibirok, mother of Nongda Lairen Pākhāngba, as to changing (the paddy) she can not change it, as to increasing she cannot increase it. Mahuiroi Laisna, as to changing she cannot change it, as to increasing she cannot increase it. Mahuiroi Nongmainu Ahongbi, as to changing she cannot change it, as to increasing she cannot increase it. Mahuiroi Haunukhu, as to changing she cannot change it, as to increasing she cannot increase it. Mahuiroi Haunuhan, as to changing she cannot change it, as to increasing she cannot increase it. Mahuiroi Laithong Khu, as to changing she cannot change it, as to increasing she cannot increase it. Laithonghan, as to changing she cannot change it, as to increasing she cannot increase it. By the *maibas*, the glorious heap of paddy becomes more

beautiful. You from Meyang Khulen (Cachar), let it increase, let it grow long. On this day of calling all we your grandchildren, offering a black hen to you our Lady Phau-woibi, addressing you as Loimonphau. What we leave of the cooked rice, let it not decrease but increase. What we leave of the *zu*,¹⁴ let it ferment again. O Lady! make the paddy to increase on the threshing mat as the rising rivers fertilize the land. Taratongnu, Liksikharoi, Yaisen Yaiphau, Chājak Chāhow, Pumanbi Langmanba, Chauwaibi Phaudongba, Hamok Keigabi, Morsi Nauremton, Phaureima, Phauningthau, Irioya Keitekpaga, Pokliba, to you we pray."

Yoibirok is Pākhangba's mother, and the other six ladies mentioned at the commencement are the wives of the first six rulers mentioned in the Chronicles. The allusion to Meyang Khulen or Cachar refers to a legend that Phau-woibi once fled to Cachar, whence she was recalled by the skill of the *maibas*. The names in a long string at the end are other names of the goddess. The black fowl is no longer sacrificed, other articles being substituted.

After the invocation is finished, the cutting of the crop begins. The harvesters start from the mat, and follow the directions shown by the arrows. The offerings are taken to one side, and eaten by all present. Should any of the paddy be stolen or burnt before it is removed from the field, or should a cow walk over the threshing floor, Phau-woibi will run away unless the ceremony is repeated.

I have mentioned the *phau-rungba*, the owner or master of the paddy. Among the Manipuris nowadays he is simply an elderly person selected to offer her portion to the Spirit of the Rice; but among the Kabuis, who inhabit the hills to the west of the valley, every village must have a *nam-u-*

¹⁴ Yu=zu=rice beer, no longer now drunk by the Hindu portion of the community.

pau, a title which exactly corresponds to and is always translated as *phau-rungba*. This person has no particular duties, but in connection with certain other officials is considered necessary to the wellbeing of the village. The *khul-lakpa* or head of the village, and the *khunpu* or headman, seem connected with the general welfare of the community, but the *phau-rungba* is only concerned with the rice. Before his house a sacrifice has to be performed before sowing can be commenced. He seems to be the person in whom the spirit of the rice lives, just as the spirits of the *Umanglais* are supposed to reside in certain persons. Cultivation in the valley has extended, and persons own land beyond the boundaries of the village in which they live. What wonder, then, if the processes of cultivation have ceased to be communal acts, and if the *phau-rungba* has deteriorated into any elderly person among the reapers?

I must now describe briefly the other supernatural beings believed in by the Manipuris. There are certain spirits called *Sa-roi-nga-roi*, i.e. those who accompany beasts and fishes. These are evil spirits, always on the look-out to injure mankind, and seem very closely to correspond to the demons called by the Hill tribes *Huai*, *Rampu*, *Thihla*, and various other names. The pundits' version of the origin of these beings is that the great *guru* married Leimarel, and during his absence from home a son was born. On his return she asked him to name the infant, and the *guru* said Pu. This name did not please the lady, who refused absolutely to accept it, and the *guru* (wise man!) did not argue the point, but, having given a name, he could not take it back. So he created a being to bear it, and then gave the name Ra for the child. But this also did not suit the mother, so the *guru* created another being to bear it, and pronounced the name Isam. But the lady was still not satisfied, and four more names were pronounced and rejected, and for each a being had to be created.

Finally, the name Mahirel Sena or Senamahi was approved of. The seven beings which had thus been brought into existence each produced twenty-one more, and all these demanded food of their creator, who, to appease them, told them that he was about to create men, and that, if these did not feed them, the *Sa-roi-nga-roi* might inflict all sorts of troubles on the human race. This story is far from satisfactory, as it fails to account for the name *Sa-roi-nga-roi*, and I think that, in common with much of the pundits' lore, it is a late invention, probably after the introduction of Hinduism. When any large concourse of people takes place, these troublesome spirits collect in great numbers, and if a person is brought home from a journey ill, the demons follow him. On such occasions, therefore, it is necessary to feed them, and this is also particularly requisite on the two Saturdays preceding the Hindu festival known as the *Holi*, the spring festival of general license. Old women go round from house to house collecting all sorts of food, and some cotton to represent the clothing of the people, and also *puk-yu*, *wai-yu*, yeast cakes used in making rice beer. They then go to each point where a road crosses the village boundary, and there strew the articles in a thin line composed of seven parts, one for each of the original beings whence the *Sa-roi-nga-roi* are said to have sprung. On the first of these two Saturdays, all sorts of food are offered to Senamahi, and then cooked and eaten by each household, portions being placed on the boundaries of the homestead. On that day the luck of each person for the ensuing year is tested. A *ngāmu* fish for each is procured, and the *maiba*, having placed tiny pieces of gold and silver in the mouth of each fish, releases it in a pond, and from the vigour of its movements the health of the person concerned is foretold. These fishes are said to carry off ill-luck. This ceremony is also performed on the night of the *Chei-tāba*, which is that preceding the Manipuri New Year's Day. On that night

the gods settle the fate of every one for the next year. To diminish the chance of dying during the year, it is well to keep awake throughout that night. A safer method is to give a piece of reed the length of the width of the palm of your right hand to the *maiba*, who will pronounce a charm over it, and lay it before the god Hei-pok, saying, "Here is So-and-So's stick; do him no harm." The following morning the stick is returned.

There are various other interesting ceremonies connected with the *Chei-tāba*, but I must pass on to the *Helloi*, another class of being. These *Helloi* are beautiful Sirens who lure young men into waste places, and then disappear and leave their victims in a state of insanity. They are said to have been the seven daughters of a hero who killed the Great Snake; they were so lovely that no names were good enough for them; they were more beautiful than Sorārel's dancers. They asked their father what they were to live on, and he told them to live in waste places; any one meeting them would go mad, and they would live on the offerings given to cure their victims. When a person is thought to be a victim of one of these fair ladies, the village *maiba* lays out offerings consisting of seven sorts of animals or birds, seven sorts of fruits, and seven sorts of fishes. Formerly the animals and birds were sacrificed, but now a few hairs or feathers are pulled out and given to the *Helloi*, who are asked to accept them and let the victim go. Some foolish men are said to be able by charms to summon the *Helloi* and become intimate with them, but such persons do not prosper, and their wives die. Before a Hindu can summon a *Helloi* in this way, he must take off his sacred thread.

More dreaded than the *Helloi* are the *Hingchābi* (*hing*, alive, *chāba*, to eat). Of these also there were originally seven, but the number has now increased. *Hingchābis*, as the termination denotes, are all females. They are spirits which enter into women, and the daughter of one so afflicted

will inherit the affliction, but not till after her mother's death. If a *Hingchābi* stares at the food you are eating grasp both your knees quickly and abuse her roundly, and she will not be able to enter into you. If you have any doubt as to whether a friend of yours is possessed of such an evil spirit, ask her casually to sit down on a stool of *khoirao* wood; if she makes excuses and departs, she is a witch. At the beginning of each year, stir your first pot of rice with a stick made of this wood, to drive off such evil spirits. The evil spirit passes from the woman in which she ordinarily resides and enters another person, who becomes delirious and mentions the name of the woman whose spirit is troubling her. To expel the spirit in former days a mithan used to be sacrificed, but now a *ngākra* fish is substituted. This is cooked alive and placed on top of a plate of rice and offered to the patient, and then thrown away outside the homestead after the seven original *Hingchābis* have been called by name. You will observe that the *Hingchābi* is not a witch as we understand the term. She does not control nature by her spells; she exactly corresponds with the *Khawhring* of the Lushais.¹⁵

The belief in witchcraft is firmly established, and a fairly well educated man assured me that he, and indeed most Manipuris, always carried a charm to preserve them from the danger of being bewitched. The same person solemnly attributed a sudden death to witchcraft. Tree worship is not unknown. A certain shrub called *u-hal*, i.e. oldest tree, is said to have the power of curing sickness. The *maiba* takes some of the sick person's clothing and places it on the *u-hal*, and then, offering *pān* and betel nut to the shrub, asks it to take the disease of the patient on itself. The *maiba* then appropriates the clothing. (Is not the labourer worthy of his hire?) To his credit be it said that, if the person be poor, a little cotton thread may be made

¹⁵ *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, pp. 111-2.

to serve as clothing. A certain tree, on the bark of which are markings supposed to resemble a troublesome skin complaint, is believed to be the cause of this disease, or at least to be the special abode of the *Lai* which causes it. If a sufferer hangs his clothes on the tree, and after dancing before it departs home without looking back, and leaving his rags on the tree, he will get well. Should he not recover, he concludes that his particular complaint is not due to that *Lai*, and consults a *maiba*, or goes to hospital.

A short note of mine on the subject of Rain-stopping appeared in *Folk-Lore* for September, 1911,¹⁶ and Mr. Hodson in *The Meithei*s¹⁷ has given various rain-compelling ceremonies. The following is from my friends the pundits. A certain woman, who had no children, worshipped Sorārel, and asked for nine sons. Shortly after this she gave birth to four stone children. Being ashamed of her progeny, she left her home and came to the Iril, carrying the four stone infants. Finding the river in flood, she left the children and crossed alone, and the abandoned ones cried loudly, whence that place is called Nunglaubi (stone crying). Subsequently the full number of nine children was born to her, but all were of stone, and she left them in the places where they were born and returned to look after the first four. She asked Sorārel on what she was to feed these strange children, and was told that the god would stop the rain and her progeny could live on the offerings made by men to procure rain. I must admit that this explanation comes rather too frequently in the pundits' book. Having got this promise the woman joined her four children, and changed herself into a stone. She and her offspring are still to be seen in a small cave in the Nongmaijing hill. The stone resembling the mother is said to have some resemblance to the human form, but the four others are merely round stones from a river bed. There is considerable disinclination to touch these stones, as handling them

¹⁶ Vol. xxii. pp. 348-50.

¹⁷ Pp. 107-8.

produces sickness. The two *yumnaks* known as Hijam and Salam are the guardians of the mother and her four children. In each family there is a *nonglamba*, who has to keep himself undefiled, attending no cremations, always using "clean" fire, and doing no cultivation. When a rain *puja* has to be performed, these two men must keep away from women for five days, and then they go to the cave in clean clothes, with some men of their families carrying the rain shields used by Nāgas. A "lay-out" somewhat similar to those already described is made, and then, after a long invocation, one of the *nonglambais*, with the help of a hoe and a *dah*, removes one of the stone children and rolls it into a cloth used by women for carrying children. In this he conveys it to the Iril, and submerges it. He will not touch the stone on any account. The stone child will cry to be returned to its mother, and Sorārel will send the rain. Should he, however, not do so, the ceremony may be repeated twice more, but on no account may all four stones be taken from the mother. That would be too cruel. After the rain has come the stones are replaced.

While the Raja's raceboats are in the river rain is sure to fall. Just outside the sacred enclosure in the old palace there was a spot in which the heads of enemies were buried; to pour water on this through bamboo pipes from the top of the *kaugla*, or throne room, for five days, was certain to produce rain. Another method was for the Raja and all his wives, with their servants and followers, to pour water on to Yumjao *Lairema's* shrine, and thoroughly deluge the whole house and each other, exchanging filthy abuse all the time.

The invocation used when calling rain is very lengthy. It commences with an enumeration of all the hills in the neighbourhood whence the rain is supposed to come, and calls on them to send rain and make the rivers increase. It then goes through a long list of insects, which it says are stretching themselves, with stiff backbones and wide open

eyes, and challenging the rain. "Therefore, O! Rain, fall, and increase the waters." Next, a number of animals, and, lastly, a number of birds, are mentioned, which are said to be defying the rain in the same way, and it is therefore invited to descend.

I have now given an account of the religion of the Manipuri of the present day. You will observe that I have carefully abstained from applying a name to the worship of the *Umanglais* and other local cults. Mr. Hodson has called the Manipuris animists.¹⁸ I leave the question in your hands.¹⁹

J. SHAKESPEAR.

¹⁸ See pp. 518-23 below.

¹⁹ The lower part of Plate XIII. shows the Manipur State Arrow-thrower, with an arrow in his hand. See vol. xxi., p. 79.