

**Name of the Element:** The Maharas Festival of Bishnupriya Manipuris  
**Domain 3:** Social practices, rituals and festive events  
**Name of Inventory:** Pilot Inventory 1  
**Serial No:** P1-D3-001

### **Brief Description**

Description: The Maharas Festival is the biggest Raasleela festival of its kind in Manipuri community. As other types of Ras's, the centerpiece of this festival is the dance-drama that depicts the union of Radha and Krishna. The first Ras was observed during the reign of Raj Shri Bhagyachandra in Manipur and the Manipuris who have migrated over to Bangladesh due to conflicts have carried on the tradition. The festival is preceded by a week of training in the skills and methods of Ras songs and dances by Ras-ustads inside the community. The largest Ras takes place at the Manipuri Lalitkala Academy in Moulovibazar and becomes a site of communal harmony as people from all castes and religions attend the festival to watch the dancers and devotees celebrate the union of Radha and Krishna. The Maha-Ras begins at night and carries on till dawn and is accompanied by stalls of traditional Manipuri items such as clothing and jewelry and also stalls that sell books on the history and culture of Manipur in both the Bishnupriya language and Bengali. The dance-drama is central to the proceedings and performers are adorned with specifically designed costumes for each role (Radha, Krishna, Gupis etc). At the same date, the *Goshtholeela* or *Rakhal Naach* (another dance drama to precede the Ras at night) is performed at the venue. The dance rituals are carried out around a *mondop* (shrine) in the presence of a *pandit/purohit* (priest).

State of the element: It is practiced widely and vigorously throughout the Manipuri communities however the threat in this case is that without adequate protection of the well-beings of the Ras-ustaads as well as without adequate resources to train and sustain future Ras-ustaads, some of the methods, philosophies and thoughts may be lost.

**Region: Kamalganj, Moulovibazar and other upazilas of Sylhet**

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**Photographs: Video: Consent:**

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