

CHAPTER – 6

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Architecture, the art and the technique of building is the most important branches of art. The temple is one of the significant and characteristic products of Indian architecture and is also considered as the oldest institutions of India. It is an architectural entity, emerged out of certain concepts about God and gods *vis-à-vis* human being.¹ The concept of temple has already been in existence far back from the prehistoric periods. In the early historical period (400 BCE-100 CE), the open-air shrines or objects of veneration were kept under sacred trees or near water bodies which seem to have predominated according to the existence of several example of this type of ‘places of worship’ and ‘symbols of worship’ in the history of Indian art. When, both the traditions of the ‘places of worship’ and ‘symbols of worship’ were fused mutually it gave birth to the concept of House of God, which led to the origin or emergence of ‘temple’.² Thus, the architectural origins of the several parts of the temple are very significant. The base of the temple is derived from the Vedic sacrificial altar plainly cubical cells of the sanctum. It splendidly represents the subtle values of Indian culture.³ The technique and decoration of building representing the both religious and secular in character is one of the most important branches of art of the civilized people. Through the art of building the people could also express themselves as civilized one.⁴ It is stated that architecture has not only been influenced by religious, political, social and economic conditions but also by the climate and available building materials of a region.⁵

In a settled society, every community has their own technique in the art of building, which is not only for the defenses of natural forces but also the benefits of human environment. There are different types of architecture built according to the needs of the society, i.e., Domestic architecture, Government architecture, Recreational architecture, Religious architecture, etc. The history of architecture is more concerned with religious than any other type and this is one of the most expensive, influential and permanent buildings in any community. Therefore, the temple is one of the most important examples of religious architecture. The structure of the temple made sacred by the presence of a deity or holy symbol is regarded as place of worship, shelters for the images, relics and holy areas of the cult.⁶

In ancient times, the Indian people used art as a medium of expression particularly eternal and universal elements in nature, portraying the divinity of the various elements of nature. The essential function of the art of building was to symbolize the concrete form of the prevailing religious consciousness of the people. Actually, the art and architecture of every community get their inspiration from their respective religion. The artist considered it to be their religious duty in decorating the place of worship with various types of artistic works.⁷ To the Hindus, the temple is the abode of God who is the spirit eminent in the universe. It is thus, known by the terms as *Devalayas*, *Shivalayas* and *Devayantana*. Hence, the worship comprising of the living use of the temple starts with the installations of life in the form of the deity in the sanctum. The Hindu temples are regarded as permanent abode of a deity.⁸

The worship of the image of gods and goddess greatly increased as a product of spiritual belief of the people. People began to erect temples after installing an image of gods and goddess at a permanent place which provides facilities to worship. Later on, the image of gods and goddesses never installed without a temple. The need

of temple was greatly felt along with the image. The status is the manifestation of the duty through a concrete work of art (*murti*) and the building is its body and house. The whole sanctum became a '*tirtha*' of Hindu community. Thus the Indian temple is the product and handmade of Indian religion and philosophy.⁹

The Hindu temples are the product and combination of different kinds and symbols. This symbol signified an artistic principle of Hindu generally evolved from the 'figure of man' or 'central image of man' as a place of co-ordinate function. The names of the various limbs of the human body from the foot to the hair on the crown of the head reapplied in architectural texts to different parts of the temple architecture. In general terms, like feet, legs, thighs, neck and head embody the anatomical position and function of the structural parts corresponding to those of the human body and are often used symbolically to emphasis the concept of organic unanimity in temple architecture. The different structural parts of the temple were identified with the different limbs of human body. Thus the human body itself is the vehicle of expression in art and architecture.¹⁰

The Indian temple architecture is classified according to regional variations and the shape or stylistic differences, such as *Nagara*, *Dravida* and *Vesara* styles. The style of *Nagara* is illustrious by its quadrangular shape, the *Vesara* style is round shape and the *Dravida* by its octagonal or hexagonal shape. But, the distinguished features are generally noticed at the upper part of a building. *Dravida* styles were peculiar and confined to the south while *Nagara* or Indo-Aryan style found in the Northern India. The *Vesara* was not confined to any particular geographical area. It is included in both *Nagara* and *Vesara* styles. These stylistic differences of temple architecture are mainly due to the availability of raw materials, climatic conditions, religious revivalism and contacts with neighboring countries.¹¹ The Gupta period is

ushered in an age of the Hindu temple architecture. It is characterized by the peace and prosperity of the people, the revival of Hinduism and the enlightened patronage of the kings, created the maturity and balance of expression in the art of architecture, sculpture, painting and terracotta. Therefore, the Gupta period is marked as the beginning of a new style of Indian temple architecture known as Indo-Aryan temple. Other prominent structural temples in northern and eastern India were Orissan temples, the Khajuraho group of temples etc. The development and perfection of the Dravidian styles of the temple architecture was mainly due to the patronage of the Pallavas, Chalukyas, Rastrakutas, Cholas and Hoysalas.¹² Like this, due to the impact of Bhakti cult, many temples sprang up in large numbers for the worship of deities. It may be mentioned that in the north-east India also, the temple architecture made remarkable progress under the patronage of Hindu rulers of Assam, Manipur and Tripura from 15th to 20th century CE.¹³

In Manipur, the adoption of Hinduism as a state religion towards the beginning of the 18th century CE marked a new phase in the development of art and architecture. Many icons of Hindu deities were sculptured by different artists. Besides this, there were many temples constructed by different architects to promote the newly introduced state religion.¹⁴ The construction and establishment of these temples, and its related buildings were associated with the development of Hindu religion. The religion is a process of attention, feeling and action that is shared by a section and that gives the members of that group an object of devotion. For their fulfillment, they generate a separate place which is a structure or sometimes merely an enclosed area dedicated to the devotion of an idol and the enshrinement of holy objects associated with such worship. This kind of sacred place or shrine cannot be

separated from religious society.¹⁵ However, it also contributed to the growth and development of religion in the society.

There were various groups of people migrated in Manipur, but among these immigrant people, the Brahmins are one of the sections who brought socio-cultural and religious changes of the Meitei community in the Manipur valley. When they arrived in Manipur kingdom the king respected and granted them many lands for their settlement.¹⁶ In course of time, the Brahmins intermarried with the local Manipuri women and thereafter, the process of sanskritisation started in Manipur. The term sanskritisation is a process of internal upward social mobility whereby communities lower down the social ladder tries to change their status by emulating the life style of the dominant caste or group. Afterward, with the incorporation of Brahmins in the Meitei society, they gradually used to construct temples in the land granted by king and instigated the king and his subjects to practice their own culture, religious belief, etc. They also undertook many steps for the popularity of Vaishnavism in Manipur.¹⁷ Thus, the development of Vaishnavism provided an impetus to the construction of temples. All these contributed for the growth of new styles of temple architecture in Manipur. Therefore, the immigrants not only practice their own culture, traditions and religious beliefs but also helped the original inhabited people for their conversion to their belief and practice which facilitated to enrichment of culture, art and architecture and the literature of Manipur. Temple played a conspicuous role in constructing the religious culture of the society, which existed generally in relation with its developed ritualistic aspects.

The historical development of the temple in Manipur can be trace back from the early period with the help of archeological evidence, literary sources, oral traditions, etc. The temples constructed in the early period were perishable materials,

like bamboo, wood, thatch, etc. These materials were easily destroyed by natural forces. Therefore, those temples constructed in the early period with the help of these perishable materials were not able to survive for a long period. In Manipur, the temple is called '*Laishang*' or the house of god (*Lai* means god and *Shang* means house or hut) by the Manipuris. The place without any building structure is called '*Laipham*' the place of god. The *Laishangs* were generally constructed within the complex of '*Laipham*'.¹⁸ The Manipuris have their own styles of building architecture from the early period. There are many ancient manuscripts which deal with the evolution of dwelling place or house. The '*Yumsarol Puya*', one of the ancient manuscripts deals with a short of treatise on the gradual evolution of the Meitei house structure and its related architecture. '*Yumsarol Puya*' mentions the invention of house for the first time with the advice of *Atiya Guru Sidaba*, the lord of the universe. The legends of the development of house in this text is that after creation of the earth and human being (man was created to take after the shadow of the lord), *Atiya Guru Sidaba*, the lord of universe entrusted *God Konjin Tuthokpa* (the immortal sky-god) with the task of making house for the residing place of the human beings. Thus, *Konjin Tuthokpa* constructed the house under the instructions of lord of the universe. This was the beginning of the construction of house for human beings as dwelling place.¹⁹

In Manipur, there are some other versions, which make a shine on the origin and antiquity of art and architecture. Laishna, the consort of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba is described as "*poirei manung oidaringei touring khangpaacksha, chana ihounana, poirei hanna manung oirakpi Meitei Leima Laisna-O-touna koi-e,*" which means Laishna was entitled as Meitei queen, who introduced the architecture of the hut of weeds and reeds with the roof of thatch, when the *Poirei* (Meitei) were not

known to the art of these architecture. Thus, according to these account, it can be said that thatch huts were popular in Manipur.²⁰

It is believed that in Manipur, the reign of King Naokhamba (411-428 CE) is said to have introduced the dwelling houses in the valley of Manipur and king Naophangba (428-518 CE) also laid the foundation of the Kangla palace in the architectural history of Manipur.²¹ The *Poireoton Khunthokpa* (immigration of *Poireiton*), one of the ancient manuscript mentioned that houses were in use by the 2nd century CE and they constructed the houses with bamboo, covered with thatch and the walls were made with a mixture of mud and straw chips. But it did not mention the exact historical period relating to the changes occurred in architecture. In Manipur, Bengal hut type of thatch and bamboo was built during the reign of Kiyamba (1467-1508 CE).²²

Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal chronicle refers to the use of bricks and brick factories from the time of king Khagemba. The chronicle however, did not mention any such factories before him. During the reign of king Khagemba (1597-1652 CE) new architectural styles of building technology was introduced.²³ Therefore, the reign of Khagemba marked a new era in the field of art and architecture in Manipur. The chronicle also mention about the construction of five and nine storied buildings in his period. King Khagemba, (1596-1652 CE), son of king Mungyamba used durable materials, such as stone and brick for the construction of palaces, temples and other monumental structure.²⁴ For strengthening the structure of the building, Khagemba introduced a new style of pillars called '*Sana Yumbi*'. This pillar is fully decorated which shows a stylistic change and development of dwelling architecture. Later on, with the development of new experiment, contact with foreign craftsmen and invention of new instrument, craftsmen used different materials and new styles of

architecture for its beautification as well as also to save from natural forces or calamities.²⁵ In the reign of King Khagemba, Kachari and Muslims jointly invaded Manipur under the leadership of Sanongba, brother of king Khagemba. The invading forces were defeated and a large number of invaders belonging to Muslims were made settlement in the valley when they were captives and a new department was established to look after the Muslims. However, the role of Muslims in the development of art and architecture was noticed. They also contributed to the development of Islamic style of architecture in Manipur in the 18th and 19th century CE.²⁶

The main feature of temple architecture in Manipuri is the adoption of indigenous styles at different periods because of different situations. A variety of architectural styles, like indigenous style, Bengal School of art, Burmese school of art, Nagara style and medieval Islamic style of art were employed in the construction of temples in Manipur. The co-existence of traditional and Hindu faith in respect of religion and culture led to the erection of temples dedicated to the worship of both traditional gods and goddesses with Hindu gods and goddesses. In Manipur, the adoption of Hinduism as a state religion led to the construction of numerous temples in Hindu style, which were responsible for the development of Hinduism among the masses.²⁷ Therefore, Charairongba's reign was a most remarkable period in the history of Manipur as he was the first king of Manipur who formally initiated into Hinduism. With the adoption of Hinduism, the socio-cultural and religious life of the Meiteis was gradually converted into Hindu way of life. Thereafter, Manipur had developed in the field of artistic culture.²⁸

Charairongba's (1697-1709 CE) reign was a period of peace. That is why, it provided good and great impetus to the development of art and architecture. He

carried on the political stability and maintained peace and order as well as contributed to the economic prosperity of the people. As a result, with the emergence of new religious cult during his reign, the art and architecture as well as crafts were flourished to a considerable extent. He used art in the propagation of religion.²⁹ Thus the reign of Charairongba was a transition period from the traditional Meitei society to Hinduised Meitei society.

King Charairongba was a great builder. In his reign, many significant buildings and other artistic monuments were erected. All these formulate us to shape a specific idea about the extent and nature of the Indian art. Many palaces, buildings and monuments proceeding to the Charairongba's reign had perished as they were mostly made of wood, thatch and bamboo. Perhaps, brick and stone became the material per-excellence for art and architecture in Manipur after the period of king Paikhomba.³⁰ However, the general use of stone and brick dated from the reign of Charairongba. He constructed many temples of traditional gods and goddesses, viz., goddess *Panthoibi* and god *Laiwahaiba* installed in 1700 CE and 1704 CE respectively. Another temple of god *Sanamahi* was also constructed in 1709 CE. Under his liberal patronage, many temples of Hindu deities were also constructed. For instance, temples of goddess Kali were constructed in 1708 CE and a Krishna temple in 1707 CE.³¹ However, according to royal chronicle and other remains, it is stated that those temples built during his reigns were the product of Bengal and Burmese style of architecture. Therefore, from the period of king Charairongba's reign upto the 19th century CE is very remarkable for the development of many monuments of high quality in Manipur.³²

In Garibniwaz's reign 1709-1748 CE, (son of king Charairongba) Hinduism attained its zenith of perfection and declared as the state religion of Manipur. He was

the most brilliant figure in medieval history of Manipur. His reign is also marked as a new era in the political and cultural history of Manipur.³³ Manipur had well developed in the field of arts and crafts. Garibniwaz as a great Vaishnavite ruler used art in the propaganda of religion. The art and architecture were flourished well and the hundreds of people were also engaged through *Lallup* system. He erected magnificent buildings and many artistic monuments, some of which have survived till today. These buildings deserved to be included among the finest specimens of medieval art.³⁴ This confirms that the conscious and organized attempts were made in the realm of art. The few monuments which have survived till present day testify the excellence of the architecture of those times.

The reign of Garibniwaz is also very remarkable for the development in the field of art and architecture. During his period, many temples were constructed for both the traditional and Hindu deities as well as excavated tanks. The royal chronicle also mentioned the construction of temples in different places.³⁵ In 1715 CE, he established a separate department of the abode of deities called *Laipham Loisang*, especially for the well administration of the temples. The king appointed one officer called *Laipham Lakpa* to look after the abode of deities or temples. *Laipham Lakpa* who was the in-charge of the abode of deities was also the head in religious matters. He was one of the permanent members of the chief court *Cheirap* and was next to the king. The court administered the laws and customs of the kingdom. The king Garibniwaz recognized some of the traditional deities as the most important gods and goddess. He also built many temples of these traditional deities particularly God *Laiwahaiba* who is also identified as *Sanamahi*.³⁶

Apart from it, the king made many image of Hindu gods and goddess including Lord Rama, Sita, Krishna and Kalika. The image of Rama and Sita founded

by him is still worshipped in a temple near the royal pond known as *Ningthem Pukhri*, in Imphal.³⁷ He also curved out the image of Hanuman on a big stone slab bringing from the *Sana Keithel*, the main market at the capital in 1729 CE. This stone image is still worshipped in a temple at *Mongbahanba* where the images of traditional deities were buried. The Hanuman temple is inaugurated by the Maharaja in 1729 CE.³⁸ However, the temple is well designed and the structural design is an improved version of the hut type of Bengal.³⁹

After king Garibniwaz, Bheigyachandra also contributed to the growth and development of the art and architecture in Manipur. He specially took various steps to make the popularization of Goudiya Vaishnavism in Manipur by constructing temple and curving image of the gods and goddesses.⁴⁰ His most important contribution generally lies on the installation of the image of Shri Govindaji. The fact is that Lord Krishna revealed in his dream for making an image of Shri Govindaji according to the beliefs of the Manipur people. It is stated the image was made out of a jackfruit tree which was fully grown in *Kaina* hill and after that, the installation ceremony of Shri Govindaji was held at the Canchipur capital.⁴¹ On the day of the installation ceremony, the famous Ras dance was performed dedicating to Shri Govindaji. However, the royal chronicle *Cheitharol Kumbaba* also refers to the construction of numerous temples on several occasions by the king.⁴²

The successors of Bheigyachandra followed his footsteps in the view of religious matters. Having ascended to the throne in 1801 CE, the king Madhuchandra constructed a temple of Shri Govindaji. During the reign of Maharaja Chourajit (son of Bheigyachandra) also, the art and architecture were developed in Manipur. The Maharaja Chourajit dug tanks, constructed coronation hall, palace and temples which are especially dedicated to Hindu deities. In Manipur for the first time in 19th century

CE, the unique contribution of king Chourjit was the construction of *Navaratna* temple on 26th March (*Lamda*) of 1803 CE particularly due to the closed contact with the Bengal.⁴³ But unfortunately today there is no concrete evidence of this temple. Perhaps, it was destroyed by the Burmese invaders during the seven years devastation in 1819-1826 CE.

During the periods of Gambhir Singh, Manipur made progress in the field of art and architecture.⁴⁴ The images of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra made of wood were installed for the first time in Manipur. The most important religious festival known as *Ratha-Yatra* was also introduced by him. It is further mentioned that the images of Radha-Krishna, Krishna-Balaram and Balabhadra-Subhadra are still worshipped in the Govindaji temple in the palace compound at Imphal. The king Gambhir Singh was a true devotee of Lord Krishna. It was during his reign that Radha-Krishna cult of Hinduism became very popular in Manipur.⁴⁵

The reign of Nara Singh was marked with the revival of religious activities including construction and renovation of Vaishnava temple after the Burmese war. After having shifted his capital to Kangla from Canchipur in 1844 CE, the king executed the reconstruction and the reinstallation of various images.⁴⁶ One of his notable contributions was the construction of brick temple of Shri Govindaji at Kangla.⁴⁷ After him, the art and architecture was also developed in Manipur under the patronage of Maharaja Chandrakirti. He encouraged the worship of Hindu gods and goddesses by constructing many temples. Many brick and wooden buildings including temples were constructed during his period but some of these had been ruined due to earthquake and a few temples are still survived.⁴⁸ These temples are Leimapokpa Keirungba located at Yaishkul, Imphal, and Thangal General at new palace compound, Imphal. This temple is only the finest example of *Panchayatana* style of

temple architecture in Manipur.⁴⁹ In the style of *Panchayatana*, the main shrine is constructed on a rectangular plinth with four smaller subordinate shrines at the four corners which is making it a sum total of five shrines, i.e. *Pancha*.⁵⁰

Thus, the influence of Hinduism in Manipur resulted on the construction of many temples in Hindu style. The existing temples are classified into three different phases. In the first phase, the Vishnu temple of Bishnupur falls, and in the second phase, those temples built during the periods of 17th and 18th centuries CE. In the third phase, those temples which were built after the 18th century CE are incorporated.⁵¹

Vishnu temple of Bishnupur

The temple of Vishnu (**plate-1**) is situated at Bishnupur about 29 km from Imphal. The old name of the place was Lammangdong. It is believed that this temple is one of the earliest brick temple found in Manipur and attributed to king Kyamba. In supporting this view, it is mentioned that King Kyamba received a gift of Vishnu image from the Pong king Chaopha Khekhomba after their joint successful expedition in Kyang Kambat. Consequently, Vishnu worship was started in Manipur during the reign of king Kyamba.⁵² The Vishnu temple which was identified as *Ngangom Phura* (*Ngangom* temple) build by Ngangom Chingsomba, before the installation of the image of Vishnu by king Kyamba. Then, Ngangom Chingsomba dedicated the *Phura* to god. It is said that king Kyamba installed the image of Vishnu in this *Phura* and after that the temple came to be known as Vishnu temple. Thereafter, the Lammangdong came to be known as Bishnupur (abode of Vishnu). This is the oldest temple of Manipur and occupies a symbol of the remains of ancient times.

The whole structure of the temple is built of burnt bricks and lime mortar. The temple was built on a square ground plan externally as well as internally. The

architectural feature of the temple is consisted of *adhithana* (basement), *bhitti* (wall), *garbhagriha*, porch hall, *antarala*. Its architectural style is similar to the style adopted in Burma during the early medieval period.⁵³ The corbelled arch style of this temple reflects the influence of the Burmese architectural style.⁵⁴ According to the view of Percy Brown, the corbelled arch style can be attributed to Burmese masonry. The style of corbelled arch and dome like roof of Vishnu temple is seen in many of the temple of Burma of the medieval period.⁵⁵ The temple has a rectangular entrance porch facing to south covered by a corbelled roof. The distinctive feature of this temple is dome like curvilinear roof and *sikhara*. The four side's eaves projecting lower edges of roof are designed semi-circular arches. These arch consist of seven string of brick one above the other. Then the finial of the *sikhara* is cap by a circular disc-like structure. The upper part of the sanctum hall is rounded by the concurrence of bricks until it move toward to central axis. The roof of the portal hall is a facsimile of the sanctum roof. Then the ceiling is extended by eleven course of corbelling. The unique feature of this temple is that it stands without a *prakara* or outer wall and the *mandapa* or congregation hall.⁵⁶

Temple of Lord Krishna

In Imphal, the Lord Krishna temple (**Figure-4**) is located at Brahmapur Guru Aribam Leikai, Wangkhei.⁵⁷ It is believed that king Charairongba (1697-1709 CE) built this temple in honour of his guru Rai Banamali who formally initiated him into the fold of Hinduism. The royal chronicle Cheitharol Kumbaba mentioned many places in connection with the construction of various temples during his reign.⁵⁸ The temple was especially built of well burnt bricks. Along the vertical axis, the whole structure can be divided into four distinct sections, such as the pedestal or the platform on which the temple stands, the sanctum cube which is interconnected with

the porch, the hut type finial or the roof and the crowning cap and the *kalasha*. The three layers of bricks raised the pedestal. The moulding starts from a square sub base block. The four walls of the sanctum hall rise straight to a certain height and then meet the semi-circular of the roof.⁵⁹

The façade of the temple is facing towards the south. At the corners of the walls, four pilasters are provided. A narrow porch is connected to the sanctum hall with a lanceted arch opening. There are flying steps leading to the entrance door of the porch. The finial of the porch is a replica of the southern roof. The roof of the sanctum hall is dome like in structure. It is slightly hemispherical in shape. The whole of the roof was designed as semicircular arch. The topmost part of this temple is decorated with floral motifs. Above the floral motifs, a circular crown is placed. Over the crown two *kalashas* are placed one above the other. Above the top of the vase, a *nilachakra* (wheel) is fixed. This *nilachakra* identified as weapon of Lord Krishna. The internal structure of the sanctum hall is square. The porch hall and sanctum hall are interconnected.⁶⁰ In this temple, various events and images of Lord Krishna is depicting from his childhood to adult stage. The inflection of the icon is ended in an awfully artistic manner.⁶¹ This is the second oldest temple in Manipur.⁶²

The temple of Lord Krishna built by Charairongba is the archetype of the Bengal style of hut-type. In Bengal, during the period from 17th to 18th century CE, the hut-type or vernacular *chala* type was very common. There are different styles of hut type temple found in Bengal, i.e., *eka-chala* (single sloping roof), *do-chala* (double sloping roof), *cau-chala* (four chala) and *ata-chala* (eight chala).⁶³ Many temples of the same archetype are seen in Bengal at present. The style of hut type temple is also found in Udaipur district of Tripura. However, it needs to mention here that the religious wave of Vaishnavism in Manipur occurred due to the influence of

missionaries came from Bengal. Therefore, the temples of Manipur which were constructed in the 17th and 18th centuries CE were mainly built on Bengal style, which was very common in their original homeland.⁶⁴

Temple of Hanuman Thakur

This temple (**plate-2**) is located on the eastern bank of Imphal river near the palace compound of Imphal east and this area is known as *Mongba Hanba*.⁶⁵ The temple was constructed by king Garibniwaz and dedicated to Hanumanji. It is built of well burnt bricks and lime mortar.⁶⁶ From the architectural point of view, the temple is structurally similar to the temple of Lord Krishna.⁶⁷ The whole structure of the temple can be divided into pedestal, the sanctum hall, the hut type roof, the porch hall and *kalasha*. The temple of Hanuman is facing towards south. The ground plan of the temple is rectangular in shape and stands on a low plinth. From the upper surface of the plinth the walls of the sanctum hall rise vertically and congregate the molded curved cornice and the semi-circular arch eaves of the roof.⁶⁸ The sanctum cube hall is enclosed with a dome-shaped hemispherical roof. The topmost part of the roof is crowned by a double lotus in criss-cross pattern. Above it, a vase-shaped finial or *kalasha* is placed over the lotus shape and a *nilachakra* is fixed on it. The sanctum hall is preceded by a porch hall, stands on a low plinth which is rectangular in shape. The roof of the Porch hall is barrel vaulted type.⁶⁹ A thick bandhana surmounts the façade of the porch and continued upto the roof of it. Again, the roof of the main shrine is surmounted throughout with a thick and thin bandhanas projecting in an arch shape. In front of this temple a flat roof *mandapa* was constructed for congregation, which is modern architectural style. The architectural style of the temple is *char-chala* hut type of Bengal. In many religious festivals, the Meiteis used to go for worship to

this temple. The temple is an important monumental evidence of the religious history of Manipur.⁷⁰

Temple of Ramji Prabhu

The Ramji Prabhu temple (**plate-3**) is very old situated near *Ningthem Pukhri* (*Ningthem Pond*) of Wangkhei, Imphal.⁷¹ This temple has existed since the time of king Garibniwaz (1709-1748 CE). The images of Ram, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman were installed in this temple. The images which were worshipped by the king, are still followed by the Manipuri people at present also.⁷² This temple is also used as a religious congregation of Manipur. In every year on the 9th of *Sajibu* (April), *Ram Nabami* is celebrated to commemorate the coronation of Shri Ram to the throne of Ayodhya, and the *Sita Nabami* is also observed on the 9th of *Kalen* (May). The famous Ras dance was performed on these auspicious occasions.⁷³

Shri Govindaji temple of old palace Kangla

This temple (**figure-5**) is located in the old Kangla fort and constructed during the period of king Nara Singh in 1847 CE. The king dedicated this temple to Shri Govindaji. But, due to an earthquake, this temple was damaged in 1868 CE but it was again rebuilt in the year 1869 CE during the reign of Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh. This temple is made of well-burnt bricks.⁷⁴ The whole structure of the temple is divided into many sections, such as, *adhishtana*, (basement), *bahya-bhitti* (exterior wall); *antara-bhitti* (inner wall), *salas* (miniature shrines), *pradakshina patha*, *sikhara*, *vedika* (lower and upper railing), *garbhagriha* and *ardha-mandapa* (porch hall).⁷⁵ The temple is a square plan and facing towards east. This temple is the structure of two celled. It stands on a highly praise *jagati* (platform) and the *jagati* is vertically raised and the four projected mouldings are spread throughout the four

sides. Then, the *bhittis* raised upto the cornice. A *mandapa* with two *salas* on both sides are attached in the face of the temple. It is supported by four pairs of stambhas at the sides and two big rounded stambhas at the middle. Four stambhas at each side are made of one pair of rounded stambhas and the stambhas are simple and there is a small projection near the neck of it. The main shrine has a *dvara* and the *bhitti* raised straight upto the cornice. The dome of the main shrine rose from the inner base of the upper railing and four kiosks at the four corners of the dome and the dome was covered by a flat structure. The temple has a rectangular sanctum with a narrow *pradakshinapatha*. Above the *dvara*, it is highly decorated with flower motifs.⁷⁶ The architectural style of this temple is a synthesis of Islamic and eastern architectural design. The rounded pillars and the flat roof of the porch is a reproduction of late medieval Bengal style. The decoration of the railings, the dome structure and the flower motifs design shows the influence of Islamic architecture of medieval period.⁷⁷

Temple of Leimapokpa Keirungba

The Leimapokpa Keirungba temple (**figure-6**) is situated in Imphal town, in the compound of the erstwhile Manipur State Road Transport Corporation (MRSTC). During the reign of Maharaja Chandrakirti, this temple was built by Leimapokpam Keirungba in 1875 CE. It is a low plinth which almost looks like groundless and a flat roof.⁷⁸ The temple is made of brick and cement. The structure of the temple was a square ground plan externally as well as internally consisting of a rectangular *antarala* and *garbhagriha*, which is facing towards south. It is a double celled type. It is also well decorated and in front, there is a semicircular arch supported by three pillars on each side. The main entrance is in a semi-circular form and above which is a sharp projected bandhana (moulding) in semi-circular form.⁷⁹ The arch towards its outer extremity is hardened with added brick layers having hexagonal hole. The

cornice is achieved by giving different layers of bricks by structure, their track outward and then giving a slope to the projection with flat bricks. Then, on the top of cornice, there is a railing. The external jacket cube has a row of arcade in its eastern and southern walls. There are no arcades in the western wall, a staircase is however provided to it on a lift platform with 5'10" height having flying steps from both part and it shows into the thirteen spiral set of steps ending over to open to the terrace of the building.⁸⁰

This temple is a square *sikhara* and a single storey. The entrance of the antarala is on the south. It has a rectangular sanctum with narrow *pradakshanapatha* which has entrance from south east and west respectively. The capitals over pillars are decorated with leaves and the façade wall with floral motifs. Then the arrangement of pillars, the archivolt and multifold arch, the geometric inflection of arch holes, the outwit arrangement inside arcades, etc. shows an architectural improvement of the 19th century CE.⁸¹ The architectural style of the temple is the Nagara and flat-roofed temples style of medieval Bengal.⁸²

Shri Govindaji temple of New palace

Shri Govindaji temple (**plate-4**) is built during the reign of Maharaja Churachand Singh. It is located near the present Manipur palace compound of Wangkhei in the Imphal east. This is one of the most magnificent and popular temples of Manipur.⁸³ According to the beliefs of Manipuri people, Shri Govindaji who is an incarnation of Lord Krishna occupies a prominent position among the deities. It enshrines the royal deity, Shri Govindaji.⁸⁴ The architectural feature of the temple is divided into *adhithana* (the basement), *garbhagriha* (the sanctum hall), *vedica* (the railing), *sikhara*, *kalasa* (the finial) and the *mandapa* (the hall).⁸⁵ The structure of the

temple is constructed in a palatial shape raised on a square with adequate high pedestal. It has got internal sanctum and outer coat with *pradakshanapatha*. The internal cell is partitioned by two septica walls. The outer and portico cube are constructed in the form of huge pillars elevated at intervals in the arcade system. On the top of the arch the wall goes upto the cornice and above the cornice, there is a first railing, covering the terrace over by circumambulatory path. The first railing is having *salas* and the mini-shrines. There is no superstructure over the portico roof after the first railing. The sanctum cube walls are raised upto the terrace of the first railing, right upto the cornice, and then the second railing surrounds the two domes. Externally, the sanctum wall does not confirm any partition but internally the partition walls carve up into three chambers.⁸⁶ In the central chamber, the images of Shri Govindaji and Rasheswari were installed. In the southern and northern chambers, the images of Radha-Krishna and Lord Jaganatha (the supreme deity honoured by the Ratha-Yatra festival) are installed respectively.⁸⁷ The *sikhara* of the temple is double dome with a single finial in each dome. The dome is well-plastered and it was covered with gold leaf, and its face is to the east. The vase-shape finial is placed over a disc as *kalasha* and fixed a *chakra* on it.⁸⁸

Another feature of the temple is the adorned bell erected in both side of the front flight of steps and the texture is of brass metal. The *mandapa* of Govindaji temple shows the impressive majesty of its structure.⁸⁹ It is a separate structure just in front of the eastern façade of temple having the common compound with the main temple body. The front façade facing the temple carries two double storied structures having a roof gallery over the first story in between, which is supported with a solid line of railing. At the roof slab of each side building, there is a minaret in the form of a mini temple. The complete structure has several rows of pillars. On the sides of east

and south, a concentric seating arrangement has been made for the performance of socio-cultural and religious programme in the temple. The *mandapa* of Govindaji temple is spacious enough to accommodate several thousands of devotees at a time. There is also another *mandapa* on the western side of temple known as *Natyasala*. Thus, Govindaji temple is the main center of religious activities of Manipur.⁹⁰ It contains the architectural style with the mixture of *Nagara* and Indo-Islamic architecture.⁹¹

Radha Raman temple of Langthabal

This temple is situated at the old Langthabal palace on hill ridge, nearest to the Manipur University campus. The temple was dedicated by Maharaj Churachand. Radha Raman is another name of Lord Krishna. It was actually a temple of royal family.⁹² The architectural feature of the temple is *adhithana* (the basement), *garbhagriha*, (sanctum hall), *veranda*, *stambha* (column), *vedica* (railing), *ashtasra* or the octagonal dome, *mandapa* (congregation hall) and *torana* (the gateway). The whole structure is made of bricks and mortars.⁹³ The temple is a square plan facing towards south. It has a two celled. The structure of the temple consists of a square sanctum cube and surrounded by an open verandah having three curved vaulted arch doors on each side and the *garbhagriha* is square. The *bhitti* (wall) rose vertically from the *adhithana* upto the cornice. The *sikhara* portion is distinct with balustrade. The railing has incised decorations forming the diamond shape and has four square miniature replicas of the shrine at the four corners. The top of the *sikhara* is surmounted by a rounded octagonal *kapota* (eave) with a finial. There are many columns surrounding the verandah supporting the heavy weight of the flat floor.⁹⁴ The superstructure of the temple just above the sanctum cube is an octagonal dome and the dome roof is well decorated with floral designs and other geometrical patterns. The

cornice of the dome is also decorated with floral motifs and the top of the dome is capped with a flower designed.

The departing feature of the temple is built of *mandapa* at the rear of the temple, where all *mandapa* are usually constructed to the front of the temple.⁹⁵ The whole structure of the temple is made of brick with cement coating. The construction was considered in an incredibly artistic technique with architectural impact. This temple is the example of the proliferation of the Vaishnavite cult in Manipur.⁹⁶ But, the architectural style is a mixture of different models. The octagonal dome and flower designs are the style of Indo-Islamic architecture particularly the Mughal architecture of medieval period. The sanctum cube surrounded by verandah on all sides is belonged to late medieval temple style of Bengal.⁹⁷

Temple of Thangal General

This temple (**plate-6**) is located at the north-eastern side of the palace compound of Wangkhei in the Imphal East of Manipur. It was built by Major General Thangal, who was the general of the kings Surchandra and Kulachandra. He dedicated this temple to Radha-Krishna. The temple stands on a ground square plan facing towards the south.⁹⁸ The architectural features of the temple is divided into different sections, such as *adhithana* , *bhitti* (four square walls that ascends straight up from the pedestal to the cornice), *vedika* (upper and lower railing), concealed window, *sikhara* crowning cape with inverted *kalasha* and four miniature shrines on the four corners of the temple.⁹⁹

About the structure of the temple, it consists of four walls that connected with the sanctum wall, railing with *sala* and octagonal dome.¹⁰⁰ The walls of the sanctum hall raised vertically upto straight cornice of the superstructure. The upper railing

above the cornice is connected with the octagonal dome.¹⁰¹ The height of the sanctum cube reaches upto the dome and it was parted by a wooden ceiling. The ceiling is well decorated with floral motifs. The upper railing is supported by straight cornice.¹⁰² The plan of the temple is *Panchayatana* style or temple composed of five shrines, four at the corners around the central one. The architectural style of the temple is an admixture of Islamic architectural style, medieval Bengal style and *Dravida* style. The decorations on the railings and the dome design indicated the style of Islamic architecture of medieval period. The plinth and the four small square shrines on the four corners of the temple and straight cornice showed the influence of Bengal style. In the structure of this temple, the south Indian style called *Kuta* (square) is also seen. *Kuta* is a shrine of square plan with four-sided converging roof and single finial, circular or octagonal with domical roof and single finial or stupi.¹⁰³

Temple of Shri Shri Bijoy Govindaji

The Bijoy Govinda temple (**plate-7**) is located at Sogolband of Imphal and the image is made of jackfruit tree from Kaina hill. King Bheigycachandra's uncle Ananta shai and his descendants were made responsible for the worship of Shri Bijoy Govindaji temple. The annual festival of *Heikru Hidongba* is celebrated on the 11th day of *Langban* (September) at the *Thangapat* moat of Shri Bijoy Govindaji at Sagolband in Imphal. This celebration is performed with the offering of *Heikru* (embolic myrobalam) fruit to the Lord Krishna accompanied with a contest of *Hiyang Tanaba* (Boat race) in the *Thangapat* moat. The annual festival was dedicated to Lord Bijoy Govinda under the management of the descendants of the pious ancient *Mantri* in collaboration with the local people.¹⁰⁴

Temple represents a principal role in the social, religious and economic entity. They served not only the spiritual needs of the people but also played an important part in their material life. The temple is the spiritual centre through which the social and religious life was regulated.¹⁰⁵ Manipur in the 15th century CE was marked as the beginning of art and architecture with the introduction of Vishnu temple. After that in the 18th and 19th century CE, Manipur had reached its height of progress in the field of art and architecture.

Thus, the advent of Hinduism in Manipur opens a new chapter in the history of art and architecture. When the Hindu religion became very popular in Manipur, many images of Hindu gods and goddesses were installed. Besides these, many Hindu temples dedicated to many gods and goddess, having different styles and designs began to be constructed and gradually developed under the patronage of ruling family in the valley of Manipur. However, all these temples were the main center of the religious erudition and congregation. The period between 15th to 20th centuries CE is very significant, because of emergence of numerous Hindu temples, like Vishnu temple, Krishna temple, Hanuman Thakur temple, Govindaji temple, Kali temple, etc. Even, under the influence of Hinduism, the temple of traditional gods and goddess were also built in Manipur.

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