Abstract

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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 inhibitors 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.


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 Haraoba, 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 Lamyangba-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 pomp 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 Maibas 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 Lairembali. 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 Knaajei (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. Wangbarel, God of water is also known as ‘Khana Chaoba’ the Guardian of South. He was the son of Chingu Koubaru Achoura 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. Thambilnu 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 Khoinucha. 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 Taoroinai and Lainamung Namungba, is described as a great goddess of mankind (Reena 2009, p.86). The deities guards 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). The Meiteis worship edible items like rice, vegetables, sweets, fruits, and fish are offered to them.

Sanamahi : It is recorded in B. Kulachadra’s ‘Sanathong Laiqi 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).

**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.
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 Laien 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 Meiheit, 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 anganga (red lotus), changbi la (Changbi-a kind of banana plant, la-banana leaf), meiyei mei (fire), urang (plants), 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 Longban (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 meleti (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), punghpai (a medicinal plant), and water (taken from Pumlen 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 taramarini panba of Phairen (fourteenth day of February). The important items offered to this god are yerumlei (flower), fire, larongla la (banana leaf), punghpai (medicinal plant), Laithang (sword), and water (taken from Leitangpat Lake). (Ibid)

The Chenglei clan is adorned on taramarini 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
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 Tangkhuls call ‘Kaziram’, the Maos call ‘kathimei Raloku’, and the Kuki-Chins call ‘Mithikkhu/Misikkhu’. 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 Tangkhuls 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 Misikkhu-village of the dead, Pialgal/Pielral – Paradise. The spirits of most people were believed to go to Misikkhu-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 Misikkhu 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 Ngaihan 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 Misikkhu. 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 Lamsziuhs/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 Loes 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 had to be appeased through various forms of sacrifice. The barking of deer in front of them is unlucky, and they try to secure and kill the animal. The cries of various birds (Brown, 28).

The Tangkhul or Tongkhus 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 in 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; theses 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 Kwoi. (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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imunglai</td>
<td>house god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keke Kangla</td>
<td>capital Kangla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lai</td>
<td>God, deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laininghoub</td>
<td>god king, used for both gods and kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lairembi</td>
<td>goddess, female god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lai Haraoba</td>
<td>festival of ‘pleasing the gods’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lairo</td>
<td>last day of the lai haraoba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamjen</td>
<td>marathon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamlai</td>
<td>gods of the locality or areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loees</td>
<td>those who are punished by the King for the violation of marital customs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mukna</td>
<td>a traditional martial art of wrestling type.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namungba</td>
<td>taboo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panas</td>
<td>administrative divisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saroi-Ngaroi</td>
<td>evil spirits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Saroi Khangba: offers foods to the evil spirits
Umanglai: forest god

REFERENCE

[10] Salam Irene, Ginneiching Simte, Thenkhogin Haokip-Tribals of Manipur and Modernisation, pp7-13