

NATURE WORSHIP

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Abstract

Nature Worship Haobam Bidyarani Devi, Ph.D. Student, Dpmt. Of History, Manipur University
Abstract: Manipur is a tiny state of the North East region of India with its capital in the city of Imphal. About 90% of the land is mountainous. It is a state inhabited by different communities. While the tribals are concentrated in the hill areas, the valley of Imphal is predominantly inhabited by the Meiteis, followed by the Meitei Pangals (Muslim), Non Manipuris and a sizable proportion of the tribals. During the reign of Garibniwaz in the late 18th century, the process of Sanskritisation occurred in the valley and the Meitei population converted en masse to Hinduism. The present paper is primarily focused on Nature worship and animism, belief and sacrifices performed by the various ethnic groups in Manipur. Here the researcher particularly focuses on the Meiteis, (the major community of valley) and the Naga and Kuki-Chin, (the major inhabitants of the hills) and their beliefs about nature and ancestor worship. North East region was mostly home of tribes which like other primitive people believe in spirits who had to be appeased through various offerings and sacrifices in order to have good health, good harvest (being primarily cultivators) and general well-being. In the beginning most of the people of North East India were animist by faith. The word 'animism' is derived from the Latin word 'anima' meaning 'breath', hence carrying the idea of souls and spirit. Animism can thus be defined as a belief that objects and natural phenomena are inhabited by souls or spiritual beings. They believed in the existence of a Supreme Being, in angels, and also life after death. It is apparent that the indigenous inhabitants of Manipur, excluding the Meitei Pangals (Muslims) all believed in animism as also ancestor worship and the existence of both

benevolent and malevolent spirits who had to be appeased through various forms of sacrifice.

Keyword: Ancestors, Communities, Nature, Offerings, Sacrifices, Souls, Spiritual, Supreme Being, Worshiped.

1.INTRODUCTION

Manipur is a tiny state of the North East region of India with its capital in the city of Imphal. About 90% of the land is mountainous. It is a state inhabited by different communities. While the tribals are concentrated in the hill areas, the valley of Imphal is predominantly inhabited by the *Meiteis*, followed by the *Meitei Pangals* (Muslim), Non Manipuris and a sizable proportion of the tribals. During the reign of Garibniwaz in the late 18th century, the process of Sanskritisation occurred in the valley and the Meitei population converted en masse to Hinduism. (Salam Irene, Ginneiching Simte, Thenkhogin Haokip 2014 pp.1-2). After the British colonized Manipur 1891, Christian Missionaries converted the tribals to Christianity.

North East region was mostly home of tribes which like other primitive people believe in spirits who had to be appeased through various offerings and sacrifices in order to have good health, good harvest (being primarily cultivators) and general well-being (Achla Sonku and Shibhra Rajput 2011p. 34). In the beginning most of the people of North East India were animist by faith. The word 'animism' is derived from the Latin word 'anima' meaning 'breath', hence carrying the idea of souls and spirit. Animism can thus be defined as a belief that objects and natural phenomena are inhabited by souls or spiritual beings. They believed in the existence of a Supreme Being, in angels, and also life after death. (The last refers to the Nagas) (Shilpi Singh 2011 p. 375)

2. MEITEIS

The Meiteis believe in one Supreme God name 'Atiya Guru Sidaba'. He had two sons *Ashiba/Kaptreng/Sanamahi* and *Konjin Tuthokpa/Sentreng/Pakhangba*. *Sanamahi* is regarded as the spiritual deity and *Pakhangba* as the divine king of the earth (Kabui 2011 p.57). It is possible that there are at least three definite orders of animistic deities. They are *Umanglai*, *Lamlai*, and *Imunglai*. The worshipping processes of *Umanglai* and *Lamlai* are very similar whereas *Imung Lais* (House Gods) were worshipped in a different manner.

3. UMANGLAI: FOREST GODS

Meitei religion centered on veneration of deities known as *lai* (the same term is used for both male and female, and the singular and plural) (Saroj Nalini 2010 p.47.) The *lais* bear some general similarities to spirit beings in other Asian cultures such as the Naga of the Indian Subcontinent, the Tahi *Phii*, Buddhist *yaksas*, and specially the *nats* of the Burmese religion. *Lai* is usually regarded as the abbreviated form of *umang lais*, literally meaning 'deities of forest' (u=tree, mang=the midst of, lais=gods). There is some evidence that does indicate some of the *lais* may have been associated with trees, but this seems to be a residual element from a very early period and today none of the most important *lais* has such a connection (Nalini 2010 pp.47-48).

According to Gangmumei there are forty-five deities who are scattered all over the country and worshipping of *Umang Lais*, the forest gods of villages commenced in Pakhangba's reign (33AD). According to Kumar there are 378 *umang lais* (Kumar, 2001, pp.52-62) and according to Singh, there are 446 representing the Meitei Clans (Singh 1987, p.29). They are the protectors of the state. The public worshipped them during *Umanglai Haraoba* (Pleasing the forest gods). They are offered usually items such as bananas, flowers, fruits and animals. '*Umanglai Haraoba*' is one of the biggest religious festivals among the Meiteis. It is celebrated all over the valley of Manipur State. There are four types of '*Lai Haraoba*', namely, *Kanglei Haraoba*, *Chakpa Haraoba*, *Moirang Haraoba*, and *Kakching Haraoba*. The duration of the *Haraoba* varies from place to place. Some *Haraobas* last for two weeks and some even for a month. During the *Haraoba*, different dances are

performed, and indigenous games played. Dances emphasise the creation of the world, and other daily activities.

During this festival, an offering of certain items, including animals, is prepared every morning. The offering of sixteen hens is a compulsory item every day. At least one of the hens must be white in color, which is meant for the *Nongpok Ningthou* (King of the East). Kumar writes, "On the last day, in addition to the hens, a black dog and two pigs must be offered for sacrifice" (Kumar 2001, p.96). *Umanglais* are considered to be ancestor gods.

Summarising the process of *Lai Haoraoba*, it includes *Maibi Laimang Phamba* that is, foretelling of *Eputhou's* messages to the worshippers, devotees and to the public connected with the day's offering; *Tara Luk Katpa*-serving of meal; *Leilangba*-offering of flowers, generally done in a special function in which collected flowers are offered to *Eputhou* and then distributed to the King, the Queen, the Knights and others. Some two days ahead of the closing of *Lai Haraoba*, the most important functions are *Lailamthokpa*, *Khongchingba* and *Yumphamba* which are performed every year. In this regard, it is found that in the ancient period-one year was for cleaning of canals and rivers, called *Tukhong Sengba*; one year for *Kong Chingba* which was done around *Keke Kangla* and another year was for *Lamthokpa* or *Kongba Lamyengba*-a tour or picnic-like outdoor festival. The most important programmes were performed one day ahead of the closing of the festival called *Lairoi*, *Lamjen-Mukna* are compulsory by tradition in every *Haraoba* ceremony. *Lamjen* means a competition between *Eputhou Pana* and *Ebenthou Pana* and *Mukna*-a traditional martial art of wrestling type between the two same *panas* (administrative divisions) are performed with great pomps and grandeur today.

The role of *Maiba* (preists) and *Maibis* (preistesses) in *Lai Haraoba*:

An interesting aspect of the role of *Maibis* in the *Meitei* society is that she holds a special ritual status outside of the norm of the social framework for women.(Reena 2009, p.126). Ever since the institution of these ritual specialists came into being the *Maibis* and *Maiba* hold an exalted position and are an indispensable part of the society. No worship could be performed without the

intervention of a priest or a priestess who stood between him and the Lai as a mediator.(Ibid, 127)

The *Meitei Maibas and Maibis* are soothsayers who warned people against forthcoming dangers. They are able to suggest ways of diverting divine anger and saving men from evil which would otherwise have come upon them unaware. In such cases, sacrifice on a large scale or of an unusual character was commonly recommended. They also made good luck charms and acted as guides, counselors and advisors for the well-being of the King in particular and his subjects in general.(Ibid, 128)

A female destined to be a *Maibi* is distinguished from other females right from a very young age. She is always attracted towards other *Maibis*, desiring to be in their company and having a natural interest to be like them. Once possessed she may sing, pull her hair, refuse food and run restlessly in a wild manner. She sets out to find her own *Ima* Guru (ima=mother). As if revealed by the *lai* which possessed her, she sometimes accurately tells the name of the *Ima* Guru and the location of her residence. Once she meets her *Ima* Guru, the latter washes the face, hands and feet of the girl in the manner in which a child is treated. She is asked to eat *tairen* leaf (cedrela toona) which signifies the acceptance of the young girl as a novice. *Maibis* are believed to be the wives of the *lais* who possess them and are therefore treated as special persons even by their husbands (Ibid 129-130).

The *Maibis* deliver oracles whereas the *Maibas* are priests who officiate in religious ceremonies. They conduct the minute details of the ceremony, and act as partners of the *Maibis* on any occasion of ancestor worship. When the *Lai Haraoba* ritual is performed, only the *Maibas* are permitted to adorn the Lainingthou with a new dress. The *Maibi* does the same for *Lairembi*. Throughout the various stages of the function the place of the *Maiba* is at the side of the *Maibi*. (Ibid)

The other categories of priests are the traditional physicians and midwives who are known by the terms *Maiba and Maibi*, respectively. They have no religious role, although some indulge in acts of witchcraft and sorcery and are greatly feared by the people. The significant role of the *Maiba and Maibis* in the everyday lives of the *Meiteis* can hardly be overemphasized. (Ibid)

4.LAMLAI: IT MEANS THE GODS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

1. **Koubru** in the North-East, has his abode at the *Koubru* hill, and is worshipped under a segregated canopy along with the other deities and the items offered to this God included hundred each of the buffaloes, goat, lambs, cows, swans, ducks, pigeons, hens, dogs, fruits, and flowers. The *Meiteis* consider *Koubru* to be the greatest god of the *Langba Chak* (Chak is a period or age, which is a phonetic corruption of the Sanskrit 'yug'. According to tradition there are four chaks, i.e. *Hayi chak, Haya chak, Langba chak and Khunung Chak* (Kabui 2011, p. 57) (Reena 2010, p.88). One of the theories of origin of the *Meiteis* ascribes *Koubru* as their original habitation.
2. **Marjing** the Guardian Deity of the North, has his abode at *Heingang*, a place located to the north of Imphal. *Marjing* is associated with the game *Sagol Knagjei* (modern polo). It is believed that *Marjing* emerged from the intestines of *Atiya Guru Shidaba*, to catch the divine horse (sagol) which emanated from the foot of *Asiba* (Reena 2009, p.84). Therefore *Sagol* (horse) *Kangjei* (a kind of stick) and *kangdrum* (a ball made of bamboo root) was included in the offerings with the addition of articles like wild boar, dog, duck, hen, pigeon and other living creatures.
3. **Thangjing** situated in the South-West of the valley of Manipur, is believed to be the son of *Chingu Ningthou Soraren Awang Palchang Yoiremba* the ruling dynasty of *Moirang*, situated 47 kms from Imphal the capital of Manipur. A story recounts that a bull, caught by the brave *Khamba* was offered to *Thangjing*, which implies animal sacrifice was made to this *Lai*.(Reena,2009, p. 89)
4. **Wangbare**, God of water is also known as '*Khana Chaoba*' the Guardian of South. He was the son of *Chingu Koubural Achouba* and *Wangu Leima Khongchom Phabichak* and he resided with his four wives namely *Anal Khunthak Chanu, Maraipung, Khundol Chanu, Loibi Thaku Chanu and Marem Thayai Chanu*. The deities guard the corners of the earth and they should be propitiated with annual offerings of fish, certain animals, wine (rice beer), and

human flesh etc (Reena, 77). (E.g. Thambalnu a young unmarried lady was sacrificed during the reign of King Gambhir Singh and a *Pangal* (muslim) women was sacrificed during the reign of Paikhomba Maharaja).

5. **Nongpok Ningthou** literally means 'King of the East'. A popular legend has it that *Nongpok* fell in Love with *Panthoibi*, who was already married to *Tarang Khoinu*. They were finally united at *Nongmaiching*, the abode of *Nongpok*. *Nongmaiching* is believed to be the first ever created hill with divine attributes. *Nongpok* is also known by the names of *Nongpok Ningthou Yoiremba* and *Nongpok Malung Haomoiba*. *Nongpok Ningthou* and his divine consort *Panthoibi* are taken to be indispensable. The Meiteis generally worship them as *Nongpok-Panthoibi*. She is the daughter of *Taoroinei* and *Lainamung Namungba*, is described as a great goddess of mankind (Reena 2009, p.86). The deities guard corners of the earth and they should be propitiated with annual offerings of fish, certain animals, wine (rice beer), and human flesh etc (Reena 2009, p.77).
6. **Loyalakpa**, is regarded as the Guardian of the western corner of the earth. Legend has it that in the battle between the gods and the *sarois* (evil spirits), *Loyalakpa* showed great courage and destroyed the *sarois*. More popularly known as *Loiya Lakpa Pangganba* or *Loya Lakpa* (the brave), this deity is worshipped mainly by the people of *Chakpa* village. The deities guard corners of the earth and they should be propitiated with annual offerings of fish, certain animals, wine (rice beer), and human flesh etc (Reena 2009, p.77).

Although these are important *Lamlais*, there are other important *Lamlais* too such as *Khamlangba*, *Luwang Ningthou Punsiba*, *Muwa Ningthou Atomba* etc.

Usually these gods are worshipped in between the '*Mera Nongma Pangba*' i.e. the first day of the Meitei month *Mera*(October) to *Mera Taramangani Panba* i.e. fifteenth day of *Mera*. The result being that their worship ensured the protection of the kingdom.

From time immemorial the Meiteis appeased evil spirits so that these spirits would not harm them. These evil spirits *Saroi-Ngaroi* are appeased before the individual partakes of any food or edible item. First it is

offered to both the Supreme God and that which is remaining is offered to the *Saroi Ngarois*. Offerings are made to benevolent and malevolent spirits simultaneously, to the first to ensure prosperity, and to the second to prevent them from causing any harm. A ritual known as '*Lamdaiba*' (Lam=land; Daiba/tainba=neighbors) is performed on the first Saturday of the Meitei month *Lamda* (February/March), on this day the *Saroi Ngarois* are worshipped by offering *singju* (a Meitei salad) made of rice, and vegetables collected from every household of the village and some coins are also proffered. This ritual is also known as '*Saroi Khangba*' and was performed by the elderly women (Haisnam 2013, p.25).

5.IMUNGLAI

They are household Deities namely *Lainingthou Sanamahi*, *Leimarel* and *Imoinu*. These Gods are worshipped for prosperity and protection. At the time of worship edible items like rice, vegetables, sweets, fruits, and fish are offered to them.

Sanamahi : It is recorded in B. Kulachadra's '*Sanathong Laigi Thouni Lairik*' that the worship of Sanamahi was introduced by King *Kangba Kangkhan*, he was the son of Silpi Leima Leitang Chanu, during his reign in the *Haya Chak* (Reena, 98). On the day of *Cheiraoba* or *Sajibu Nongma Panba* (The New Year day of the Meiteis), a big festival was held in honor of *Lainingthou* (Lai=God, Ningthou=King) *Sanamahi* (Sana=Gold, Mahi=Liquid). Every Meitei prays to *Sanamahi* to protect his house from danger and bless him with long life free from illnesses, and shower him with prosperity and happiness. Usually *Sanamahi* and *Leimarel* are worshipped every day in the evening, by offering a fire of pines to protect and safeguard the inmates of the house.

Leimaren Sidabi is also a household deity. She is placed near the northern wall in the middle chamber of every Meitei home. She is represented by a sacred earthen pot which is filled with water. The pot is wrapped in a thin piece of cloth and covered with a lid. She is compared to *malem* (earth). Thus for the Meiteis *Leimarel sidabi* is the Mother Goddess. The water which is contained in the pot and her association with the earth are symbols of life and fertility (Reena 2009, p.80).

Imoinu Ahongbi or Nongmainu Ahongbi, is a manifestation of *Leimarel Sidabi* (Reena 2009, p.82). She

is seated at the '*phunga lairu*', one of the three secret places of the typical Meitei house. The *Phunga* is the hearth of the house situated in the centre of the main chamber of the house. *Imoinu* is the Goddess of wealth and prosperity. The goddess is worshipped on the 12th of the Meitei month *Wakching* (December/January).

Ancestor worship is an important ritual of the Meiteis and started from Pakhangba's reign and continues today. In every respect, clan and lineage played a significant part in the Meitei society, thereby forming the basis of the various stages of development of Meitei philosophical thoughts, which resulted in the emergence of worship. Lineage assumes great significance in rituals associated with the passage of rites from birth to death. The most important *lai* is 'Pakhangba'. He is the serpent deity; originally the ancestor god of the Ningthouja clan which eventually gained ascendancy over the other clans of the Meitei. His spouse is Lasana (the golden *lai*), who in the invocation of the *leihourol* is also associated with water. It seems clear that there has been some conflation between the two female *lais*, Leimarel and Laisana, probably as a result of fusion of two originally distinct religious systems (Nalini 2010, p.48).

The clan or lineage is known as *salai*, which literally means the ancestor-god of the lineage (sa=sagei=lineage and lai=god-ancestor). (kabui 2011, p.69) In the historical time, the *Meiteis* are found to have been divided into seven clans the credit of which was given to King *Nongda Lairen Pakhangba*. These seven clans or lineage are *Ningthouja (Mangang)*, *Luwang*, *Angom*, *Khuman*, *Moirang*, *Sarang Leisangthem (Chenglei)*, and *Kha-Nganba*. (Ibid)

According to some of the most credible traditions of the valley it originally was occupied by several tribes, the principal of which were the *Khumul (Khuman)*, *Luang (Luwang)*, *Moirang*, and *Meitheis*, all of whom came from different directions (R.Brown 2001, p.57). Today there are seven *salais* (clans) in the Meitei society: *Ningthouja*, *Angom*, *khuman*, *Luwang*, *Moirang*, *Sarang Leisangthem*, and *Kha-Nganba* (O. Kumar, 2004, 37).

Ningthouja clan arranged different things like *thambal angangba* (red lotus), *changbi la* (Changbi-a kind of banana plant, la-banana leaf), *meiyei mei* (fire), *urang* (plans), *chakthang* (sword) and water (collected from the Nungjeng pond) to offer to the ancestors. The day of worship was fixed on that of *taramangani panba* (full moon day) in a particular Meitei month *Inga* (June). They

chose *Ningthoukaba* (Monday) as the special day of adoration (Haisnam 2013, p.28).

The *Angoms* revered their ancestors on *Taretni Panba Langban* (seventh day of September). They offered *Tharo angouba* (white lily), *larong la* (banana leaf), *maiba mei* (fire), *tairen mana* (leaf of a kind of tree), *pukok thang* (sword), and water (taken from the Kongba Meironbi area) to their God (Haisnam 2013, p.28).

The *Luwangpokpa* is the ancestor of *Luwang*. The *Luwang Apokpa* was adored on the *taranithoini of Kalen* (twelve day May) and offered articles including *layai la* (banana leaf), *khongun mele* (orchid), *ukhok* (plant), fire, *tangbang thang* (sword), and water (from Lamphel lake). (Ibid)

The *Khumanpokpa*, the progenitor of *Khuman* is worshipped on the *taramangani/kunmangani panba sajibu* (fifteenth/twenty fifth lunar of Sajibu/April). The items offered to this god are *leishang* (flower), *Kwaklei* (flower), *kwala* (leaf of a creeper), fire, *thang toukakpa* (sword), *pungphai* (a medicinal plant), and water (taken from Pumlén Lake). (Ibid)

The *Moirangpokpa*, worshipped by offering *kwaklei* (flower), *Khangla* (tree), fire, *louhing* (plant), *yenba toksoba thang* (sword), and water (from Loktak lake), was performed on the *kunmarini panba of Lamda* (the twenty fourth day of March) (Ibid)

The ancestors of *Kha-Nganba* clan are worshipped on the *tamarini panba of Phairen* (fourteenth day of February). The important items offered to this god are *yerumlei* (flower), fire, *larongla la* (banana leaf), *pungphai* (medicinal plant), *Laithang* (sword), and water (taken from Leitangpat Lake). (Ibid)

The *Chenglei* clan is adorned on *tamarini panba of Phairen* (fourteenth day of February). The offering includes *Leikhamlei* (flower), *Thamna/Leihoura* (lotus leaf/a leaf of creeper), fire, *Khunthong thang* (sword), and water (taken from Tanakha Lake). (Ibid)

They worshipped nature objects such as fire, sun, the moon, *Soraren* (sky), the god of the homestead, and wind. The worship of natural objects in ancient Manipuri was simple. There was no icon. When they worshipped the Sun, they worshipped the visible orbit of the Sun. When they worshipped the fire, they worshipped the brightly burning fire, likewise when they worshipped the *Soraren*, they spread a seat, say a piece of clean cloth, for the god to sit on and after invocation, they believed that he had come to their midst to accept their simple

offering. In ancient times there was no icon of the god of the homestead (Jhaljit Singh, 1992, p.26).

Religion intertwines itself with culture by way of giving shape in a concrete belief in the supreme. Through the cultural expressions it reaches out to the beyond.

God becomes someone who gives meaning to the existence of a particular group of people inhabiting the earth. (L. Jeyseelan- p.6) The tribals of Manipur professed different religions and spoke different languages. They believed in the presence of innumerable spirits. These spirits were believed to reside in trees, rivers, lakes, springs, and caves holes in the earth, salt springs, rocks, waterfalls, cliffs, animals and human bodies. They thought that sickness and misfortunes of any kind were the work of evil spirits. It was even believed that the spirits could make appearances before people, and terrifying stories were told about such occurrence. They, therefore offered different kinds of sacrifices, which required shedding of animals' blood, as prescribed by priest. Sacrifices to appease the evil spirits were made through *Puithiem/Siampu* (Priest). But this does not mean that they worshipped evil spirits. They did this out of fear and out of their desire to get rid of their sickness. However, deep within them they had a belief running through their veins that there was one true God who was the Supreme Being, the Creator and the Lord of the whole world. They practiced rituals and sacrifices to please the lesser Gods and the Almighty too. They worshipped natural deities and made sacrifices and offerings to propitiate Gods as also evil spirits. In their quest for the Supreme Being, they spent much time, energy, devotion in the practice of their indigenous religions. But their mode of worship tended to fuse them into a homogenous community, where rituals and gennas were rigidly observed. Being worshippers of nature, people were inclined towards superstition and lived in fear that if they were unable to please the Gods and spirits, the wrath of the latter would descend upon them. In their ignorance, they ascribed any calamity to God's wrath.

The religious belief that binds the people was the belief in life after death. They believe that the soul of the deceased goes to the 'Land of the Dead' which the *Tangkhus* call 'Kazirram', the *Maos* call 'kathimei Raloku', and the *Kuki-Chins* call 'Mithikhua/Misikhua'. It is their belief that in the world of the dead, there is an exact repetition of the life in this world. So the soul of

the deceased goes to his or her own family in the 'Land of Dead'. The *Tangkhus* practice the presentation of a gift to the dead. And all the friend and relatives give presents of various kinds to the dead person so as to help him continue his life journey to another world. They believed that the soul of a good person will go to Heaven to live with the Supreme God.

There were two places where the spirit was supposed to live in the spirit world. Where the spirits of the departed one's world spend eternity was determined by the virtue and achievement of the dead person while living on earth. The spirit world were called *Misikhua*-village of the dead, *Pialgal/Pielral* – Paradise. The spirits of most people were believed to go to *Misikhua*-abode of the commoner's souls located underground. It was believed that the dead would unite again with their families- all the slaves they have captured and the enemies they have killed would serve them as their servants in this place. When an infant dies, they would bury the body with an egg on his or her palm so that the egg would roll on to *Misikhua* and the child would follow the egg. When a man dies, his soul finds it very hard to adopt. He is lonesome, and comes to a mountain called *Hringlang Tlang* or *Ngaiban tlang*, the mountain where the living are visible. The spirit was believed to leave the body and linger for about some months around its former home on earth. Only when his family living in the world performed a rite called *thitin*, then the soul was actually able to depart from this mountain. Eventually, it comes to a stream called *Luonglo Tui/ Lungloh Tui*, where the spirit of a departed is divested of all feeling and the living go in peace. He plucks a beautiful flower called *Hawilo par*, only then are the desires of the soul of the land of the living extinguished and it proceeds to *Misikhua*. Another home of soul is *Pialgal*-an abode of bliss. Those who go there need not work for their living. They will be fed with rice and meat by fair maidens. According to tradition, three groups of people were privileged to enter. The first are the *Lamzuihs/Hlamzuis*, that is those children who die in infancy. The second was young 'men who had sexual relations with either three virgin girls or seven women. The third are those girls who remained virgins until death. The fourth and the most important criteria that guaranteed direct or free passage to *Pialgal* was *Thangsuah/Thangsus* (a person with outstanding achievement. There are two ways to achieve the status of *Thangsuah*. By killing one each of the following species of animal- barking deer, sambhur,

bear, wild boar, wild mithun, wild elephant, tiger, lion, eagle and a poisonous serpent, or killing a hundred beasts, or chopping off the head of an enemy. The second one is by cultivating a thousand bushels of rice in one single year. (Salam Irene, Ginneiching Simte, Thenkhogin Haokip 2011, pp7-13). According to Lal Dena: A young man's maturity was never measured by the number of enemies he killed, but by the extraordinary spirit of sacrifice through Hawmngaihna that he had shown to society. For entry into Paradise after death, taking of human head was not compulsory (Lal Dena 2016, Keynote Address). *Pu-Sha*-the cultures of '*Pu-gau*, '*Pa-gau hou*' or ancestral worshipping have been practiced by the *Vaiphei* people since time immemorial. The *Vaipheis* hold the view that 'parents are deities whom we could see with eyes. As such, even after they might have turned to dust and soil, their souls or souls is believed to have the power of blessing or cursing them. The prosperity and fortune of the individual or a family depends on whether the *Pu-sha* is pleased with them, or not. However, these are no date or time fixed for the rite of offering. A swine, particularly without blemish was slain as an offering to the *Pu-sha*. When something swooped or misshaped them, they presumed that they were under the influence of the deceased spirit or soul of their ancestor, and then they would be busy preparing for the rites. On such special occasions, or say ancestor worshipping day, the family members in the house are '*Zek-Chang*', in the sense that they are not allowed, or they are forbidden to loiter out of the house. The *Vaiphei* believed that their ancestor spirit or soul could heal them whenever they felt ill or sick, and also would give them wealth, wisdom, skill, daughters and sons. They worshipped their ancestors for their well-being, and wanted to keep their ancestors spirit pleased all the time (Lalthanpari 2016, p 34)

Feast of Merit- As a gesture of geneology a well to do person would treat the villages to a grand meal called 'Feast of Merit' or '*Maram*'. It consists of a series of rites and feasting, lasting into weeks and months together among some Naga tribes such as Mao and *Maram Nagas*. It is performed defferntly among the tribes. Among the Tangkhul it involves the dragging and erecting of a huge genna post. The Angami, AO, Lotha, and Maram created stone monoliths. The Tangkhul erected a huge Genna post called Tarung. The Sema, AO, Sangtams and Lothas erected 'Y' shape Genna posts, in addition to stone dragging, wheres the Konyak used

curved wood. It is usually performed only by those who are exceptionally endured with wealth like fertile land. R.R. Shimray opines that: sharing of wealth with the whole village population through a public distribution system such as the Feast of Merit has been the most important factor which has prevented capitalism overtaking the Naga system. (R. Simon 2010, pp. 30-31) Ancestor worship and animism was the traditional as well as religious belief of the Simtes. They believed that if the spirits of their ancestors were not pleased, they could create a lot of harm. To save themselves from the wrath of the spirits of their ancestors' people worshipped them once a year. This is same as the '*Meitei Torpon*' (it is believed that at the beginning of autumn season, in the month of *Langban* (September), the sky is very clear and the length of the days and nights are also equal throughout the Globe. At this season the spirit and souls of the forefathers are very eager to know how their descendants live in the earth. So the forefathers from '*Pralok*' (a place in heaven) leave their abode temporarily and come up to the edge of the earth and remain in the air. They look down upon the earth to see whether there are worthy sons and grandsons in their family who are virtuous, good hearted, patriots and worthy sons of the society. When those invitees in the '*Tarpan Utsav*' in the form of elder men and women are fed to their stomach's content, the souls of the forefathers are also pleased. Then they shower blessings on their children for their good and prosperous life in the future. Those souls for whom there were no offerings from their children felt humiliated and go back cursing their descendants on the earth). The annual worship ceremony was performed only by the head of the different clans called '*Tulpi*'. *Simtes* believed in the existence of one Supreme God '*Pathian*'- a God of humanity and goodness whom they called '*Pathian*'- he lived beyond the sky and was a benign God. But *Simtes*, also believed in a malevolent God-Lungzar. It is believed that *Pathian and Lungzai* co-existed in equality. They were appeased in every function. The lives of the *Simtes*, and had to be propitiated. Good and evil spirits which were susceptible, to appeasement or placantation through performance of '*Phuisam*' (chanting) by the priest called '*Si ampu*' during the ceremony. They were also feminine spirits (Ginneiching 2012, pp. 154-158)

There is one curious custom which has a religious significance, and which is common not only to hill tribes

but also to the half-hinduized *Loees* population of Manipur valley; this is '*Namungba*' or a periodical closing of an individual village. This custom does not take place in regularity, and its object is the worship of a deity named *Kajung Kurraie*, when sacrifices of pigs, buffaloes, etc. are made. One of the occasions is just before the jungle, which has been cut down on their jhooms, is fired; the village remained shut up during the two days, and no one is allowed either entry or exit; and it is also affirmed that any one attempting to force an entrance during this period would be liable to be killed. On the other occasion the proceedings are of a joyous nature and may take place after a successful hunt, a warlike expedition, a successful harvest, or other striking events; on these occasions feasting and drinking are the orders of the day. (Brown 2001, p.21)

Any one may become a priest, the office not being hereditary. Of their superstitions, little need be said. Before going on a journey, they hold up by the wings a fowl; should the animal cross its right foot over the left, the omen is good; the opposite, bad. Egg-breaking, as among the *Khasia* tribes, is also practiced. Pigs are slaughtered, good or bad omens read from the position of the internal organs, a number of marks is rapidly made with the finger nail or a piece of bamboo on the ground; these are afterwards counted: an even number of scratches is unlucky. A piece of green ginger is cut in two; one half is placed on the ground, with the cut side up, and the other piece thrown on it from a short distance; should the cut surface meet, the omen is good. On a journey, as with the Manipuris, meeting a mole is very unlucky, and they try to secure and kill the animal. The barking of deer in front of them is unlucky; so are the cries of various birds (Brown, 28).

The *Tangkul* or *Tongkhuls* and *Luhupas* believed in one supreme deity, who is of a benevolent disposition, and who inhabited space; also another deity of evil disposition, who resides between heaven and earth and in whose hand, is the power of death. Their ideas of the future state are, that after death they go to the west, where there is another world; in this future state they live and die, men six times women five times; after this they are turned into clouds, remaining in that condition. In the month of December, in every year each village holds a solemn festival, in honor of those of their number who have died during the preceding years. The village priest conducts the ceremonies, which culminates on a night when the moon is young; on this occasion, it is said,

spirits of the departed appear at a distance from the village and in the faint moonlight, wending their way slowly over the hills, and drink before them the victims they may have slain or the cattle stolen during their lives; the procession disappears over the distant hills amidst the wailings of the villagers. Unless the village priest is well fed, it is said this appearance will not take place. (R. Brown 2001, p.42)

Marings believe in numerous spirits inhabiting the high hills; the supreme of these is named *Domhai*, and is of a good disposition. There are two devils of great power. Their priests and sacrifice generally resemble those of the *Kaopois*. Their superstitions are also similar (Ibid, 46). *Khongsai* of *Naga* tribes, *Khongsai* believed in two Supreme deities of a benevolent disposition; these two were brothers and had equal power. They reside in another world. They also believed in numerous evil spirits; these inhabited the high hills and jungles. Their village priests, sacrifice etc. do not differ materially from those of the *Kawpois*. (Ibid, 51) These beliefs are common to other *Naga* tribes as well.

6.CONCLUSION

It is apparent that the indigenous inhabitants of Manipur, excluding the *Meitei Pangals* (Muslims) all believed in animism as also ancestor worship and the existence of both benevolent and malevolent spirits who had to be appeased through various forms of sacrifice.

7.GLOSSARY:

Imunglai : house god
Keke Kangla : capital Kangla
Lai: God, deity
Lainingthou: god king, used for both gods and kings
Lairembi: goddess, female god
Lai Haraoba: festival of 'pleasing the gods'
Lairoi: last day of the lai haraoba
Lamjen : marathon
Lamlai: gods of the locality or areas
Loees: those who are punished by the King for the violation of marital customs
Mukna : a traditional martial art of wrestling type.
Namungba: taboo
panas : administrative divisions
Saroi-Ngaroi: evil spirits

Saroi Khangba: offers foods to the evil spirits
Umanglai: forest god

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