

TRADITIONAL MEDICINAL KNOWLEDGE
AND PRACTICES IN KAKCHING DISTRICT OF MANIPUR

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DECLARATION

I, Mayanglambam Alisha Devi, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by me, that the content of this dissertation did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to best of knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree on other universities or institutes.

This is being submitted to Mizoram University for the degree of Master of Philosophy.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**TRADITIONAL MEDICINAL KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES IN KAKCHING DISTRICT OF MANIPUR**” submitted by Mayanglambam Alisha Devi in fulfillment of Master of Philosophy in History is an original work and original work and has not been submitted elsewhere for other degree. It is recommended that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

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GLOSSARY

<i>Ametpa and Maibaloishnag</i>	Department of priest
<i>ApokpaKhurumba</i>	The worship of progenitor
<i>AshiheibongMana</i>	Leaf of a plant (<i>Ficus hispida</i> Linn)
<i>Athenpot</i>	Items/ goods arrange for offering to gods
<i>Cheiraoba,</i>	New Year festival of Manipur
<i>Ceithaba</i>	Abandoning of stick
<i>ChingloiMasi</i>	Work/ Activities of Hills
<i>ChinjaknaLayengba</i>	Treatment using plants and vegetables
<i>Chupsaba</i>	A kind of traditional ritual practice when an unmarried woman or man die
<i>Emoinu</i>	Traditional goddess
<i>Eshingyaiifamhouba</i>	Urinary problem.
<i>Panas</i>	Division of land
<i>Ganja</i>	<i>Cannabinaceae</i>
<i>Haona</i>	<i>Cymbopogon flexuosus</i>
<i>Heibimana</i>	Leaf of <i>Spinosa</i> Linn
<i>Heigru</i>	<i>Phyllanthus emblica.</i>
<i>Heimang</i>	<i>Rhus semialata</i>
<i>HeimengSampakpi</i>	<i>Bidens pillosa</i> Linn
<i>Heinouman</i>	<i>Syzogium fruitcosum</i>
<i>Heirangoi</i>	<i>Ameera Rohituka</i>
<i>HingchabiChangba</i>	Evil eye
<i>ImaLaimarelShidabi</i>	Immortal Universal Mother Goddess

Kakchingharaoba Rejoicing of god in Kakching

Khongnang *Ficusreligeosa*

KhongjaiNapi Goat weed

Lainingthou King of all deities

Kokthokchamthokpa Cleansing rituals during pregnancy

KolamaniIpomoea aquatica Forsk

KonthongChakthaba Offering of dishes outside the gate

Kwak- Tobgpham Sacred Grove at Kakching

Lai God

Lai Ekouba - Calling of the *lai* from the water bodies

Lai haraoba Rejoicing of god

Laibakngou *Artemisia nilagirica*

Nungarei *Asparagus filicinus*

LairenMathek Dance in the form of curve of a python)

Lallup Forced labour

LamthabiMelothriaperpusilla

LangthreiBirmanicum DC

LayengPathap Health care system

LeibakKundo *Oleracea* Linn

Leipung-khanga *Surattenseburm*

MaibaAmaibi Traditional priestess

Maithongthingba Closing the door of the grave

MaithongHangba Opening the door of the grave

Manahi *Angiosperm*

Mangtak Revelation through dream

Mukna Wrestling

Lamchel Marathon

Ngachik *Heteropneustes fossils block*

Ngakra *Clarias Batrachu*

Ngamu *Acephaluepantatus*

Ngamu *Channapunctatus*

Nongkarol Sending back the *Lai* (god) to heaven

Nongmai Bigger settlement for Divine

Nongmaishang or Yairenshang House of divine.

Oja Assamese term for Medicine Man

Pakhangleiton *Euphorbia hirta*

Panthoibi Traditional goddess

Pengba *Osteobramabelangeri*

Silhenba Resting from the work

Peruk Indian pennywort

Phak-pai *Polygonumposumbu*)

phambalmei Coronation fire

phanek Kind of skirt

Inaphi white shawl

Phura Fort

Poireiton A King of Manipur

Potshem *Jadu Toubu* Black magic

Salia/yek Clan

Sanamahikachin The Corner where the *Sanamahi god* is kept

Sangbreimana *Parviflorus benth*

Shanglen Traditional house
Shembang House Sparrow
ShidabaMapu Immortal Supreme God of universe
Sidahidak Immortal medicine
Singju Vegetable salad
Singju panAlocasiacucullata
SoirenThingatpa Sending the deceased soul of infant child
TairenCedrelatoona
Tampaloimashil Activities of the Valley carried out by the King
TengbanbaMapu Another name of God
TerapaibiGynuranepalensis
Loi Outcaste group
Thoithingthao Sesames seed oil
Tingthoudactylon (Linn.) Pers.
Napi Grass
Kabotmachantaret *Seven*
Kwa and Panamana Betel nut and leaf
TunghanbiTilapia mossambica
Umanglai Forest God
Yangkok basket used for winnowing rice chaff
yensilmana (Angiosperm (Dicotyledon),

1.1.Introduction

Prior to the introduction of modern medicine, in Manipur especially in Kakching area traditional healing was widely practiced for the treatment of sicknesses or ailments as they contained medicinal characteristics. The term medicine portrays as treatment of diseases. In India, from the time immemorial individuals previously had built up the information of utilizing plants as therapeutic treatment. From that point forward, proficient practitioners served an extraordinary help for the medicinal services of the general public. In the earliest literature of India, the Rig-Veda, referenced about the idea of medication that was utilized in that period.

From time immemorial, in Manipur the knowledge of traditional health care system known as *Layeng Pathap* was already there and was widely used by the local practitioners, called *Maiba and Maiba* (local male and female health care physicians). During 19th century, there were sixteen core departments, among them *Ametpa* and *Maiba Loishang* (department of medicine) were categorized under the welfare department.

In Kakching the familiarity with the used of plants and parts of animals were known to its people. The traditional health care system and treatment were based on their deep observation and understanding of nature and environment. The traditional healer of the Meitei's realized the healing properties of herbs and plants and their treatment included home medications, treatment using herbs and parts of the plants. Rituals, prayers and rites were performed to god along with such treatment. Wide range of plants and its parts were used not only to cure ailments but also used it to prevent their livestock from any diseases.

Apart from the home remedy treatment, the institution of *Maiba* and *Maibi* played an important role in serving the society. They had a deep understanding of the traditional medicinal knowledge. Most of the time they spent their time going to the forest and searching herbs and plants which had medicinal properties. Some of them had divine connection and it is said that they were told by the divine about some particular plants which possessed medicinal attributes in their dream. They walked from door to door, individual to individual to carry out the work by serving the society. Not only they were engaged with *laiyeng pathap* (treatment using plants), they also played an important role in religious activities and ceremonies.

The Meitei people of Kakching had rich religious tradition. The universal concept of equality of mankind that all human are made in the image of God remains the foundational core belief of the society. The chronicles and ancient literary texts such as *Leithak Leikharol*, *Thiren Layat*, *Sakok Lamlen Ahanba* of the Meitei also mentioned the worshipping of large number of gods and goddesses by the ancient people of the land which included natural phenomenon such as the Sun, Moon, Sky, Stars, Wind, Water, Fire, and the god of the nature such as forest god (*Umang Lai*) and also mythical and legendary figures, cultural and political heroes, tribal and clan progenitors (*apokpa*) and so on. Some of the gods worshipped by the people of Kakching were *Iboudhou Pakhangba*, *Chumnang Lairembi*, *Nagol lai*, *Irum Ningthou*, *Phousupat Lairembi*, *Ibudhou Khamnangba*, *Sengong Lai*. *Sanamahi* was another important deity which has been worshipped since time immemorial.

The Meitei of Kakching also performed traditional festivals and ceremonies in adoration of the god and goddess. Some of the festivals and rituals ceremonies were *Lai Haraoba*(rejoicing of God), *Cheiraoba*(New Year), *Heikru Hidongba*(boat racing), *Apokpa khurumba*(rituals related with ancestors) etc.

Maiba and Maibi were the priest and priestess of the Meitei and they played an important in various festivals and ceremonies. *Maibi* were of different types so as *Maiba*. *Maibi* acted as a mid-wife and attended in the delivery, practiced witchcraft and performed rituals during the festival of *Lai haraoba*, *ApokpaKhurumba* (worshipping of the ancestral deities of a particular *Salai/Yek*, i.e.clan). This type of *Maibi* was different from the modern mid wife and their style of dressing was different too. *Maiba* usually played an important role in death ceremony, *lai haraoba* and traditional healing methods. They both acted as a messenger from god who intercedes for human being and the welfare of the society.

1.2.HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The native state of Manipur is situated in the north eastern part of India.It is surrounded by Nagaland in the north, Myanmar in the east, Assam in the west, and Mizoram in the south. In the olden days the size was much bigger than the present Manipur.Manipur is marked between latitude 23.83 degree North and 25.68 degree North and 93.03 degree East and 94.78 degree longitude. “The territories of *Muneepoor* have fluctuated at various times with the fortunes of their princes, frequently extending three or four days journey east beyond the

Ningthee or Khyendwen River, and west to the plains of Cachar.”¹“The name Manipur meaning the Land of Jewels was officially introduced in the early 18th century (1724) during the reign of King Pamheiba also known as Garnibniwaz(1709-1748 A.D).”² The state has been given few other names during the pre-colonial period which includes “*Poirei Meitei Leibak* or *Kangleipak*(land of Meiteis) to the indigenous people of Manipur, *Moglai* to the Cacharis and *Mekle* to the Assamese.”³The title of “*Mekhaleswar*” or Lord of *Mekhale* was given to the King Garibaniwaza which was recorded in a coin and *Mekhala* was given to the name of Manipur.⁴ Other names of the kingdom are *Kangleipak*, *Poireipak*, *Meitrabak*.⁵ Manipur was recorded as Meckley in the treaty of 1762 between East India Company and the Maharaja Jai singh of Manipur.⁶Different names were given to Manipur by the different kingdoms of the neighbouring valley. The Burmese called it ‘*Kathe*’, and the Shans of the Chindwin River named it ‘*Ka-se*’ while the Kacharis or the people of Cachar called it ‘*Mogli*’and the Assamese named it ‘*Mekheli*’ or ‘*Magalou*’.⁷

Others have accounted that the name of Manipur was recorded in the Great Indian Epic i.e. Mahabharata while mentioning about a woman named Chitranganda, a princess of Manipur married to Arjuna.⁸ This theory has been argued by the other scholars like S.K. Chatterjee who explained that the reason behind the connection with the legend of Arjuna and Chitranganda and Manipur was because of the influence of Brahminical Purana Tradition influenced to Manipur.⁹

1.2.1. Geographical setting

Manipur is also known for her rich in flora and fauna. R.B. Pemberton stated that “Manipur size extended or contracted according to the fluctuating fortunes and powers of her monarchs.”¹⁰According to the survey the forests of Manipur has been classified into three

¹ Report on The Eastern Frontier of British India- Cap.R.B. Pemberton(1835), Manipur State Archive, Imphal.

² G. Kabui, *Lectures on the history of Manipur*, Manipur, Akansha publishing house, 2012, p. 13.

³History of Manipur – an Independent Kingdom (A.D 33-1949).http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/2710/1/11/11_chapter%203.pdf,(accessed on 10 May, 2018).

⁴ Singh P. Gunindro, *Coins of Manipur*, Imphal, 1983, p 36

*Mutua Bahadur of Mutua Museum, Imphal discovered a coin with the title Garibaniwaza Mekhleswar

⁵Kangleipak, land of Kanglei; Poireipak, land of Poirei; Meitrabak, land of Meiteis.

⁶Abdul ali, *Notes on Early History of Manipur*, 1923, Calcutta

⁷N. Pramodini. Devi, *The Cultural History of Early Manipur*, Kakching, Manipur, 2011, p. 2

⁸Gangmumei Kabui, *History of Manipur, Vol.1 Pre Colonial period*, New Delhi, 2011, p.1 3

⁹S.K. Chatterjee, *Kirata Jana Kriti, Contribution of the Indo Mongoliod people to Indian Culture*, Calcutta, 1950, 2nd edition, 1947, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, p. 124.

¹⁰R.B. Pemberton, Report on the Eastern Frontier of Bristish India, 1853, Calcutta 2nd Edition, Guwahati, p. 19.

groups namely i.e., Tropical Montaine, sub- tropical, Montaine Temperate.” E. W. Dun accounts that “The climate gave a nice inhabitate to grow rice, make a place for numerous rivers, streams and marshes and encourage aquatic and water loving plants. Forest in the east is not thick as in the west. Oak replaces bamboo, firs for Nageshwar, a drier climate produced a lighter and different kind of jungle. The villages in the valley are situated on the banks of the river or edge of the lakes so that every household has some water near it.”¹¹

F. Kingdom ward, writes that Manipur had a similar monsoon belt like of South East Asia.¹² He further states that “for long ages Manipur was almost completely sterile. The problem was simple; it had no flora at all. It had beendriven out by the cold. As the climate improved plant refugees began to return to their old homes from the warm south from the deep valleys and plains. These established themselves, multiplied until Manipur became a part of indo-Malaysia flora whence the bulk of its new population was derived... In fact the position of Manipur in the midst of glaciated mountains and astride one of the glaciated escape routes was peculiarly favourable for receiving contribution of flora from all directions.”¹³

The geographical setting gave an advantange for the Meiteis who dwelled in the valley to establish a far better in its society, economy, polity and cultural aspects than the tribes who settled in the surrounding hills. The integration of the seven Meitei principalitiesnamely, the *Angom, Moirang, Khuman, Luwangs, Khaba-Nganba, Sarang-Leishangthem* by the *Ningthouja* into one, in the mid-fifteenth centuryresulted in the formation of the Meitei kingdom.¹⁴ Gangumei Kabui noted that a transition phase could be seen from a tribal or lineage based polity to a full-fledged feudal state during the reign of the King Kyamba (1467-1508)during the medieval period of Manipur.¹⁵

1.2.2. Trade Route

Manipur had been an important trade route since the early times between South East Asia, Central Asia and South Asia. G.E. Harvey talked about “the two routes along the Irrawaddy and the Salween rivers, the third down the Chindwin River and through Manipur, took the caravan a three months journey to Afghanistan where the silk of China were exchanged for

¹¹ E.W. Dun, *Gazetteer of Manipur*, Simla, 1886, P. 2.

¹²F. Kingdom-Ward, *Plant Hunter in Manipur*, London, 1958, p. 232.

¹³Ward, *op. Cit.* P. 247

¹⁴Devi Monica Moirangthem, ‘*People and the environment: An ecological history of pre-colonial and colonial Manipur*,’ Doctoral Thesis, J.N.U, 2018, p. 4

¹⁵ Kabui, *History of Manipur*,p. 194.

the gold of Europe.”¹⁶This suggests that Manipur had relationship with some of the Asian countries.

1.2.3. Origin of Meiteis

Manipur has three ethnic community groups such as Meiteis in the valley, Kuki-Chins of the surrounding hills and the Nagas. They speak Tibeto- Burman languages and predominately Mongoloid elements.¹⁷ B.H Hodgson believed that the word “Meitei was a combined appellation of Siamese Tai and Kochin Chinese ‘Moy’ (*Moy Tai = Moytai= Moitai= Meitei* and that the Meiteis belonged to the Moi section of the great Tai race. Hudson explained that “it was the combination of two words such as ‘Mei’ and ‘Tei’. Mei means people ‘Tei’ means separate and Meitei as separate people. He further explained that Meitei belonged to Tibeto-Burman language groups as the Tai being of the Siamese-Chinese linguistic family.”¹⁸

1.2.4. Naga Kuki Connection

McCulloch developed a theory which stated that Meitei were the descendants of the Naga and the Kuki tribes.¹⁹He explained that

“The Meiteis’ Tradition believed that, the valley appears to have been occupied by some tribes such *Koomal (khuman)*, *Looang (Luwang)*, *Moirang* and Meitei (*Ningthouja*), all of whom came from different directions. For a time, the Koomal had been the most powerful principality and after its declension the Moirang tribe. But by degrees, the Meithei subdued the whole, and the whole, and the name Meithei has become applicable to all....I... think there is... ‘ground to conclude them to be descendants of the surrounding hill tribes.”²⁰

However Ch. Manihar Singh argued that “no such relation was there with the surrounding tribes of hills. But the chronicles revealed in a reverse way that the Meitei heroes migrated into hilly areas for settlements such as in Tangkhul, Kabuis, and other tribes.”²¹

1.2.5. Defining Kakching

¹⁶G.E. Harvey, *A History of Burma*, 1926, p. 9

¹⁷Kabui, *History of Manipur* p17

¹⁸T.C. Hudson, *The Meiteis*, 1908, p. 10

¹⁹ W. McCulloch, *An account of the valley of Munnipore, Calcutta*, 1859, p. 4.

²⁰McCulloch, *op. Cit.* P. 4.

²¹Manihar Ch. *The Meitei: Origin and Affinity*. JMU, 1984, p 12

The present state of Manipur has now sixteen districts after adding seven new districts on 9 of December, 2017 to the nine existing ones. And Kakching constituencies came under the newly formed Kakching District. Kakching too had a long history. In the accounts of the Royal Chronicle the name Kakching is mentioned many times. The local well-known writers and scholars contributed their efforts to understand the history of Kakching. It is stated that the people of Kakching used to settle in the Uripork area (one town of Imphal West District) in those early time. There are of multiplenumbers of stories which talk about the naming of Kakching. Moirangthem Premananda Singh in his work *Kakching Kharadang* mentioned that the name Kakching was given after *Sora Laihatthouba*(the sky god) beheaded or cut the head of *Tubi Lairen*(the two headed snake king).²² In another account the name of the Kakching was mentioned when King Naofangba's wife was taken from Thoubal (one of the District of Manipur) to the royal place. It is mention in M. Gourachandra's book that

*Kakching di nongpok maikei kangleiga hek thangnaba lamni.*²³

(Kakching was situated on the east and next to Kanglei, Imphal).

“During the reign of *Meidingdu Houdem Ewanthaba*(1163-1195 A.D.) the name of Kakching was mentioned.

Meidingu Iwanthabagi thongnet Hi bu “Kakching ngamba chongkhufaba”koue.

(King Iwanthaba's shoe wastitled as *Chongkhufaba*, the one who conquered Kakching.)

This shows that Kakching was already in existence in the 12th century A.D. M.Gourachandra stated that‘In the royal Chronicles of Manipur i.e. *Cheitharol Kumbaba*,Kakching was among the four villages which was conquered by the King *Mungyamba* in 1495 A.D and a tribute was collected in return. An account also mentioned about the meeting of the King *Meidingu Charairongba* (1697-1709A.D) with a person from Kakching and was enthroned to be the ruler of Kakching by the King *Charairongba* because of his tremendous wisdom. Since then he was known as Budhiraj.”²⁴Mentioned also made in a book called “*Kakchinggi Itihas*” about the division of Kakching into three parts such as

²² M. P. Singh, *Kakchingkharadang*, 1975,LeelaSingh Memorial press, Kakching, p.1.

²³Gourachnadra Mayanglambam, *Meitrabakki Puwarida Kakching*, Pioneer Press, Kakching, 2002, p.3.

²⁴ Gourachandra M. op. cit. p. 4.

Kakching Wairi, Kakching Khulen and Kakching Khunou.²⁵The Sekmai River which runs within the land divided the Kakching Khulen and Wairi. Some of the localities (*leikai*) that settled in Kakching khulen were Moirangthem Leikai, Makha Leikai, Pukhrambam Leikai, Sabal Leikai, Paji Leikai and so on. In Kakching Wairi, they were Khuyai Leikai, Salam Leikai, Senapati Leikai, Leishangthem Leikai etc. Some localities were named after a historic figure in the Kakching community such as Uraobam Pareng, Khulalpam Pareng, Yumjaomayum Pareng etc.

In order to maintain a strong relationship with the King of Manipur each year an individual was selected to work under the royal household. It was termed as *Lallup kaba*. In 1711 A.D. during the reign of Bhaighachadra, “a person named *Chaoba* from Kakching Wairi Leishangthem locality was selected for *Lallup Kaba* in the royal household as he was well fit and successful in his deeds and actions. The King was well pleased with his services and was given the title ‘*Leishang Arangba*’. Before he returned back to Kakching he was asked by the King to mention any gift that he could present to Chaoba. Taking the opportunity he requested the King to build a market for Kakching people and his request was granted by the King. Since then a market was established in Kakching.”²⁶

Kakching was famous for iron smelting industries. One colony called Yotsungbam Pareng was named after it as the colony carried out the iron smelting activities. Through this business the people of Kakching paid tribute to the King of Manipur every year. It was believed that the *Lord Khamlangba*, founded the iron smelting works in the Kakching area.

1.2.6. Early Traditional Medicinal Practices

Since time immemorial, the knowledge of traditional health care system known as *Layeng Pathap* was already there and was widely used by the local practitioners, called *Maiba and Maiba* (local male and female health care physicians). During 19 century, “there were sixteen core departments, among them *Ametpa* and *Maiba Loishang* (department of medicine) were categorized under the welfare department.”²⁷ “The administrative report of Manipur stated that during the last quarter of 19th century and the early 20th century when the

²⁵ *Kakchingi Itihas*, P. 10 (written Script)

²⁶ Interviewed with Gourachandra at Kakching Makha Leikai, 12th June, 2018.

²⁷ G. Kabui, *Lectures on the history of Manipur*, Manipur, Akansha publishing house, 2012, p.56.

Malaria epidemic broke out throughout the valley, regular systematic treatment with kerosene and linseed oil were widely used for the treatment.”²⁸

In Kakching area, the traditional medicinal practice which was locally known as *Maiba Maibi Layeng Pathap* came into existence since time immemorial. It included such as herbal medicinal treatment, home medications, ceremonial purification, and prayers. *Maiba* and *Maibi* were of different types which were divided according to their unique talents such as herbalist, traditional birth attendance (*Maibis*), rituals performance and so on. It is also known that the knowledge of traditional medicinal practices was mainly handed down from generation to generations. It is a belief that such knowledge were given through *mantak* i.e. revelation in their dream.

Kshetrimayum Kala Singh in his work *Chinjaknana Layengba*(Food as Medicine) talks about the different types of healing system such as treatment using biomedicine, through prayers or rituals purification, yoga therapy etc and traditional medicine was one of the essential treatment.²⁹For curing ailments the oral accounts also gives valuable knowledge on the traditional medicinal practices in Kakching. One local physician of Kakching talks about the importance of *Nomangkha* (*Phlogacan thusthyrsiformis*) and from the early days the importance of *Nongmangkhas* commonly use for the treatment of fever and later it was mixed with kerosene and salt for the treatment of scabies.³⁰

Dr Kshetrimayum Vedmani Devi, in her paper entitled “*Traditional Knowledge System of the Tribes and Indigenous Communities of Manipur and Issues of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)*” opined that “the use of locally available plants and herbs for food and traditional medicine is an integral part of the native people’s lives.”³¹ The practices are still prevalent even in the modern times.

Manisha Vinayakb Shirodkar asserted that there is a need of integrating traditional health practise with modern health practices in order to develop a sustainable model for people who lives in different geographical areas.³²

²⁸ Administrative Reports of Manipur Political Agency (1915-1930), Manipur State Archive, Imphal.

²⁹ K. K. Singh, *ChinjaknaLayengba*, Lemon Printing Press, Paona Bazar, 2016,p2

³⁰ Interviewed with NaoremBorot Singh, Kakching SumakLeikai,29/1/2018,

³¹ Manipur thrives on Traditional Medicines, *The North East Today*, available at <http://thenortheasttoday.com/Manipur-thrives-on-traditional-medicines/>

³² M.V. Shirodkar, *Traditional Health Practise among Hilly Regions: A case study of Paten Tehsil*, Solapur, Ashok Yakkal Devi publication, 2016, p.24.

1.3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A plethora of literature on traditional medicinal practice has been published in a national context which later contributed in the understanding of the concepts on health, diseases and medicinal practices in the different parts of the world. Medicinal history is considered as the science of healing, treatment and prevention of diseases and promotion to health from prehistoric to till date. One can trace back the history of medicine from Henry Siegerist's work *History of Medicine* (1987) which devoted the development of medical history from the ancient times and he linked with each civilization. His work presented the historical approaches to medicine, principles, and patterns and he also discusses the causation and nature of diseases.

K. Park in his work entitled "*Preventive and Social Medicine*" (2002) is one of the pioneer works which mainly deals with the origin of medicine through down the ages. He mainly discussed how the idea of medicine developed, and how the idea changes through times. He stated that earlier medicine were considered for the treatment of sickness but later it was developed in prevention of diseases, promotion of health and improvement of the quality of individuals and groups of community. He also talks about the concept of health and diseases and the changing nature in the society. In the later part of his work he focuses on the importance of the relation of health and the environment, social science, and so on.

W.H.R. Rivers in his work entitled '*Medicine, Magic and Religion*' (1924) made a huge contribution by adding a unique value to the history of medicine. It underlines the social practices and religious beliefs by revealing human mind and the fundamental practices. He talks about the members of different community who dealt with the diseases of healing art. He tries to discover the nature of the concept of diseases and the factor of causation given by different people. Moreover he also refers to the medical practices of the Hawaiian Islands and the treatment performed by the priest by using herbs. He also discusses the differences and similarities of the treatment of ailments in different part of the world such as China, Japan, Indonesia, India, and America and so on.

David Arnold in his "*Introduction: Disease Medicine and Empire*" (1988) discussed about history of medicine and stated that there are two approaches of seeing 'history of medicine namely history of medicine as an unfolding story of scientific discovery and others seen as a cultural artefact and a reflection of a social total being'. He also pointed out that the pre-colonial societies were not free from endemic diseases. His work explores the role of the

state in medical and public health activities by examining the state policies and managements system.

Joan Lane's work "*A social history of medicine: Health, Healing and Diseases in England 1750-1950*" (2001) subscribe to the development of medicine chronically and talks about the earliest development of social medicine under the poor health care institution and how it was shaped into a professional way of health care system.

O.P Jaggi in his work "*Indian system of medicine*" (2016) basically focuses on the origin and development of medical system in India during the early periods. He emphasizes on the knowledge of life i.e. *Ayurveda* and its historical background and concepts of health in relation with *Ayurveda*. He deals the different disciplines in the system and treatment aspects. He also talks about the system of practices that were prevalent in the subcontinent.

In G. Nemthianngai work titled "*Indigenous Medicine and Health Care among Paite Tribe of Manipur*"(2011) she describes the indigenous medicinal substances and health care among the Paite tribe of Manipur. She also discusses the trade trends in indigenous medicine not only at the national but also international level with its impact on the people. Till today, the practice of using indigenous medicine is prevalent in the various regions of Manipur.

TelemJogendrajit in his work *Sidahidak*(2011) talks about the importance of nectar which not only protects individual from sickness but also helps to increase life longevity by keeping someone's life fit and healthy. He has provided an extensive collection of medicinal plants and its benefits in the society of maintaining good health. He also discusses on the health of a man in relationship with the environment and how the environment promotes good health and prevent us from diseases.

Konsam Manikchand's *Loyumpa Silyen Amasung Masilgi Puyashing* talks about the different institutions, it rules and regulation and various works that had been carried out by the different departments since the time of *Nongda Lairen Pakhangba*, the first king of Manipur. The department included *Maiba Maibi Mashil* (duties or activities of Maiba/Maibi) *Chingloi Mashil*(duty and activities of hills), *Tampakloi mashil*(works of thevalley). He further discuses each activities from the year 1074 to 1122 C.E. that had been carried out under the King *Loyumba*. It also deals with the administrative system from the reign of King *Khagemba*.

S.N. Parratt in her work entitled “*The religion of Manipur*” discusses the religious beliefs and practices of Manipur, the role of *Maiba* and *Maibi* in the society and various rituals, the belief of *lai*(god) in the early pre-Hindu period. She further discussed the serious attempt that has been made by the Hindu *Vaishnavites* to impose the new religion first in the royal household then to the people of Manipur.

S. Kumar Singh has highlighted the nature and the origin of *Maiba* and *Maibi* in his work “*Maiba amasung Maibigi Sanskriti*” (the rules, language and nature of *Maiba* and *Maibi*). He further discusses the establishment of *Maiba/Maibi*'s institution, their role in the society, their hardship and their wishes in the nature of their services.

Pukhrambam Borot Singh thoroughly examines the *Lai Haraoba* of Kakching (merry making of god) in his work “*Kakching Haraoba*”. The work deals the reason behind this festival i.e. *Lai Haraoba*. It also examines the duties of the attendants especially the role of *Maiba* and *Maibi*, the activities that had been carried out during the *Haraoba*, the traditional dance and the prayers, the rituals that were offered to the *lai* during the festivals.

It is to be noted the purpose of this reviewing books is to understand the existing research work and to make it more relevant in explaining the research findings.

1.4. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Numerous works has been done which were predominantly on plant based medicinal practices but very little information has been gathered on the nature of sickness or ailments, role of local male and female practitioners by using traditional way of medicinal practices in earlier works in Manipur. Also the ethno-medical beliefs and practices of the Meiteis have not received much attention as a research topic and the concept of sickness, diseases; healing system by using traditional methods remains untouched. The purpose of this study is to find out the historical background of Kakching, the concept of health, sickness, diseases, healing methods, the role of the local practitioners in performing such practices. Further through this research, efforts were made to find out the belief system and the idea of taboos that led to the cause of illness, treatment and methods.

Further, the research has been extended to understand the promotion of health and prevention of sickness which were well established in the society prior to the introduction of modern medicines. Therefore the research examined the Kakching society and also briefly incorporated the traditional medicinal practices of Manipur as a whole.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The study is undertaken on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are more of official reports, archival records and local accounts. The nature of the study is based on qualitative and descriptive analysis methods. Oral interview based on direct observation, purposive and open ended interview were conducted and this were supplemented by personal diaries, legends, folktales and myths.

1.6. AREA OF STUDY

The study mainly focused on the Kakching District which is located in the south-eastern part of Manipur 4(four) Assembly Constituencies namely Hiyanglam Assembly Constituency, Wabagai Assembly Constituency, Sugnu Assembly Constituency and Kakching Assembly Constituency fall under the District. The period of the study covered up to the period 1947.

1.7. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To highlight the concept of traditional medicinal practice.
2. To trace the history of traditional medicine and its uses in the society.
3. To examine the traditional belief system of Meiteis of Kakching.
4. To study the role of *Maiba* and *Maibi* and their healing practices.

1.8.CHAPTERIZATION:

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter deals with the historical background of Manipur, with special reference to pre-colonial Kakching society its origin, migration, culture, religion and economy; also it talked about the role of Kings, chiefs, priesst in the society. It gives a brief description on the area of the study, also consists review of literature on the traditional medicinal practice, the statement of the problem; objectives of the study, nature and scope of the study, the methodology and the last section introduces the whole structure of the dissertation.

Chapter II: Concept of traditional medicinal practice

This chapter highlighted the general concept on the traditional medicinal practices and its development in the context of India, Manipur and finally Kakching District. The chapter also discussed the relationship between nature and the people of the Kakching and their understanding of the surrounding environment. It also explained on the concept of diseases and its treatment offered to the people using traditional medicinal in the early period

Chapter III: Belief System

This chapter discussed the traditional belief system and the religion of Meiteis of Kakching. It traced the early religious belief system of Kakching and their faith in god and goddess, nature of worship, their festivals and various rites and rituals, practiced in pre-colonial period. The last part of the chapter briefly discussed the changing trend of the Meiteis belief due to the advent of Hinduism.

Chapter IV: Role of *Maiba* and *Maibi*

This chapter discussed the unique features of the Meiteis religious pretitioners or priests and priestess known as *Maibi* and *Maiba*. It examined the different types of *Maibi* and *Maiba* and their role in the society and their healing practices by using traditional medicinal methods.

Chapter V: Conclusion

This chapter summarized the findings of the research.

CHAPTER TWO

TRADITIONAL MEDICINAL KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES

2.1. Introduction:

Prior to the presentation of modern medicine, in Manipur particularly in the Kakching area, traditional medicinal practice was generally practiced for the treatment of illnesses or ailments as they possessed medicinal characteristics. The World Health Organization (WHO) clarifies “traditional medicine as the sum total of the abilities, knowledge, and practices based on the different theories, beliefs, and encounters to different cultures and societies, whether logical or not, utilized in the support of wellbeing as well as in prevention, diagnosis, enhancement or treatment of physical and psychological instability”³³.

The word tradition is derived from the Latin *tradere* which indicates handing over, to pass on. AL Kroeber characterizes tradition as “the passing on of culture to the next generation and giving on through time”.³⁴ Charles M. Leslie explains traditional medicine as “the wellbeing values and knowledge, roles and rehearsed of laymen, of professional specialists in folk medication and of homeopathic medication.”³⁵

Diverse nations have distinctive ideas with regards to medicine. As indicated by Henry Siegler, a medical historian, “each culture had built up an arrangement of medication and medicinal history is nevertheless one part of culture.”³⁶ R.J. Dubos in his work entitled *Man, Medicine and Environment* likewise remarked that “ancient medicine was the mother of science and assumed a great role in the incorporation of early societies.”³⁷

Joshi noticed that “Traditional medical systems change from one culture to another, however there are regular or common components in them. The components are magic, black art, and herbal medicine.”³⁸

Chinese medicine is known for the world’s originally composed body of medicinal knowledge and information. Since the early period in view of its helpful aspects the bulk of

³³Traditional Medicinal Strategy, 2014-2023, WHO,p15
http://www.searo.who.int/entity/health_situation_trends/who_trm_strategy_2014-2023.pdf?ua=1(accessed on 29th Feb 2018)

³⁴ Kroeber,A.L. *Anthropology: Race, Language, Culture, Psychology, Pre-History*, New York, Harcourt Brace,1948, p411

³⁵Charles M. Leslie, *Asian Medical System: A Comparative Study*, London, university of California press, 1996, p1

³⁶Siegler Henry,A History of Medicine, Vol I Oxford University Press, London, 1951. p 33.

³⁷Dubos, R.J.*Man, Medicine and Environment*. New American Library, New York, 1969 p.7.

³⁸Joshi, P.C. *Medical Anthropology: An Overview*.In P.C.Joshi and Anil Mahajan (eds.) *Studies in Medical Anthropology*. Delhi: Reliance Publishing House, 1990,p7

the population relied upon the medicinal plants for the treatment of illness. Till now “over 85% of Chinese Material Medica (CMM), a complete reference book which recorded the finding of plant based medicine, originates from plants which additionally cover various ethnic natural medicines like herbal and folk medicines.”³⁹

N. Haokip stated that “Medicine is both a belief and ability and is intended to investigate the importance and meaning and nature of ailment and with this it provide a way to cure the ailments. Consequently, the investigation on medicine provides an incorporated information on the life and culture of the general population and furthermore on the interactional examples of assorted beliefs and thoughts that have been created round the ancestral (tribal) society through ages.”⁴⁰

Frederick L. Dunn has arranged three kinds of medical framework based on social and geographical setting for example local medicinal framework which named as folk medicine; regional medicine as *Ayurveda*, *Unani* and traditional Medicine; and current or scientific or modern medicine.⁴¹

Personalistic medicinal framework believed that “the fundamental cause for the sickness was an outcome of an agent that can be a divinity or God or ghost or it may be an individual. For example, in the early Mexican Society it was believed that diseases usually fall on those individuals who outraged the rain god i.e. ‘enanitos’. When they were furious with any individual they breathe out their breath, making him fall sick with a typical disease known as “aire de cuevas”.⁴² In such condition the treatment based on magic or ritual using medicinal practices was the main solution for healing. Ackerknecht has utilized a simple term known as “Magico-religious” or “super naturalistic ideas”.⁴³ However the naturalistic framework observed the causes because of the imbalance of body’s substance or the natural events like snake bites etc.”⁴⁴

³⁹ Pan, S. Y. Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine, vol. 2013(2013), No. 627375, pp. 25 <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/ecam/2013/627375/> (accessed on 19th Feb, 2018)

⁴⁰ N. Haokip, *Tribal Medicine and Healing Practices*, Research Project, Tribal Research Institute Government of Manipur, Imphal, 2018 p. 11.

⁴¹ Fredrick L. Dunn. *Traditional Asian Medicine and Cosmopolitan Medicines* Adaptive system in Charles Leslie (ed). *Asian Medicinal systems: A comparative Study*, Motilal Banarasis Das Delhi, 1998, p. 135

⁴² William Madsen, *Shamanism in Mexico*, Southern Journal of Anthropology, vol. 11, No. 1: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3628996> (accessed date 2nd Nov, 2018).

⁴³ Erwin Heinz Ackerknecht, *A Short History of Medicine*, Ronald Press company, New York, 1955, p. 12.

⁴⁴ George M. Foster and Barbara G. Anderson, *The Field and History of Medical Anthropology The New Field of Medical Anthropology*. http://www.sjaakvandergeest.socsci.uva.nl/pdf/medical_anthropology/content_art.pdf (accessed date 3rd December, 2018)

Kelly Kate strongly believed that from “the early period the Greeks, Romans, Chinese had impacted the knowledge of traditional medicine to keep individuals from specific illnesses or diseases and further stated that from the enduring earth tablets in Mesopotamia, written in cuneiform it is additionally affirmed that around a thousand mentioned about medicinal concerns which comprised of medicinal procedures.”⁴⁵

Indeed, even in African nations, for the essential health care needs, large number of populace depends on traditional medicine. Traditional medicine used to be the major medical framework accessible to huge number of individuals in Africa in both the rural and urban networks.⁴⁶ M.G. Mokgobi propose that it was the main source of medicinal consideration for a more noteworthy extent of the populace and he further noticed that every single African region, traditional healers were very resourceful and assumed a vital role in numerous circle of general population’s lives and they were considered to ‘medical knowledge storehouses’.⁴⁷ Amid the Middle Ages, because of the spread of Christianity, healing was accepted and considered as a demonstration of divine kindness and faith in the person of Jesus Christ as divine and perfect healer.⁴⁸ Most Christian believes that healing was considered as demonstration of philanthropy, rehearsed out of religious dedication rather than a target of objective enquiry.

In India, from time immemorial the general population already had built up the knowledge of utilizing plants as medicinal treatment and professional specialists and practitioners served an incredible help for the healthcare of the general public. In the earliest literature of India, the Rig-Veda referenced about the idea of medicine and its uses amid that period. Additionally we find the evidence of the essential of general wellbeing in the Indus valley civilization. Their style of drainage system, bathrooms, sewage douse-pits, garbage cutes and block-lined wells limited the problem that led to undesirable affliction.⁴⁹ Apart

⁴⁵ Kelly Kate, *History of Medicine, Early Civilizations Pre-History Times to 500 C.E*, New York, 2009 ,p23.

⁴⁶ A.A. Abdullahi, ‘Trends and challenges of traditional medicine in Africa’, *African Journal of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicines*, vol. 8 no. 5, 2011, pp 115-123. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3252714/> (accessed on 4th Feb, 2018).

⁴⁷ Mokgobi M.G, *Understanding traditional African healing*. Afr J Phys Health Educ Recreat Dance, 2014 Sep; 20(Suppl 2):24-34, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26594664>, (accessed on 6th April, 2018)

⁴⁸ Dorothy Porter, *Health Civilization and the state: A History of Public Health from Ancinet to Modern times*, Routledge, New York, 1999, p20.

⁴⁹ Frederick L. Dunn, 1998, p148

from this, the preventive measures based on health and cleanliness, their insight on hygiene, nutrition, and safe drinking water affirmed the civic services of the people of Harappa.⁵⁰

In India the oldest medicinal system *Ayurveda* is considered being the most antiquated framework for the treatment of illnesses which was established from the Vedic period. As indicated by Y. S. Jaiswal and L.L. Williams *Ayurveda* stands to be “the oldest, most widely acknowledge practices and prospered indigenous system of medicine.”⁵¹ The study of life which characterized the *Ayurveda* is a Sanskrit word *Ayur* implies life and *Veda* implies knowledge. “It intended to enable people to remain healthy by giving knowledge and insight while understanding their full human potential.”⁵² Romilar Thapar the most prominent and celebrated author of Ancient India noticed that the healer or shaman started to think and learn the medical knowledge in an appropriate way.⁵³

During the early period, diseases were accepted to be mostly effected due to anger of divine beings and impact of evil spirits. To cure from such illnesses the healing art was done by prayers and petitions with few hymns. Apart from this they normally utilized traditional herbal medicines. Such treatment was likewise used for certain disease like poor visions, faltering and even leprosy.⁵⁴ Indeed, even today large number of Indian populace still relies upon herbal medicine for their essential health care needs.

The early hymns of the Rig Veda mentioned the use of medicinal herbs and plants for healing activities. The juice of the soma plant was applauded as the amrita (ambrosia) and medicine for a sick man and as the remedy of life.⁵⁵ Likewise Reddy discussed about the traditional medicinal practice which incorporates an all encompassing knowledge by giving preventive and curative aspects of illness and disease and to promote health and total well-being.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Suraj Bhan and K.S Dahiya. ‘Disease, Surgery and Health in the Harappa civilization’ in Deepak Kumar (ed) *Diseases and medicine in India- A Historical Overview*, Indian History Congress, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2001, p3

⁵¹ Y.S. Jaiswal and L.L. Williams, ‘A glimpse of Ayurveda– The forgotten history and principles of Indian traditional medicine’, *Journal of Traditional and Complementary Medicine*, vol.7, no. 1, Jan 2017, pp 50-53,

⁵² What is Ayurveda? <https://www.ayurvedichealing.net/Ayurveda/> (accessed on 15 March 2018).

⁵³ Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the origin to A.D.1300* Penguin books, INC: New York, 1960, p 27.

⁵⁴ Asha B. ‘A study of the application of information technology in tribal medicine in Kerala with regard to forest medicinal plants’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Calicut, 2002, p. 22.

⁵⁵ C. Muthu, ‘A short Review of history of ancient Hindu Medicine’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, vol. 6, 1913, p. 180, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2006236/> (accessed on 26th March 2018)

⁵⁶ N. Haokip, *Tribal Medicine and Healing Practices*, Research Project, Tribal Research Institute Government of Manipur, Imphal, 2018, p12.

Even in North-east India, from time immemorial and till today the general population depended on the traditional medicines for the supervision or treatment of different diseases. The Bodo people utilized natural remedies such as plants and herbs to fix ailments. They generally had a standard medicine man called *Oja* who gives traditional cures to various basic ailments.⁵⁷ It is stated that from the olden days, “the Mizos dealt with their health care needs through traditional medicines in the form of plants and creatures parts, minerals and different substances. They have the learning of treatment of childbirth, fractures and of gynecology.”⁵⁸

2.2. Meitei Traditional Medicinal Knowledge

Manipur is also known for her rich in flora and fauna. Since time immemorial, the knowledge of traditional health care system known as *Layeng Pathap* was already there and was generally used by the local practitioners, called as *Maiba and Maiba* (local male and female health care physicians).

The role of medicine man was progressively important in the early days. He was known as magician, the witch specialist and the shaman.⁵⁹ In India they were named as *Bhara, Guniyas and Bhopsa*.⁶⁰

During 19th century in Manipur, there were sixteen offices in royal house, among them *Ametpa and Maiba Loishang* (department of medicine) were sorted under the welfare office.⁶¹ According to the respectively administrative report accounts it is stated that in the last quarter of 19th and the early 20th century when the Malaria epidemic broke out all through the valley, deliberate treatment with kerosene and linseed oil were broadly used for the treatment.⁶²

Prior to the coming of medicinal specialist or modern doctor in 1920s, the weight of the healthcare was taken up by the Meitei *Maibas* and countless number of plants and vegetables were utilized in the treatment of sickness as well as served as an economical purpose. The

⁵⁷ShabnamBormon, ‘Traditional Health care Practices and Bodo Women’,proceeding ofNorth east India History Association, Thirty-first Session, Don Bosco College Tura, Meghalaya, Vol. ,2010,p.152

⁵⁸Zoathanpuii, ‘History of Health Care in Mizoram: Pre-Colonial Period to 1972’, PhD thesis, Mizoram University, 2014, p. 106

⁵⁹ Faroch Erach Udwardia, p.9

⁶⁰ P.C. Joshi, *Issues in Tribal Health and Medicines* in A.K. Kalla and P.C. Joshi(ed). Tribal Health and Medicines, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2004, p.40.

⁶¹ G. Kabui, p.56.

⁶²Administrative Reports of Manipur Political Agency (1915-1930), Manipur State Archive, Imphal.

fables of a romantic tale called “*Khamba Thoibi*” uncovered the reason behind the physical strength of Khamba due to fond of eating pennyworth (*Centella asiatica*). Generally the Meiteis were fond of vegetables serving of mixed greens (*singju*), boiled vegetables delicacy with chilli (*eromba*), vegetable soup (*chamthong*), simple vegetable boiled (*champhut*), broil vegetable (*kanghou*), blended curry (*chagempomba/ utipomba*), and fruits curry (*heithongba*). They were widely consumed by each household of the Meiteis family. The purpose for the use of plants and vegetables were for dietary consumption as well as a source of medicine which was already in the psyche of the early Meitei forefather. They possessed a huge knowledge of medical values of plants.

In Kakching area, the traditional medicinal practice locally known as *Maiba Maibi Layeng Pathap* was in presence since time immemorial. The traditional healer of Meitei’s faith from the early times learnt the healing properties of specific herbs and plants and their treatment including home medications, treatment utilizing herbs and parts of the plants. Rituals, supplications and customs were conducted as an act of offering to god for healing ailments. A myth was told in which the sun god created seven *sidahidak* (plants which has medicinal properties) for seven days. “They were:-

1. *Nongmaijing*(Sunday)- *Nongmakha*
2. *Ningthoukaba*(Monday)- *Ningthoukhongli*
3. *Leipakpokpa*(Tuesday)- *Leipaklei*
4. *Yumsaleisa*(Wednesday)- *Yerum keirum*
5. *Sagolshen*(Thursday) – *Sagol hidak*
6. *Erai*(Friday)- *Laihidak*
7. *Thangja* (Saturday)- *Thang hidak*

The above *sidahidak* was given to the King *Puthiba* when he was lying on his sickbed and was relieved totally. From this occurrence, *sidahidak* has been known as the king of every single medicinal plant and stated to use for the treatment of ailments in seven *salai*(direction) of Manipur.”⁶³

Maiba and *Maibi* were of different types which were divided according to their unique blessings and talents such as herbalist, traditional birth attendance (*Maibis*), rituals performance *Maiba* and so on. One interesting part to be noted here is that the knowledge of

⁶³Yogendrajit Singh Telem, *Sidahidak*, Imphal, 2001, p. 76-77

traditional medicinal practices was mainly handed down from one generation to another generation.

Dr Kalanjoy, a priest, botanist and a medical practitioner explained that the significance of medicinal plants and its benefits had been revealed since the time of *Nongda Lairen Pakhnagba* when a man and the divine had a solid bond amongst each other and he further explained that the divine association has tremendously helped him in his healing treatment and half of his medicine was revealed and foretold in his dream by god or in contact with the *lais*.⁶⁴

2.3. The Meitei concept of Health, Diseases and Healing

Since the early time, the Meiteis had developed the knowledge of primary health care and the treatment related to diseases which were prevalent during that period. Margaret Read accounts on the concept of health care can be identified with the Meitei concept of health wherein she expressed

“Health is the result of a right connection between man and his environment, the surrounding and his fellow man and that it was related with good gifts and beauty- all that was positively valued throughout everyday life.”⁶⁵

The common disease or sickness or ailments during the early period were cough cold, fever, piles, skin diseases, dysentery, snake bite, urine problem, leprosy, indigestion, jaundice, women problems, diabetes, asthma, bronchitis, chicken pox, cholera, malaria etc.⁶⁶

The oral accounts also testify the valuable knowledge of the traditional medicinal practices commonly used in Kakching before the coming of the British settlers. One local physician of Kakching told about the importance of *Nomangkha* (*Phlogacanthus thuyrsiformis*). He states that from the early days the significance of *Nomangkha* came to be known and the general population started to utilize it for the treatment of fever and sometimes it was mixed with kerosene and salt for the treatment of scabies.⁶⁷ *Heirangoi* was one of the important plant that was generally used both as edible and used for medicinal purpose. In *Lai Haroaba* the essence of the *Heirangoi* fruit has been expressed...

⁶⁴ Interviewed with Dr Kalonjoy at Phumlou on 2nd August, 2018.

⁶⁵ Margaret Read, *Culture, Health and Diseases- Social and Cultural Influences on Health Programmes in Developing Countries*, Tavistock Publications Limited, London, 1966, p.25.

⁶⁶ Interviewed with Nitaibi Irom, at Langmeidong on 23rd July, 2018.

⁶⁷ Interviewed with Naorem Borot Singh, 29/1/2018, Kakching Sumak Leikai, Yotsungbam Pareng.

'Heirangoinida chanaba heinida

Sibuda thoina haoba neini chindamba heinida'

The translation goes like this

Heirangoi, the edible fruit

there is no more prominent taste than the fruit of *heirangoi*

Extract of root bark of *Heirangoi* was used for different purpose like leprosy, diabetes, jaundice, burning sensation, joint inflammation and skin maladies etc.⁶⁸

Another treatment for scabies was through rituals and the rite included along with the *Inllukok* (a local plant). While gathering the leaves, the concerned individual needed to pluck breathlessly and reciting must be done upon the leaves. After the chant, the leaves were crushed and the juices were drunk. It was believed that the leaves would give some relieve to the ailing body.⁶⁹

The medicines were usually extracted from various parts of the plants such as roots and from bark, stem and wood, leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, the whole plants, gum-resins and oleo-resins etc.

2.3.1. Daily care

The womenfolk of Kakching were known for their beautiful, long, black, and silky and volume hair and they had the traditional way of hair care system. While cleaning up the hair was taken consideration with *chenghi*, a sort of traditional shampoo prepared from rice water adding with some herbals plants or leaves such as *yensil mana* (*Angiosperm (Dicotyledon)*), *peruk* (*Centella asiatic*), *heibi mana* (*Spinosa Linn*) also used for intestine worm and leaf paste allied on head in hoarseness⁷⁰, *sangbrei mana* (*Parviflorus benth*), *Khongjai Napi* (Goat weed), *leibak kundo* (*oleracea Linn*) *hameng Sampakpi* (*pillosa Linn*) and so forth which was boiled properly and used after it was chilled off. Sometimes the hair was given back rub with *thoithing thao* (sesame seed oil) which kept from grey hair and advanced hair growth.

⁶⁸ Interviewed with Mayanglambam Hiramani Singh, Kakching Wairi, June 29th, 2018.

⁶⁹ Interviewed with Gourachandra Singh Mayanglambam, Kakching Makha Leikai on 12th June, 2018.

⁷⁰ Herbal Medicine of Manipur: A Colour Encyclopaedia By Huidrom Birkumar Singh, Daya publishing house, 2003, p 38

2.3.2 Importance of Sacred Grove

Madhav Gadgil and M. D. Subash Chandaran explained that sacred groves are one of the best instances of traditional conservative practices which are also the focus of social and religious life of indigenous individuals.⁷¹ Hughes and Chandran clarifies sacred groves as “fragments of scene, containing trees and includes different types of life and land, that are delimited and ensured by human social orders since the belief to keep them in a generally undisturbed state is an outflow of vital relationship to divine or to nature.”⁷² Gadgil and Vartak explained that “Sacred groves are more or less pockets of peak vegetation. These forest preserved on religious grounds are the genuine indicators of the kind of vegetation that once existed along these hilly terrains, long before the dawn of human advancement.”⁷³

D. Brandis, the first Inspector general of forest in India who worked on sacred groves in the year 1897 commented that “sacred groves as an indigenous form of sacred appearance were already existed in almost all the territories of British India.”⁷⁴ Sacred groves are given with different names according to their location such as “Sharana in Madhya Pradesh, Kovilkadu in Tamil Nadu, Devrani or Devrahati in Maharashtra, Umang Lai in Manipur (Umang- Forest, Lai- god) and the ideas, traditions, worship and beliefs were also diverge from region to region.”⁷⁵ In Meghalaya, the idea and concept of protection of sacred grove preservation were already known by the people of Khasis, Garos and Jaintias.⁷⁶ D. Kharmawphlang remarked: “These forests are residence to various vegetation, some of them were endangered and accordingly are rich in bio-diversity. Ecological scientists have opined after a thorough survey in the forest and stated that these forests give the best natural

⁷¹Madhav Gadgil and M D Subash Chandran, “Sacred Groves” *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 1/2, Indigenous Vision: Peoples of India attitude to the environment, Spring-Summer, 1992, p. 183.

⁷²J.D. Hughes and M.D.S. Chandran, “Sacred groves around the Earth: An overview”, *Conserving the Sacred for conserving biodiversity*, P.S Ramkrishnan, K.G. Saxena and U.M. Chandrashekhara (ed.), New Delhi, 1998, p. 69.

⁷³Madhav Gadgil and V.D. Vartak, “Sacred Groves of Maharashtra: An Inventory”, *Glimpse of Indian Ethno-Botany*, (ed.) S.K Jain, Delhi, 1981, p. 272.

⁷⁴Ramachandra Guha, “Forestry in British and Post-British India: A Historical Analysis”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 1. No. 44, October 29th 1983, p. 1883.

⁷⁵Ashalata Kh, M.L. Khan, R.S. Tripathi, “Sacred Groves of Manipur”, *Current Science*, Vol. 87, No. 4, 25th August 2004, p. 340.

⁷⁶S. Jeeva, B.P. Mishra, N. Venugopal, L. Kharlukhi and R.C. Laloo, “Traditional knowledge and biodiversity conservation in the sacred groves of Meghalaya” *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge*, Vol. 5, No. 4, October 2006, pp. 563-568

surrounding for the reproduction of species and could help in better utilization of fallow land. They could also serve as very important study sites for environmental investigation.”⁷⁷

Even in Manipur, the Meiteis already had developed the concept of ensuring and worshipping sacred groves. They believed that the forest offered the consecrated abode of various deities, who were considered as the defender and protector of the surrounding environment and safeguard of the existing community. The sacred grove of Heingang-Marjing was accepted as the consecrated habitation of Ebudhou-Marjing and the sacred forest of Langol Thangok lairembi for the gods Langol Ashithel and Ema thangok lairembi.⁷⁸

The role of sacred grove also proposed the significance of conserving varieties of the fauna and flora of Manipur. Some of the sacred groves are:-

1. “*Yumjao Lairembi- Langmeidong’s yumjao lairembi* was the habitat of a medicinal edible fruit called Heirit (*Ficus genia*) and its fruit was used for the treatment of dysentery (crushed unripe fruit with salt).
2. *Kwak- Tobgpham-at Uyokching* a sacrosanct hill at Kakching which offered a place to conserve the rare medicinal plants like *Kwamanbi (Smilax lanceifolia Roxb)* *Heinouman (Syzogium fruitcosum)*. The root was generally used for the treatment of dysentery and urinary problems.
3. *Sanamahi-* at Wangoi was well-known for the conservation of *Shembang* bird (shallow). *Shembang* is an indigenous bird of Manipur and helped in the control of insects in agricultural crops.
4. *Sekmai Ningthou-* at Kakching is well-known river of Kakching and every year the god of this river was celebrated with a grand festival known as *Heikru Hidongba*. It also signified the conservation of *Heigru (Phyllanthus emblica)*. Its significance was known to the Meiteis of Kakching. Heigru with (*khohi*) nectar was generally used for treatment of cold and cough and its juice with *peruk (Indian pennywort)* was treated as a remedy for prevention of grey hair.”⁷⁹

The sacred grove divinity of *Turel Achouba* and *Sekmai River* which runs in Kakching also served to preserve the fishes such as *Ngaton (Cirrhinus)*, *Pengba (Osteobrama*

⁷⁷D. Kharnawphlang, “*A Walk through the Sacred Forests of Meghalaya*”. In *Glimpses from the North East, National Knowledge Commission, New Concept Information Systems Pvt. Ltd., 2009, pp. 9-10.*

⁷⁸Ashlata Devi Khumbongmayum, M.L Khan, and R. S. Tripathi, “*Sacred groves of Manipur, North-east India: Biodiversity value, status and strategies for their conservation*”, *Biodiversity and Conservation* Vol. 14, 2005, p. 1545

⁷⁹Dr. Rajendro, op.cit, P 130

belangeri), Tunghanbi (*Tilapia mossambica*) ngachik (*Heteropneustes fossilis block*) and ngamu (*Channa punctatus*) etc.”⁸⁰ Ngamu was used by the *Maiba* and *Maibi* for the sacrificial ceremony during the rituals.

A religious celebration known as *lai haraouba* (the pleasing of gods) is yet celebrated as a symbol of adoration to the god who was believed to be protecting the forest and surrounding environment. T.C. Hudson and J. Shakespeare regarded the *umang lai* as forest deity while K.B. Singh characterizes as a general term for all “the traditional deities of the Meiteis.”⁸¹ The protection of sacred groves is still seen till today. N. Rajendro Singh has completed a study in the year 2001 and found 365 sacred forests in Manipur.⁸² Some of them are referenced in the appendix section.

The knowledge of medicinal plants was derived from their comprehension of the nature and environment. Animal parts were broadly used to cure specific illnesses. A.G. Hall noted the advantages of animal parts such as fat of python that was used to rub the body and furthermore its bile for looseness of the bowels and cholera case.⁸³ In those early days when an individual was sick from tuberculosis, boiled meat dog soup was usually served to build the strength of the sick individual. Till today the soup is known as a remedy to fight cancer.

Medicinal plants also had a long history in the treatment of animal diseases and the Indian old literary works such as *Rig Veda*, the *Atharva Veda* and the *Ayurveda* also gave the information the knowledge about the advantages of plants and its parts on animals for the treatment of diseases and solutions were given to keep from the sickness.⁸⁴ Leaves were usually used for the arrangement of ethno veterinary medication. Cattle rearing were the major occupation for kakching people. When the cattle lost craving, fresh *manahei* leaves (combretaceae) blended with the grain was given so the cattle would regain their

⁸⁰ Dr. Rajendro, P.131

⁸¹ K. B. Singh, “*Traces of Pre-Hinduism in Meitei Society*”, *Folklore- 5*, 1964. p. 201.

⁸² M.L. Khan, Ashalata Devi Khumbongmayum and R.S. Tripathi, “The Sacred Groves and Their Significance in Conserving Biodiversity: An Overview” *International Journal of Ecology and Environmental Sciences*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 2008, p. 282.

⁸³ Dr Rajendro, *op. Cit.* P197

⁸⁴ Taranisen Panda and Nirlipta Mishra, Indigenous Knowledge on Animal Health Care Practices in Kendrapara District of Odisha, India, *International Letters of Natural Sciences*, ISSN: 2300-9675, Vol. 53, pp 10-27 (<https://www.scipress.com/ILNS.53.10>) (accessed date 27th oct, 2018)

hunger.⁸⁵ *Urok Sumbal* (Basellaceae) was generally used for the cuts and wounds for bulls and cows. The leaf was normally crushed and pasted on the wounded parts.

One of the respondent during an interview (*Maiba*) mentioned about some plants which were widely used for the treatment of ailment. He told: In the early days, skin problem was quite common in Kakching area. Some people who had problem with allergies after taking bath with cold water were given a mixture of honey with fresh turmeric juice at least two times a day. Decoction of *kanglayen* (*Commune Fr.*) was regularly used to those individuals who had sore throat. *Heigru* (Amla in Indian language) with honey was additionally use for treating misty voice. Fresh *chuhi* (sugarcane juice) was usually applied to burnt skin to prevent blister. For snake bite or dog bite tamarind seed powder was used as a medicine as it can act as antivenin against the poisonous substances. The fresh leaves after it was crushed were usually applied to tooth ache and the fresh leaves with white rock sugar (*sitamisti*) was usually treated for urinary problem.⁸⁶

2.4. Notable Medicinal plants and its uses

Some notable medicinal plants and its use in the early days are given below:

Yeriksibiand Singju pan (*Alocasia cucullata*) were commonly used for purification of blood. The curry of *yeriksibidry* leaves and *ngakha* fish (baby fish) was served to the patient. In the olden days boiled water of such leaves were used for the treatment of skin diseases because of its medicinal property. They used to carry such leaves while travelling in the forest in order to protect themselves from insect bites etc.

Heikagok (Bengal and Ouinee) -Decoction of *heikagok* leaf was believed to be effective for dry cough. In the olden days, the Maibi commonly used *Heikagok* leaf for religious purpose. They believed that the offering of its leaves to god would get blessing. Decoction of its leaf or fresh juice was widely used for the treatment of diabetes and dysentery.

Langthrei (*Eupatorium birmanicum DC.*) -The benefits of *lanthrei* were known to the Meiteis of Kakching. It was widely used for many purposes not only for its medicinal properties and the tips of *langthrei* was commonly used by Maibi for religious purposes. On the New Year i.e. Cheiraoba, *langthrei* was offered to Sanamahi and Leimaren. Sometimes tender leaves

⁸⁵Interviewed with Nitaibi Irom at Langmeidong on 23rd July, 2018.

⁸⁶Interviewed with Naorem Borot Singh, Kakching Sumak Leikai, Yotsungbam Pareng, 29th June, 2018.

were applied on the burnt skin to relieve severe pain and burnt sensation while *langthrei* fresh juice with honey was also usually served as a remedy for burning stomach.⁸⁷

Bhubati (Andrographis paniculata)- Decoction of leaves was used for the treatment of bronchitis, intestinal worms, stomach ache, and dysentery. In the early days during the outbreak of cholera its leaves were used and were quite effective. They also used for the ailments of pile, diabetes and jaundice. *Bhubati* served as an important medicinal purpose among the *Meiteis* of Kakching and the *Maiba* also used its leaves to cure cough and fever.⁸⁸

Kolamani- Because of its medicinal property the fresh shoot was widely consumed by every household of the District for their diet. Decoctions of its leaves were mostly applied to get relief from insect bite also the fresh leaf was scoured on the area where the insect discharged its poisonous substances. For the prevention of chicken pox, *Kolamani* leaves with warm milk were usually served. It is to be noted that in case of insufficiency of milk from the mother breast (during breastfeeding) cooked *kolamani* with ghee was given to the child.

Manahi (Angiosperm) - *Manahi* was usually treated for digestion. *Maiba* used to collect all the necessary items from the forest for the preparation of medicine. For digestion, crushed powder of the dried fruit with black salt and *ganja (Cannabinaceae)* leaves were prepared to help digestion. Sometimes the *Maiba* used to keep the readymade medicine which was prepared in the size of tablet so that whoever had the problem of indigestion would come and take from *Maiba*.⁸⁹ Its bark was used for the treatment of tooth-ache. In early days people used to chew the bark when they had tooth-ache problem.⁹⁰

Tingthou- Crushed juice leaf was used to cure blood vomiting

Ningthoukhongli- Used for blood purification. Usually the crushed roots mixed with honey and warm water was served on an empty stomach.

Ashi heibong Mana – The decoction of the leaves with white rock sugar was used for *eshing yai fam houba* (urinary problem).

⁸⁷ Irabot Ningthoujam, *Mana Mashingna Layengba*, Pratap printing press, Imphal, 2016, p.63.

⁸⁸ Interviewed with Irom Nitaibi, at Langmeidong on 23rd July, 2018.

⁸⁹ Interviewed with Irom Nitaibi at Langmeidong on 27th July, 2018

⁹⁰ Kala Singh Kshetri, *Chinjakna Layengba (Food as a Medicine)*, Lemon printing press, Imphal, 2016, p.23.

Plants and its parts were used during the rituals and rites. For religious purpose called Chaban thaba, *Maiba or Maibi* used items - Seven different types of flower, Seven different fruits, Tou, Napi Kabot machan taret, Kwa heiruk, Egg, Gift (dokhina).⁹¹

For a pregnant woman or a delivery mother in Meitei society some certain foods were prevented from taking it which was not good for her health and for the new born baby. The same tradition also existed among the *Koiren* tribe (one of *Kuki* who leaved in *Kangpokpi*). The women were not given any meat of wild animals only the simple vegetable curry was cooked for them for the betterment of the health of the mother and the baby and after giving birth the mother was cleansed and bathed with warm water except the hair so that the blood would not go up to head.⁹²

Apart from the professional supervision early kakching Meitei knew the effectiveness of home remedy as a treatment to cure ailments. They used ingredients which were available to the surrounding areas when they were in need of it which includes parts of the plants, vegetables, animals' parts etc. In early days when a person had sore eyes they used to put their own urines instead of consulting a professional physician which was believed to be cured. In case of common cold and cough, ginger with honey was often served. And for the same sickness warm mustard oil with garlic was also used for massage to get relieved.

Some of important plants that were widely used for the ailments were “*Nomangkha (Phlogacanth thuythyriformis)* for cold, cough and fever, *Lalu-kok (Adenostem malavenia (L.) Kuntze)* for fresh injuries and skin disease, *Singju pan (Alocasia cucullata)* for blood purification, *Laibak ngou (Artemisia nilagirica)* for mouth ulcer and dizziness, *Nungarei (Asparagus filicinus)* for dysentery, *Tairen (Cedrela toona)* for skin disease, chicken pox and religious purpose, *haona (Cymbopogon flexuosus)* for injuries and cuts, *Pakhangleiton (Euphorbia hirta)* for diarrhoea and dysentery, *Terapaibi (Gynura nepalensis)* for stomach burning, *Lamthabi (Melothria perpusilla)* jaundice and kidney infection, *Phak-pai (Polygonum posumbu)* for heart problem, *Yellang (Polygonum)* for toothache, *Heimang (Rhussemi alata)* for intestine problem, *Leipung-khanga (Surattense burm)* for cough, fever, dysentery.”⁹³

⁹¹Interviewed with Subadani Nongmaithem at Kakching Chumnang Leikai on 19th June, 2018

⁹² Haokip Nemneivah, *Tribal Medicine and Healing Practiced* (Research Project), 2018, P 80

⁹³ Interviewed with Laishram Jeevan Singh. at Waikhong on 15th July, 2018.

In rituals activities some plants and leaves were used for religious purpose as they had religious and cultural significance. For instance, “mayokpha tree (*Terminia arjuna*) was believed as an incarnation of Ebudhou Pakhangba, the supreme god of the Meiteis faith hence was well protection and conserved in Mayokpha sacred groves. Sometimes religious rites were performed at this abode to receive blessing. *Khongnang* or banyan trees (*Ficus religiosa* sp.), *tairol* tree (*Cedrella toona*), *pangong* tree (*Butea monosprema*) were worshipped and regarded as sacred.

Felling of these trees was strictly forbidden. When a banyan tree became old, it became *laioraba khongnang* meaning a divine tree. They were believed to have divine power or believed that some deities resided in the tree. Planting of a banyan tree was done only by the elderly people and was regarded as an act of peace and for the prosperity of mankind. Therefore, often *khongnang pambi* was planted in each and every main street of the village or town. In fact some of the streets were named after the particular *khongnang pambi* of the vicinity for example Khongnang-mari-phangba locality in Kakching, Thangalawai-khongnang-makhong lane in Bishnupur etc.⁹⁴

The parts of the trees such as *tairol* leaves (*Cedrella toona*), *heinou* leaves (*Mangifera indica*) were used for religious purposes and *choi* (*Cassia fistula*), *khoiju* (*Plectranthus ternifolius*), *saitingkhong* (*Cudrenia nepalensis*), *tingthou* (*Cudrenia nepalensis*), *pungphai* (*Dactyloctenium aegyptium*), *theibong* or jack fruits (*Artocarpus heterophyllus lamk*), *kuraoangouba* (*Erythrina* sp.), *tulsi* (*Ocimum sanctum*), *shamba* (*Oroxylum indicum*), *heikreng* (*Cettiscinua menum*), Chinese sumac (*Rhus chinensis*), crowfoot grass (*Dactyloctenium aegypticum*), camphor tree (*Blumea balsamifera*), etc. were considered as sacred tresses used for rituals.⁹⁵

2.5. Conclusion

From time immemorial the people of kakching had known the used of traditional medicine for treating the ailments and sickness. They had a deep understanding of the surrounding environment and believed that nature had endowed certain attributes which could give benefits to the mankind for their welfare and well being.

⁹⁴Moirangthem Monica Devi, *People and the environment: An ecological history of pre-colonial and colonial Manipur*, Unpublished Thesis, JNU, 2018 p.56

⁹⁵ Ashalata Kh, Khan and Tripathi, “*Sacred Groves of Manipur*”, p. 24.

CHAPTER THREE

RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND PRACTICES

3.1. Introduction

In Manipur, before the advent of the Hinduism the Meiteis had a rich religious tradition and norms of their own. The universal concept of equality of mankind that all human are made in the image of God remains the foundational core belief of the society. As indicated by Kumar, "The narratives and ancient literary works such as *Leithak Leikharol*, *Thiren Layat*, *Sakok Lamlen Ahanba* of the Meitei notice the adoration of number of gods and goddesses by ancient people of the land which incorporate natural characteristic such as Sun, Moon, Sky, Stars, Darkness, Wind, Water, Fire, Lightening, Earthquake, and so on furthermore legendary and mythical figures, social and political saints, innate and family ancestors, and so forth."⁹⁶

3.2. Traditional gods of Meitei

The Meiteis believed in several gods and some of the gods worshipped by the people of Kakching were *Iboudhou Pakhngba*, *Chumnang Lairembi*. They also believed in the Supreme god who was considered as the maker of the entire world. The almighty God was identified as *Tengbanba Mapu*, or *Chingngu Khoiyum Yaibirel Shidaba*. The word "*Chingngu Khoiyum Yaibirel Shidaba*" represents the attributes of this Almighty God. The word "*Chingngu*" indicate the divine qualities of the god which meant majestic and "*Khoiyum*" denotes the protector of all living beings and non-living things of the universe (*Khoi*= whole of living organism and *Yum*= shelter).⁹⁷ He was also known as *Yaibirel* which meant the source of all the souls, (*Yaibi*=Soul, and *rel*=supreme). They believed that God is immortal;thus known him as "*Shidaba Mapu*" (Immortal Supreme God of universe)⁹⁸. In order to help in the creation process the *Chingngu Khoiyum Yaibiren Shidaba* brought forth the mother of the universe, *Ima Laimarel Shidabi* (Immortal Universal Mother Goddess). They brought forth two sons, namely *Sanamahi* and *Pakhngba*⁹⁹. Before he left the world he

⁹⁶Kumar, op,cit,p 28).

⁹⁷Interview with Mayanglambam Gourachandra, kakching makha leikai, 12th June, 2018.

⁹⁸Sairem Nilabir, "Sanamahi Amasung Sanamahi Laining Eehou," in Universal Literary Association (ed.) Meetei Laining, (Imphal: Universal Literary Association, 1989, p. 97.

⁹⁹Oinam Bhogeshwor Singh, *Ningthourol Seireng* (Imphal: Granthakar Publication, 1967, p. 1

gave the permission to his two sons to rule the world in peace and harmony. In order to know their capacity of looking after the world, *Atiya Sidaba Mapu* (supreme God) arranged a race to tour the whole world for seven times and whoever returned first would be appointed as King. *Sanamahi* started his journey and went ahead before *Pakhangba*.

However as his mother *Leimaren* favoured his son, she secretly revealed to move around the throne of his father seven times. Soon after he had finished his circulation he was given the throne to rule as a King. When *Sanamahi* returned and saw his brother on the throne, he became angry and tried to kill him. *Atiya Guru Sidaba* after seeing his furious son he consoled him and gave him the blessing to become the King of every household. Since then the worship of *Sanamahi* and *Leimaren* had been practiced in every Meitei household.

3.2.1. Sanamahi

The worship of *Sanamahi* has been practiced since the early times. The literal meaning of *Sanamahi* is 'liquid gold' as gold is the most precious of all metals. Similarly *Sanamahi* is regarded the most essential for the existence of all living beings and is believed to be the spirit dwelling inside each being".¹⁰⁰ Some other Manipuri scholars regarded him as the Sun god.¹⁰¹ However W. Singh argued that 'the identification with the Sun god remains doubtful and there is no tangible evidence to support this concept.'¹⁰²

In fact he is considered as the supreme God. Sairem Nilabir in his work stated:-

"God *Sanamahi* was the king of all deities (*Lainingthou*). His place was also at the south-western corner in every house as a household deity as a protector of all the members of the household and controller of birth and death"¹⁰³.

In the religion of the Meiteis, *Sanamahi* remained the presiding deity having his place in every household and seated as the main principle of life and the king of all deity (*Lainingthou*)¹⁰⁴. He was placed at the south-west corner in every house as the main

¹⁰⁰Vijaylakshmi Brara, N. *Politics, Society and Cosmology in India's North East* Delhi:Oxford University Press, 1998. p.126

¹⁰¹Singh, K.B, *Traces of pre-hinduism in Meitei Society.*, 1964, Folk Lore 5: 203

¹⁰²Singh, W. Yumjao, *Religious Belief in Ancient Manipur*, Imphal, 1966, p66

¹⁰³ Sairem Nilabir, "The Origin and Development of Sanamahism from 2000 B.C. to 1709 A.D." in Sapamcha Sanatomba (ed.) *The Sanamahism* (Imphal: S.R. Institute of Manipur studies, 2003, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ Sn bhagyachandra

household deity as a protector and controller of death and birth. Others have regarded him as the symbol of fire, specifically the fire of the household hearth¹⁰⁵.

Some believes that the early Meitei worshipped fire.¹⁰⁶ Evidence shows the importance of fire in the Meitei house and this was seen in the *loi* village(degraded) of Andro called *phambalmei*(coronation fire). It was believed that the first settlers brought and place it in that particular village and kept it burning until now. Even today at the *Leimarel* and *Sanamahi* where they take refuge, fire is placed and keeps burning throughout the day and night. The Manipur chronicle indicates that *Poireiton* groups carried a tray of burned fire of earth filled with husk and kept it burnt.¹⁰⁷ Further the hearth occupied a place of importance in the Meitei house usually located in the centre of the room. It was believed as bad omen if the fire went out and the family might befall serious problems such as hardship, sickness, sorrow and death.¹⁰⁸

In the Meitei house of Kakching, *Sanamahi* occupied an important place. The south west corner i.e. *Sanamahikachin* where the *lai* was placed, a mat and a bamboo was kept to be used for the worship of this god.¹⁰⁹ Evidence is also found which tells the worship of *Sanamahi* as a household deity and the prince *Ibungshi* building was dedicated to *Sanamahi*. *Cheitharol Kumbaba* suggests few other “names of *Sanamahi* who was known under “the name of *Taibang Khaiba* and *Laiwa Haiba* ruler of the universe.”¹¹⁰ According to some traditionalists there were seven sons who were the progenitors of the seven *salais*, of whom the two mentioned above were the eldest¹¹¹.

As a household deity Lord *Sanamahi* was worshipped with care and edible vegetables and some other things were offered to the god to receive blessings. L. Bhagyachandra Singh points out that:-

“The main offerings to *Sanamahi* as a household deity include articles which were completely raw. Nothing cooked or burnt in the fire is offered to this deity till today. As has been said earlier, people pray to this deity daily after sunset. Over and above this, at critical hours of their life, and also annually on the first day of the year, i.e. on the day of *Cheiraoba*

¹⁰⁵ Parratt,S.N, *The Religion of Manipur*, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1980,p.16-17.

¹⁰⁶ Singh, L.Ibungohal, *Introduction to Manipur*. Imphal,1963, p.27

¹⁰⁷ Singh, R.K. Jhaljit. *A Short History of Manipur*.Imphal,1965, p 36

¹⁰⁸ Interviewed with Mayanglambam Hiramani Singh, Kakching Wairi, June 29th, 2018

¹⁰⁹ Shakespear,J, *The Religion of Manipur*.? Folk Lore, 1913, p444.

¹¹⁰ Parratt,S.N, *The Religion of Manipur*, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1980, p19

¹¹¹ Jhulon Mutum(1[35]Shakespear, J. (1913) p 444¹¹¹947) Manipur Itihas, Vijay Panchali;p:6.

all the items of the day's meal, before they were cooked, were offered to this deity. The divine seat, and the cloths and articles were arranged for the coming year by replacing the old ones. This was normally done by the eldest male member in the family after taking bath and wearing clean cloths"¹¹².

A very important prayer was offered to Lord *Sanamahi*:-

Like a cowherd tending dairy animals please lead us in the daytime and hold us under security in the night. You are the maker of the earth and the sky and the people. You are the planner of everything. You are the doctor and the healer. Pardon me for neglecting to give appropriate contributions to you. We pay regard to your lotus feet to give us long life.¹¹³

The above supplication of the Lord Sanamahi was followed by offering vegetables and rice and *athenpot* (offering merchandise) during the worship time.

3.2.2.Ima Leimarel Shidabi

Ima Leimarel Shidabi(Immortal mother) was another important goddess worshipped by the Meiteis. She was the mother of *Sanamahi* and *Pakhangba* and the wife of *Atiya Maru Shidaba* and had a special place of worship inside the house close to *Sanamahi kachin* (Sanamahi corner). Her residing area was placed close to the north wall of the fireplace. She is considered as the goddess of success, and the sustainers of every living being. To mean the nearness of the divinity an earthen pot, loaded with water with a cover was kept. The water should be supplanted when the season of purifying of the *lai* occurred. The cleansing of the *lai* happened only after the member of the household carefully considered the holy day of the week.¹¹⁴

3.2.3.Phungga-Lairu

Phungga-Lairu is another significant place of the Meiteis of Kakching. According to Ibungohal Singh it is identified with the fireplace usually located at the centre of the main house.¹¹⁵ K. B Singh has compared "*PhunggaLairu* with Hindu Laxmi goddess and opined that she is the god of wealth and prosperity and was usually a place similar to that of

¹¹² L. Bhagyachandra Singh, *A Critical Study of the Religious Philosophy of the Meeteis before the Advent of Vaishnavism in Manipur* (Imphal: L. Momon Devi, 1991), p. 48.

¹¹³ Maibam Nando Singh, *Lainingthougee Mingkhei Lising Ama* (Imphal: Maibam Nando Singh, 1999), p. 37

¹¹⁴ Interviewed with Mayanglambam Hiramani Singh, Kakching Wairi, June 29th 2018

¹¹⁵ Singh, L. Ibungohal *Introduction to Manipur*. Imphal, 1963, p.27

Sanamahi Kachin. The hearth occupied a place of importance in the Meetei house.”¹¹⁶ It was more than a person unlike *Sanamahi*. An earthen pot was kept on the small hole which was situated to the west of the fire hearth. The hollow was covered with a clay roof where the people used to put offering during the time of ritual.¹¹⁷

In the early times offering and prayer was conducted as a daily routine. Even now every household after the sunset, members of the family would clean the area and offered prayer for the well being of the family. Before the meal was served, the offering share of the *Puhunggalairu* should be placed and spelled prayers to god to bless the household with riches and wealth. "This belief had some points in common with the Vedic conception of fire as the guardian deity of a dwelling house and the Vedic attribute of fire as the giver of wealth".¹¹⁸

According to Manipuri myth it is believed that on the month of January in the Manipuri lunar calendar, goddess *Emoinu* lands on earth every year and took rest at the *phunggalairu* and visited every household to shower the blessings. She was considered as the mother of peace and prosperity and wealth. Historians traced the origin of the *Emoinu* worshiped and found that it was started from early period but was confined to royal household only, however later the common people also began to worship the *Emoinu* from fifteenth century

3.3. The Worship of Lai

The word Lai means god. Hodson limited the term only to forests deities.¹¹⁹ However his view was contradicted by Parratt and she argued that it was because of the etymology of the term *Umang Lai* i.e. forest god (forest=*Umang* and god=*lai*) and “*UmangLai* was not limited to particular forested area. Parratt has broadly divided *UmangLai* into four groups:-

1. Ancestors or deities which were believed to have had a human existence at some point in the past. Examples of these were *Pakhangba, Nongpok, Ningthou, Poireiton*.
2. Important *lai* associates with one particular *yek*.

¹¹⁶ Premi Devi N, Impacts of Hindusim in Medieval Manipuri Society and Culture, *Scholars Journals or Arts, Humanities and Social science*, Sch. J. Arts Humanit. Soc. Sci. 2017; 5(4A):332-342, <http://saspjournals.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/SJAHSS-54A332-342.pdf>(accessed date 30th Nov,2018)

¹¹⁷ Shakespear,J.‘ *The religion of Manipur.*’ *Folk Lore* 24; 409-55, 1913, p444

¹¹⁸ Parratt,S.L, *The Religion Of Manipur*, Calcutta, 1980, p2

¹¹⁹ Hodson, T.C, *The Meitheis*.London, 1910, p 14

3. The domestic deities, who was practiced by a particular clan or family group called as *yumjaolai*.
4. Tutelary divinities, i.e. spirits associated with particular spots. There are various places in Manipur which were considered as sacred. Examples of this are *Thangjing hill* in *Moirang, Nongmaiching*, which was formerly associated with *Nongpok Ningthou* and subsequently with Siva.”¹²⁰

According to the Meiteis belief, there were nine *umang lais* in the early days which were later increased to three hundred more *umang lais*. The worship of Umang Lai originated from the existence of sacred groves. In James Johnstone wrote that “The valley of Manipur possessed a few sacred groves, left, according to the universal aboriginal custom, throughout all parts of India that I have visited, for the wood spirits, when the land was first cleared; but no natural forest. These groves are little isolated patches of forest dotted here and there; the villages have plenty of planted trees, and many of great antiquity, and from the heights above they have the appearance of woodland covered with grass.”¹²¹

J. Shakespeare saw some similarity with the worship of *umang lais* by the Manipuris to the worship of *nats* by the lower class of Burman.¹²²(*) In both the tradition the concept of regarding them as guardians of the surrounding areas was the main belief. Even the nature of rites and offerings items required during the festivals was identical.¹²³

3.3.1. Ancestors Dieties

Ancestor worship is religious practice based on the belief that the deceased family members have a continued existence, take an interest in the affairs of the world, and possess the ability to influence the fortune of the living.¹²⁴ They also believed that the ancestor of the

¹²⁰ Ancestor Worship in Taoism, https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/Chinese_Customs/taoism_ancestor_worship.htm, (accessed date 5th November, 2018.)

¹²¹ Johnstone, *My Experience in Manipur and the Naga hills*, p. 76.

¹²² J. Shakespear, “The Religion of Manipur”, *Folklore, Volume 24, No.3*, 1913, pp. 409-410.

* (The concepts of *nats* in Upper Burma are often related with nature especially tree and forest which is similar with the concept of *umang lais* or the forest deities of the Meiteis.)

¹²³ Saroj Nalini Parratt, *The Religion of Manipur: Beliefs, Rituals and Historical development*, Calcutta, 1980, pp.112.

¹²⁴ Indira, K., *Social Organization and Religion of Lois*, (Doctoral Theses), JNU, New Delhi, 2003, p32.

yeks continued to exist till today. There were other rituals which concerned to the deceased of a particular groups and clans such as *ApokpaKhurumba* and others concerned to *Sanamahi* and *Leimaren*. *ApokpaKhurumba*(bowing down to the *Apokpa*) was a *lai* of the ancestors of the immediate family circle. *Apokpa* means to beget or to give birth to. These *Apokpa* were the deceased males of the previous three generations (the father, grandfather and great grandfather who looked after the interest of the family).¹²⁵ Offering was performed on the full moon day and they believed that the *Apokpa* comes and eat on that day.

One example of the ancestral deity is *Pakhangba* of *Ningthouja* clan. Parratt identified his existence in three different ways:

- (a) As a man, the unifier of Meitei
- (b) As a deity, brother of *Sanamahi* and son of *Atiya Guru Sidaba*(creator);
- (c) As a Snake¹²⁶

Tradition says that *Pakhangba* was fit and eligible for the throne and evidence also found in the form of poetry which reads:

“*Lairen*(sovereign) your rightful dwelling is the palace land; Chief of all the lands which are good.... in which cattle roam. As your ancestor the great Sovereign came like the spreading heat of the sun, so you *Lairen*, spread your fame from beneath the shade of the royal canopy and made the last of the ranges of *Hanching* Mountains your settling place”¹²⁷.

He was described as god in the day time but a human being in the night.¹²⁸ Another tradition considered him as a full deity.¹²⁹ *Pakhangba* was the brother of *Sanamahi* and the son of *Atiya Guru Sidaba*(immortal god) who also possessed a divine power. He took seven round of his father's throne i.e. the Guru (*Atiya Sidaba*), who himself is the symbol of the universe, and it was believed that the world was created after his image.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Parratt,S.N.*The Religion of Manipur*, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1980, p69

¹²⁶ Parratt,S.L, *The Religion Of Manipur*, Culcutta,1980,p 10.

¹²⁷ Parratt,S.N. *The Religion of Manipur*, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1980, p11.

¹²⁸ Bihari Nepram, *The Cheitharol Kumbaba*, The Royal Chronicle of Manipur, Spectrum Publications,Guwahati:Delhi, 2012, p31

¹²⁹Parratt,S.N, 1980, p11.

¹³⁰ Sircar,M.C. *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley* (New Delhi:Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd), 1984,p116.

Hudson talks of *Pakhangba* as appearing to men in the form of snake who incarnated himself in this form on different occasions.¹³¹ McCulloch opined that, the Raja worshipped a particular god which was a species of snake called *Pakhangba*, from which it was claimed that the royal family was descended. According to McCulloch when the big size snake appeared in front of the King it indicated the displeased nature of god and the small size signified the contentment of god and further describes the process of snake being charmed by the *Maibi*.¹³² S.K. Chatterji accepted *Pakhangba* as the first King but the identification with the identification of snake according to him is less certain.¹³³

Even the Lotha Naga tribe had the same tradition of giving respect to ancestor spirit. They believe that the ancestor spirit continue to interfere in everyday life to help and to protect the family. The ancestral spirits of *Sagei Lai* (ancestor of a particular clan) were worshipped under various names such as *Apokpa* (progenitor of a clan), *Ibudhou Purel Nakakpa* (Greatgrandfather) and *Kasarel* (a common name for the ancestral spirits) etc.¹³⁴ Since time immemorial the people of Kakching had been keeping the tradition of worshipping their ancestors. They believed that their ancestor spirits continue to exist and they were much interested in the daily affairs of their family life.¹³⁵

Some of the important ancestors were *Ebudhou Khamnangba* (great grandfather) and items used during ancestor worship were a bunch of bananas (*laphoi*) which should be always in odd number, buds of a sacred plant (*langthreimaton*), leaves of a sacred tree called *tairan*, a white cock or a pig, root of the bamboo (*waroo*), root of the tree (*maroo*) and a piece of cloth to make a figure of the ancestor (*phijangkhanba*).¹³⁶

¹³¹ Hodson, T.C. *The Meitheis*. London; 1910 p 14.

¹³² McCulloch, W. *An Account of the Valley of Munnipore and of the Hill Tribes.* 'Selections from the the records of the Government of India, No. XXVIII:17, 1859.

¹³³ Chatterji, S. K.. 'Kirata-jana-kriti: The Indo-Mongoloids, their contribution to the history and culture of India.' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* 16(2): 143-235, 1950, P.227.

¹³⁴ M.Kirti Singh, *Recent Researches in Oriental and Indological Studies* (Delhi: Parimal Publications), 1998, p.64

¹³⁵ Nongmaithem Ebenjaobi Devi, Kakching Chumnang Leikai, August 4th, 2018, (nterview)

¹³⁶ Indira, K. *Social Organization and Religion of Lois*, (Doctoral Theses) JNU, New Delhi, 2003, p60

3.4. Festivals of Meiteis

3.4.1. Lai Haraoba.

The *LaiHaraoba* is perhaps the most authentically Meitei of all the traditional festivals of the Meiteis which preserved the ancient Manipuri culture .E. Nilakanta Singh has put it:

“The *LaiHaraoba* mirrors literally is the entire culture of the Manipuri people. It reveals its strength and weaknesses, the beliefs and superstitions, and perhaps also the charm and happiness of Manipuri people. It reflects the people at their interest. For him it’s a festival of merry making of the gods and goddesses”¹³⁷

Parratt defined the meaning of *laiharaoba* as ‘pleasing the god’, and the essence of the ritual is to call up the *lai* and to give him pleasure.¹³⁸ Y.Tamphajao states that "*LaiHaraoba* is but an expression of the whole human life from birth to death. Human enjoyment is the reflection of the very image of divine happiness. The pleasing of the gods is expressed as *LaiHaraoba*."¹³⁹

M.Husain opined that: "In the *LaiHaraoba* rite, the deity is worshipped in his own peculiar place as the chief deity of the universe without Interferring at all with the claims of any other god".¹⁴⁰ Another view related to *LaiHaraoba* is with regard to the creation of the universe. Pundit Kulachandra wrote: "When Guru opened his mouth and showed all the living beings, which shall live in the earth, *Asiba* (a deity) exclaimed with joy and this is called *LaiHaraoba*".¹⁴¹

Lai Haraoba can be classified into three main forms though there are minor differences between them.¹⁴²

1. Kanglei haraoba: - this form of *LaiHaraoba* festival is carried out at

¹³⁷ Singh , E. Nilakanta, *Lai Haraoba*, Culcutta,1961, p30.

¹³⁸ Parratt, S.L. *op.Cit.*, p.53

¹³⁹ Singh, L. Bhagyachandra, *A Critical Study of the Religious Philosophy of the Meetei Before the Advent of Vaisnavism in Manipur* (Imphal: Paradise Publishing House), 1991, p.103.

¹⁴⁰ . Majid, Hussai, *Encyclopedia of India*, Manipur, vol.xxi, New Delhi.: Rima Publishing House, 1994, p.75

¹⁴¹ L Bino Devi, *Regional Integration*, vol .xix., A Journal of the Manipur Cultural Integration Conference, 1994, p.49.

¹⁴² Parratt, S.L. *op.Cit.*, p.54.

the palace,

2. Moirang haraoba:- this form of *LaiHaraoba* festival is mainly carried out at Moirang in honour of god, Thangjing, and
3. Chakpa Haraoba:- mostly practiced in the *Loi* villages.

The *LaiHaraoba* practised by the *Lois* were considered as the most authentic and origin in character.

The celebration of *LaiHaraoba* usually starts from the northern side of Manipur, where the god Koubru resides. Thus the *LaiHaraoba* festival first starts at *Sekmai* because the village deity of *Sekmai* is *Koubru* and then followed by other *Loi* villages.¹⁴³

According to S.N. Parratt there are seven important sections or stages in the observation of the festival.¹⁴⁴

1. *Lai Ekouba* -calling of the lai from water
2. *Paining Jagoi*- a dance which represent the life cycle of *lai*
3. *Panthoibi Jagoi*- a dance consisting of romantic tale of *Nongpok Ningthou*

and *panthoibi* . The costume is in thankful so this tell us

the connection with the tribes if thankful.

4. *lairen Mathek*- it's a community dance.

This is limited to *kanglei haraoba*and shows

the connection with the python manifestation of *Pakhangba*

5. *Our Hanfel*-another community dance..

Cheitharoi kumbaba also talk about it. It was performed

to bring wealth and prosperity in tag land

6. *Thabal chongba*- community dance in the moonlights in circle

¹⁴³ Indira,K. (2003). *Social Organization and Religion of Lois*, Doctoral Theses JNU, New Delhi,p82.

¹⁴⁴ Parrat,S.L. (1980), p50-55

7. *Nongkarol*- sending back the Lai to heaven

3.4.2. Role of Maiba and Maibi in Lai Haraoba

Maiba and *Maibi* played an important role during the *laiharaoba*. They were the one who acted as a mediator between *lai* and human being. They deliver oracles in their state of trance, predict the future of the individuals and play important role in the ceremony. The *Maibis* and *Maibas* are traditional priestesses and priests of the old Meitei religion. Higgins regarded the original form of the *Maibi* and derived from the last syllables of *Sanamahi*. McCulloch believed that they were descended from a princess who lived in ancient times.¹⁴⁵

According to Shakespeare *Maibi* usually played an important role in the festivals and believes that the *lai* engaged more pleasure in female ritual functionaries and more likely to be possessed by the spirits.¹⁴⁶ However Parratt explained that it can be little doubt that *Maibi* are far more important than the *Maiba*. Within the *Maibic* community they have their own subdivisions according to their own functions. The rituals specialist who engaged with the ritual festivals was distinct from the midwives and traditional physicians. Even they were not required to wear white dress which were usually worn by *Maibis*.

The *Maibas* also act like the Shamans. Their duties and services were different according to the needs of the society. During the birth ceremony rituals were conducted by the *Maibi*. A ceremony called *kokthokchamthokpa* (cleansing) was performed after the fifth month of pregnancy in which the *Maibi* would offer fruits and flowers to the *lai* and she would arrange a pot full with water which was used later by the women to clean herself. This was done to regain her strength during pregnancy and childbirth. During the child birth, the midwives would attend the mother in the process of delivery and she would cut the umbilical cord with a bamboo knife.¹⁴⁷

3.4.3. Cheiraoba

Cheiraoba is the New Year festival which usually falls in the first day of the month *Sajibu* (March) for the Meitei speaking community of Kakching. Since time immemorial the festival has been observed every year to bid goodbye to the old year and to welcome the New Year. In the early time it was the duty of the heads of the four *panas* (division of land) to announce the

¹⁴⁵ McCulloch, W., *An Account of the Valley of Munnipore and of the Hill Tribes.* 'Selections from the records of the Government of India, No. XXVIII, 1859, p21.

¹⁴⁶ Shakespeare, J., *The Religion of Manipur.* Folk Lore, 1913, P.429

¹⁴⁷ Parrat, S .L. op.cit, 1980, p77

message of the festivals to the people. They rode on the horseback and carried a stick and on the top of it a bell was attached. The festival hence titled the name *Cheiraoba*, “announcing by the stick (*Chei* means stick and *laoba* means to announce).”¹⁴⁸ The festival was also known as *Sajibu Cheiraoba* as it was held on the first day of the first month of *Sajibu* of Meiteis. The tradition of announcing with a stick tradition came to an end during the reign of *King Kiyamba*(1467-1508).¹⁴⁹

A new system was introduced called *Cheithaba* (*Chei*-stick, *Thaba*- abandon) in which a particular individual was selected who would take all the responsibility of the *cheithaba* for the whole year until the appointment of another person in the next year. Hiyangloi was the first person during the reign of King Kiyamba who was appointed in 1484 A.D. to take up such responsibilities. Since then the year was known as *Hiyangloina Cheithaba Kum*(the year of Hiyangloi’s cheithaba).¹⁵⁰

Hiyangloi responsibility was to bear the sins and burden of the Kings and the people so that no catastrophe might befall upon them. In those years if any calamity falls in any person (*cheithaba*), he was made responsible for such misfortune. Lately in 1898, in Manipur a serious cholera epidemic spread like wildfire and a deputation approached the political agent to punish the *cheithaba* of that year for he was accused of the cause of such tragedy .¹⁵¹

The two *Cheithabas* the outgoing person and the new *Cheithaba* addresses the king as follows:

“*King Lainingthou*, the coming year is my friend’s year (name).

Let the king and queen lives long; let it be more prosperous than the past year in the production of rice, fish, other foods, and salt, and let it be richer in everything”.

The New *Cheithaba* with folded hands kneeled before the King and says:

“*Lainingthou*; from today I bear on my head all thy sins,

¹⁴⁸ Bhagyachandra, L. *A critical study of the Religious philosophy of the Meiteis before the advent of Vaishnavism in Manipur*, p.91.

¹⁴⁹ Bhagyachandra L Singh, op.cit, p.93

¹⁵⁰ Singh, Ibungohal, L and Singh, Khelenchandra N. *Cheitharol kumbabba*, Imphal, 1967, p10.

¹⁵¹ Parratt, S.N, *The Religion of Manipur*, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1980, p48-49.

diseases and misfortunes, shame, mischief,
all that is aimed in battle against thee, all that threatens thee,
all that is terrible and destructive for thee and thy kingdom.”¹⁵²

For bearing such responsibility he was given some privilege to enjoy such as exemption of the state service called *Lallup* (forced labour), gift of land and various other benefits.

During the season of the festivals cleansing and sanctification of household, the surrounding areas and the community was done. Members of the household and the community were busy doing the washing and cleaning. On the day of the festivals everyone would take bath and put on new clothes and by then they were ready for the prayers.

Another offering known as *Konthong Chakthaba* (offering of dishes outside the gate) was done to the ancestor's spirit after the food was offered to the divine household deity. Three dishes, one for the outgoing year, one for the incoming year and for the year to be come after the incoming year were offered to the spirits of outdoor.¹⁵³

On the day of *Cheiraoba*, God *Sanamahi* and *Leimaren* were worshipped in every household of Kakching. In the morning the women of the household cleaned the area where the deity was placed. They would change the pot water and placed the flowers, vegetables, live *ngamu* (acephalaeus pantatus), fruits and *langthrei*. It was believed that if the *ngamu* (fish) remained calm and composed, it showed the good sign that the family would be happy and have prosperous days in the coming year.¹⁵⁴ Traditionally it was custom to spend the next five days by playing games of *Kang* and no work had to be done during the period (*Silhenba*).

3.5. Tree Cult

Tree cult takes a prominent place in every religion. Even in Egyptian mythology tree cult was popular where the date tree was used to worship and its fruits were

¹⁵² Saroj Nalini Parratt, *The Religion of Manipur*, p. 48.

¹⁵³ Bhagyachandra L Singh, *A Critical Study of the Religious Philosophy of the Meeteis Before the Advent of Vaisnavism in Manipur*, n. 2, p. 95

¹⁵⁴ Indira, K., *Social Organization and Religion of Lois*, JNU, New Delhi, 2003, p. 192

used for medicinal purpose.¹⁵⁵ It's not surprising to know that the Meitei of Kakching had believed that the tree was regarded as a sacred adobe place for the home of the spirit.

K.B. Singh pointed out that among the *Loi* (a group of outcaste people) people of Manipur tree worship was seen even today. For them the most sacred tree was the *Tairen* (cedrela toona) and its leaves were used for various ceremonial purifications by all the *Maibis*. The tree was considered as sacred and was regarded as the abode of the spirits of *Lais*.¹⁵⁶ Still today *Tairen* is used by the *Maiba* for the rituals ceremony. A twig of *tairen* was used by the *Maiba* to sanctify the *diety* before the worship of *Lai Haraoba* took place and it was also used in time of casting out of the evil spirits when the spirit possessed a person.¹⁵⁷

The worship of tree cult has been practiced a long time ago. A myth has been told to the people about the origin of the worship of the tree cult. "A man on his way saw an old lady selling winnowing fans under a banyan tree and his admiration for the fan made him to buy. However he was unable to pay since he did not have enough money but he promised that he would pay her later. The old lady died after few days and he couldn't meet her anymore. One day in his dream he saw her stopping him from going to a place. Later she tried to threaten him and stretched on his back with a knife. But when he woke up he found himself doing well and good. On his way he saw the banyan tree under which the old lady used to sell the fan with a long stretch mark in the shape of winnowing fan. He remembered his dream and was so amazed to know that the tree has saved his life."¹⁵⁸ Since then it is said that tree worship was began to be practiced among the Meiteis. Even today in Kakching district tree worship is still practiced by the people.

3.6. Iratpa

Iratpa means the rituals concerned with the sacrifices of living being which involved the shedding of blood. In many primitive societies and in every religion the practise of blood sacrifice had been performed to please the deity. *Maibi* also played an important role during the practice of blood sacrifice. The sacrifice was performed according to the oracles and the *Maibi* would utter the items that were required for the sacrifices i.e. the desire of the deities.

¹⁵⁵Marie-Louise Buhl, The Goddess of the Egyptian Tree Cult, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* Vol. 6, No. 2 (Apr., 1947), pp. 80-97 (18 pages). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/542585?seq=1#> Access Date 05/08/2018.

¹⁵⁶Singh, K.B. *Traces of pre-hinduism in Meitei Society.* Folk Lore 5:201-206, 1964, p5

¹⁵⁷Interviewed with Mayanglambam Nupi Devi, Kakching Chumnang Leikai, 29th July, 2018.

¹⁵⁸ Interviewed with M. Hiramani Singh, Kakching Wairi, date 29th June, 2018.

Blood is identified with soul substance of men, animals and plants. Thus animals, birds, fishes even human were sacrificed as an offering during the rituals. Malinowski noted sacrifice as a form of presenting gift, sharing with the spirits or divinities, a ritual ingrained in the psychology of gift.”¹⁵⁹ Mostly *ngamu* (loach) and *ngakra* (clarias batrachu) were used for the offering but the most commonly used animals were duck, pigeon and pigs. While sacrificing the animal(s), the *maiba* utters phrase like: "you living being protect the life of the persons (in question) from the tragedies by substituting for them and laying down your life on their behalf".¹⁶⁰ T.C Hudson called it as the “law of substitution”¹⁶¹

Parratt talked about the sacrifice of animals which was being offered by the Lois of *Andro, Panam Ningthou* to their diety. Among these was a buffalo or mithun, which used to be sacrificed on the occasion of the *Lai Haraoba* of the god".¹⁶²

The religious system of the Meiteis testified the earlier belief system of the society. The society had a strong reverence for the god and goddess. They believed that they were the one who protected them and looked after them. Giving adoration and worshipping them would bring harmony, peace and prosperity not only in family but to the whole society. Indeed religion is instrumental to connect the society and to bring together into oneness.

¹⁵⁹Troisi, J. *Tribal Religion: Religious Beliefs and Practices among the Santals* .New Delhi:Manohar ,Publishers and Distributors, 1979, p.148

¹⁶⁰ Indira,K., *Social Organization and Religion of Lois*, JNU, New Delhi, 2003, p,P.66.

¹⁶¹ .Hodson, T.C. *The Meitheis* London, 1910, p108.

¹⁶² Parratt,S.N.*The Religion of Manipur*, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1980. p33

CHAPTER FOUR

MAIBA AND MAIBI

4.1. Introduction

Traditionally *Maiba* and *Maibi* were the traditional priest and priestess of the Meitei's faith. McCulloch noted "the *Maibi*s own their institution to a princess who flourished hundreds of years ago. They may become a *Maibi* if they had a call from the deity. This call was evident when she began to speak in certain different language and her whole body trembled because of the spirit possessed her. They put some rice or some of the coin of the country into a basket and turning it about with incantations, they considered the sign from the divine. They dressed in white."¹⁶³ *Maibi* is someone who understands the language and nature of *lai*, performed rituals, who could oracles.¹⁶⁴

Hudson expressed that, "Maiba was somebody who acted as a medicinal specialist with a good arrangement of empirical knowledge, which he enhanced with brazen creativity, but he was also a doctor to whom men turn for help after the failure of all methods and was employed in all the ceremonies where magical rites and rituals were practised."¹⁶⁵ In times of crisis, the king would consult a senior *Maibi* to seek advice. The words of the *Maibi* were believed to be the words of god and were obeyed with great sincerity.

4.2. Classification of Maibi

L.S Devi has classified the *Maiba* into four groups such as:-

- (i) "*Maiba*- somebody who performed customs during the festival of *Lai-Haraoba* (merry making in songs of divine beings and goddesses);
- (ii) *Maiba*- like a medicinal male healer. In this group there were two sub-categories. Such as
 - (a) a man who performed the rituals of healing *Hingchabi Changba* (Evil Eye);

¹⁶³W.McCulloch, *An Account of the Valley of Munnipore*, Calcutta, 1859,p.22.

¹⁶⁴Singhkhalechandra Ningthoukhongjam, *Ariba Manipuri Longei*, Imphal. 2012, P.187

¹⁶⁵ Hodson, T.C. *The Meitheiis*, Low Price Publication, Delhi 1908, p.110.

(b) a man who healed and cured ailments such as stomach ache, fracture, sprain, boils etc.

(iii) *Maiba*- who performed *Potshem Jadu Touba* (black magic), which may be either good or bad magic;

(iv) *Maiba*- a man who performed a ritual for the welfare of the family or person or community and sometimes they performed rituals to exorcise the evil spirit.

Maibi were further classified into following categories according to their function in the society

—

- (i) *Maibi*- who attended a delivery, a mid-wife,
- (ii) *Maibi*- a woman who practiced witchcraft and rituals when a person asked her to do something either good or bad and she used *Potshem Jadu Touba* (black magic) and
- (iii) *Maibi*-who performed rituals (priestess) during the festival of *Lai haraoba*, *ApokpaKhurumba* (worshipping of the ancestral deities of a particular *Salai/Yek*, i.e.clan). This type of *Maibi* entered into a trance and gave message to a person for his /her future. She acted as a medium connecting Gods and human beings.”¹⁶⁶

In ancient times, human sufferings and physical health were closely associated with religion, myth and magic and when a patient had suffered from any sickness, it was a must for the family to invite the local doctor or a magician who could counteract evil- magical influences.¹⁶⁷

4.3. Origin of *Maibi* Institution

The belief was that after the creation was completed *Amaibi* was send from above by the creator to look after the human kind. In order to carry out the work, a special residential place was built for the *Maibi* known as *Nongmaishang* or *Yairenshang* (*house of divine*).** Even in the *Yairenshang* there were different compartments which were made

¹⁶⁶Tomba Meitei Asem, *Traditional Medicinal Knowledge in North-East Region of India*, International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies (IJIMS), 2017, Vol 4, No.2,105-111. 106

¹⁶⁷ K. Pouchunbou, *Tribal Medicine*, E-pao,

<http://www.e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=education.Health> Issue Tribal Medicine

** According to belief this was created by God particularly for dwelling for the *Maibi*

to perform certain rituals works. The *Maibi* had different hierarchy and organization according to their gift received from god. Only the learned and well verse *Amaibi* will be in charged to perform the difficult and important rituals.¹⁶⁸ During the difficult times, the King would seek advice from the *Ima Maibi*(mother *Maibi*)¹⁶⁹ and her words were believed to be the words of god and were taken seriously.¹⁷⁰

During the reign of King *Ningthoukhomba*, *Yairenshang* (the house of divine) were divided into three groups according to their social service. They were *phura* (fort), *Shanglen*(hut), *Nongmai* (bigger settlement)¹⁷¹.

According to Chandasekhar there were three types of *Yairen Shang*, they were:-

Name of the <i>Maibi</i>	Name of the house	Name of the god
1. <i>Chengba Khutlou Maibi</i>	<i>Shanglen</i>	<i>Mangangni</i>
2. <i>Tampak Leihou Maibi</i>	<i>Nongmai</i>	<i>Luwangni</i>
3. <i>Khabi Lengnao Mombi</i>	<i>phura</i>	<i>Khuman</i>

Shanglen covered the areas of *Nambul* River (a few kilometers to the south of Imphal), *Koubru* hill range in the north, *Imphal* River and *Kangchup* mountain range in the west. *Nongmai* which covered the areas located in the east of Imphal river whereas *Phura* covered the areas of west of Imphal river and the southern side of *Nambul* river. *Phura* was the youngest institution and *Shanglen* was the oldest one.¹⁷² According to Meitei folklore the oldest *Maibi* was called *Chakpa Lamlang Amaibi*, the head of the *Shanglen*.¹⁷³

Chakpa was the group of tribes who were considered as degraded or an outcaste. Some scholars explained that they belonged to the *Loi* community. (Today they comes under schedule caste category). The origin of *loi* remains unknown. It is said that they were once

¹⁶⁸ Dr. S. Kumar Singh, *Maiba Maibigi Sanskriti*, Gouro press kakching press pub, 1997,p 15)

¹⁶⁹ Sircar, M.C.,*Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1984, p.167

¹⁷⁰ Brara, N. Vijaylakshmi, *Politics, Society and Cosmology in India's North- East* (Delhi: Oxford University Press),1998, p.141.

¹⁷¹ Maibi Tombi(Interviewed at Kakching Chumnang Leikai on 7th August,2018.

¹⁷² Singh S. Kumar , *op. Cit.*p.21

¹⁷³ Singh L Roshan, *A study of Personality Profile of the Meitei Maibis of Manipur*, Manipur University (Doctoral Thesis), 2014, P.35

an independent tribe and later they were brought under the subjugation of the Meiteis and they paid tribute to the Meitei king. Hence they were given the name *lois*.¹⁷⁴ Others stated that they were the one who refused to be converted into Hinduism and were treated as a separate tribe, even though they belong to the same class in per with their counterparts.

According to the text such as old manuscripts of the Meiteis the “establishment of the *loi* village started during the period of *Nongda Lairen Pakhngba* (33-154A.D.) and lasted up to the period of *Meidingu Khunjaoba* (1652-1666ad). During the reign of the King *Pakhangba* (33-154AD) fifteen *loi* villages were already established such as *Chakpa, Khasekmei, Awing sekmai, Koutruk, Thongjao, Thoubalong, Andrwo, Phayeng, Leimaram, Kakching, Sikhong, Ningel, Tinshang, Chairel, Loikon Leisangkhol*. During the reign of King Kongyamba (1324-1335) another four *loi* villages namely *Heiyal Hangulp Houbakchao and Waikho. Wangoo Nungoo Sugnu Langathel and Pallelwas* established as *loi* village during the time of King *Khagemba* (1597-1652AD).”¹⁷⁵ The *loi* villages managed to pay their tribute to the King and in order to fulfil their payment they were engaged in different industries which were changeable without the permission of the king.¹⁷⁶

Under the first king of Manipur named *Nongda Lairen Pakhangba* (the first King of Manipur) certain rules and regulations were made concerning to required rituals ceremonies and duties to be performed by the *Maibisto* gods and goddess. Under the same ruler the first institution known as *Yoiren Loishang* was established.¹⁷⁷

The Yoiren Loishang comprised of certain work such as rituals which were concerned with divine related activities. It was a common belief that the *Maibi* sometimes sat in front of the deity and delivered an oracle which contained divine message for the people. Fortune telling and rituals events were also practiced under *Yoiren Loishang*. *Maibi Tombi* stated that “Sometimes members of a clan used to visit *Yoiren Loishang* to listen to the *Maibi*’s oracle and to hear prophesy. If any message which contained misfortunes were to be revealed to the family she would tell them to arrange a ritual ceremony along with the required necessary

¹⁷⁴ Hodson T.C. op. Cit..p8-9.

¹⁷⁵ Government of Manipur, Manipur Gazette. Imphal: Tribal Development Department, 1994. p 14.

¹⁷⁶ Devi Sanathoi P, *Social Change Among the Lois of Manipur*, (Doctoral Thesis) Assam University, 2012 P.64.

¹⁷⁷ Singh. Kumar S, op. Cit. Page 22

items that needed to be offered to god in order to avoid such misfortunes to fall in the future. An offering in the form of dance were performed to satisfy the god by the priestesses”.¹⁷⁸

Ametpa Loishang (healing department) was another institution under the house of the divine which basically engaged with the traditional healing methods practiced by *Maiba* and *Maibis*. *Maiba* and *Maibi* who were involved in this department were different from the other *Maibi* who performed rituals. Collection of herbs, plants and certain animal's parts which had medicinal benefits was their main work. They were also commonly known as *Metpi Laiipi* (those who practiced healing activities). Prayer was offered for the treatment of the sickness by *Maibi*. Sometimes they was any demand from *lai*, animals were sacrificed to take away all the sins and ailments from the people.

4.4. Selection of *Maibi*

To become a *Maibi* by her own choice was considered impossible. Society believed that they were appointed by the gods to carry out the activities of god. It was believed that they became diviners not by choice but because of the relationship with their ancestors and sometimes they were considered as ancestor's servant.¹⁷⁹ They acted as the middle man between god and human being. Selection from the divine or the possession of the spirit during *Lai Haraoba* was the two ways to become a *Maibi*.¹⁸⁰ Parrat noted that:

“A *Maibi* might become possessed at an early age, as young as seven year. Such person was considered as the best *Maibi*. But older women may also become *Maibi* even at late as fifty or sixty years of age. Possession by the spirit made the person behave in abnormal behaviour. The woman sang song, pulled at her hair and refused to eat food. At the festivals she might dance in a wild manner and fall into a trance in which state she would utter different languages.”¹⁸¹

Khulem Chandrashekhar wrote:-

“The *Maibi* behaved in a strange way that could be seen from their lifestyle or behaviour at her young age. There were resistance to eat *ngakra*, *ngashep* (some kind of fishes). They loved to put flowers on their ears and tend to be easily angry without

¹⁷⁸Interviewed with Maibi Tombi, kakching chumnang Leikai, Kakching Gas Pareng, 7th August, 2018

¹⁷⁹ N. Haokip, *Tribal Medicine and Healing Practices*, Research Project, Tribal Research Institute Government of Manipur, Imphal, 2018, p 20

¹⁸⁰K Indra op. Cit. p 72.

¹⁸¹ Parratt, op. Cit. P. 97.

proper reason. They talked freely without boundaries. Sometimes they fall sick for weeks and went on like that without food for many days. Such person would become *Maibi* in the later days. They began to speak different languages and their ascent began to change. The person then started looking for *Mama Guru* (Spiritual mother *Maibi*,) for training. During the period of training to become a *Maibi*, a person had to learn *Maibalon* (language of the *Maibis*), studied the science of reading pulses etc. from *Mama Guru* who were well trained and professionals.¹⁸²

At the time of learning, the new *Maibi* would follow the footsteps of *Ema Maibi* from door to door in order to observe how she would treat the sick person, and the way she would perform the rituals. After she was well trained the household gradually began to consult her for certain sickness.

The *Maiba/Maibi* nor dine or eat together with the non *Maibis* and they would refuse to take certain types of food that was considered unclean such as fishes especially having long whiskers and they would avoid touching those who were in the state of menstruation or childbirth and so on.¹⁸³

Another interview with a *Maibi* revealed the process of possession of the *Maibi* by the spirit wherein “she narrated that she saw herself some behavioural changes at the time of spirit possession such as dizziness, unconsciousness, rigorous illness, spending most of the time on her bed for many days, began to speak unknown knowledge, stayed without food for days, moving her head in circular way, not paying attention to her surroundings. She would not listen to what other people say and most of the time she would remain in a situation of having conversation with the spirit. She further expressed that she was totally conveyed when another *Maibi* appealed to god and after that sprinkle with water by *tai ren* (medicinal plant) leaves was done for sanctification.¹⁸⁴

She further stated that she would get relieved only after when she met the mother *Maibi* (*Ema Maibi*). She would sit and sometimes cry and laugh. Later *Ema Maibi* conducted the rituals and sprinkled her with the twigged of *tai ren* and after this offering was made to the spirits

¹⁸² Chandrasekhar, Khulem, *Enatki Harao Kumei*, Meitei Mayek Organising and Research Association, Imphal, 1994, p 28.

¹⁸³ Parrat op. Cit. p.99.

¹⁸⁴ Interviewed with Subadani Mayanglambam, kakching chumnang leikai on 27th July, 2018

who have possessed her. Sometimes the *Maibi* face opposition from the family and in order to set her free prayers and offering were made to the spirit.”¹⁸⁵

The dress of the *Maibi* was different from the ordinary people. They usually wore a white blouse and a white *phanek* (kind of skirt) and the white shawl (*inaphi*) around the waist a wrapper of white colour would be tied on top of the *phanek*. The hair was tied like a ponytail and adorned with flowers behind the ears. The male *Maiba* also wore in a similar way. They usually decorated their hairs with a white *koiyet* (turban) on the head and a long white dhoti and white sash wrapped around their waist.

According to one informal (preferred to be anonymous) revealed the struggle after her husband became *Maiba* and his concerned for the welfare of the family began to lose day by day. She further stated that her husband almost forgot that he was a family man and he had a wife. He did not bother anymore about his family and the affairs of the house and began to talk strange things of marrying a *Maibi*.”¹⁸⁶

Not only in the Meitei society, the other societies also had similar experience. For instance in ancient Mexico, a shaman name Don Soltero after he was possessed by the spirit fell sick severely. He was cured only after he accepted the invitation and later he was given a spirit wife who lived in a cave. If Don Soltero had refused to marry her she would have killed him in revenge. Don Soltero was not allowed to have sexual relations with his human wife since he became a traditional healer. Once when he tried to sleep with his human wife after he became shaman, he had an attack and fell on the floor as though he was dead. During his attack his spirit forced him to go to a cave where he was beaten up by the ‘*enanitos*’ (dwarf size rain deities).¹⁸⁷

However this is not the case for all the *Maibi*s of Manipur. Some *Maibi*'s husband generally seemed to accept his wife status as a vehicle of the god. Some *Maibi* while sleeping with the husband she occupied the left place normally taken by the husband. Moreover, on a particular night she used to sleep alone, on the belief that the spirit would visit her and who would appear in human or animal form.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Interviewed with Maibi Tombi on 7th August, 2018, Gas Pareng Kakching.

¹⁸⁶ Anonymous

¹⁸⁷ William Madsen, Shamanism in Mexico, *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 11, No. 1. Spring, 1955, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3628996>

¹⁸⁸ The People, <https://www.webindia123.com/MANIPUR/PEOPLE/Purohitism.htm> (accessed date 14th oct, 2018)

4.5. Role of Maibi/ Maiba

According to Shakespeare the *Maibis* played an important role in the festivals and believed that the *lai* takes more pleasure in female ritual functionaries and more likely to be possessed by the spirits.¹⁸⁹ However Parratt contradicted such assertions and explained that there would be little doubt that *Maibi* was far more important than the *Maiba*. She further stated the subdivision of the *Maibi* in the *Maibic* community as per their functions in the society. The rituals specialist who engaged with the ritual festivals was distinct from the midwives and traditional physicians. Even they were not required to wear white dress which was usually worn by the *Maibis*.¹⁹⁰

The *Maibas/ Maibi* services were different according to the needs of the society. The role of the *Maibis* and their main aim were to show the work that was performed by the deity *Sanamahi* and the *Nongthangleima* for the welfare of the human being during the time of the creation.¹⁹¹ In order to reveal the duty of the gods, *Nongthangleima* was presented in a human form which later came to be known as *Panthoibi*.¹⁹²

Another worth mentioning role played by *Maibis* in Meitei society was the ritual part taken by *Maibis* in the *Lai Haraoba* (rejoicing of god) festival. *Lai Haoraba* was conducted in three different locations. One was in *Kakching Khulen*, one in *Kakching Wairi* and another in *Kakching Khunou*.

The spiritual functionaries of the traditional Meitei religion were the male *Maiba* and the female *Maibis*. On the first day of the festival, a ceremony called *Lai-Ikonba* (calling up of the *Lai* from the water) was conducted by the *maibi*, *maiba*, *penakhongba* (flutplayer) and other male and female attendants would join them later after the *Ikouba* was done. Before the *Ikouba* was held, all the main players had to report themselves at the worship place and the *maiba* and *maibi* would do rituals to bless them. A series of dance would be presented beginning from the *Hoilaoba* (uttering *Hoi*) to *Laibou Jagoi* (dance representing the birth of *lai*), *Panthoibi Jagoi* (dance of goddess *Panthoibi*), and *Lairen Mathek* (dance in the form of curve of a python). The *Maiba* and *Maibi* would take the lead.

¹⁸⁹Shakespeare, J. *The Religion of Manipur.* Folk Lore, 1913, P.429

¹⁹⁰ Parrat op. Cit. P 96.

¹⁹¹ Singh S. Kumar, op. Cit. P3.

¹⁹² Panthoipi Khongkul, Manipur State Archive (written script)

This suggest that *Maiba* and *Maibis* were not only priest and priestess but they were also great singer and dancer who preserve the oral religious traditions and rituals alive. The *Amaibeas* were to dance in order to welcome the gods and goddesses at three stages in the course of the returning journey. The dances were further explained in the following manner:-

- i) “First arrangement – “*Lai ok Jagoi* (the dance performed while welcoming the deities) by the priestesses. Dance performed while welcoming the deities by the priestess. This dance started with *Kangbom or Konggol* (bubble) *Jagoi* (the buddly dance) and to be closed with *Laiyingthou-Lairemma Jagoi* (the dance perform with taking roles of the god and goddess concerned to the merry-making festival.
- ii) Second stage- The dance was began with *Kangbon Jagoi* and *Kakkup Jagoi* (the dance in the initiation of small water lettuce) and was closed with *Laiyingthou Lairemma Jagoi*(dance offered to specific god)
- iii) Third stage- The dance started with *Kangbon Jagoi* is then proceeded to *Kakkup and Kangjao Jagoi* (the dance performs in the imitation of the (big) water lattuce) and then closed with *Laiyingthou-Lairemma Jagoi*. ”¹⁹³

On the last day the *Maiba* and *Maibi* offered ceremony called *Nongkaba*(sending god to above). Related rites and rituals were performed and they uttered chants and seek blessings from the god before he leaved the place. The end of *Lai-Haraoba* was usually followed by the indigenous Meitei games and sport such as *mukna*(wrestling), *lamchel*(marathon) etc.¹⁹⁴ The person who won the *Mukna* of such year was given the privileged to sit amongst the leaders of the Kakching during the *Lai Haraoba* in the next year. Till today, the religious rituals like *Lai Haraoba*, ancestors' worship, etc. are conducted by the *Maibas* (traditional priest) and the *Maibis* (traditional priestess.) in Kakching. And the location of celebration has now expanded and many more other *lais* such as *Chumang leirembi*, *Ethak Ningthou* etc. (name of *lais* according to different location) began to celebrate in different season of the year.

It is to be noted that the *Maibi* also acted like a shaman. Lowie defines a shaman as “any person who has direct communication with super- natural beings through dreams, visions, or

¹⁹³Lukhoi Singh Wahengbam, *Lai Haroba*, Imphal2008, p.26.

¹⁹⁴ Huiaren Bihari Singh, *A study of Manipuri Meitei folklore*, Doctoral Thesis, Guwahati University, 1985,103

spirit possession.”¹⁹⁵ According to J. Herskovits a shaman is an individual who endowed with supernatural power to heal, who had contact with the spirits and could find out the hidden things beyond time and space.¹⁹⁶ Some similarities could be seen between *Maibi* and Shaman. Some similarities could be seen such as “the *Maibis* like the Shamans get into trance by singing and dancing. Both regarded themselves as an intermediary between the natural and supernatural or spiritual world. They could also diagnose and cure human sufferings. They could predict or forecast human fortune and communicate with the spirit and were possessed by the spirit.”¹⁹⁷

Parrat described the role and unique features of the *Maibi* and stated that: *The Maibi* also played an important role while giving birth and during early days when there were no proper medical facilities she served as the main helping hand in time of delivery. She made a visit from houses to houses and sometimes she stayed for one or two week at the birth place if the conditions demanded. Along with some other elder women the *Maibi* would wait and attend the woman who gave birth and her child.

During such process no one was allowed to enter the house and they used shawls to make partition and to maintained privacy while giving birth. According to Meitei folklore “During pregnancy and after the fifth month, a ceremony called *kokthokchamthokpa* (cleansing) was performed in which the *Maibi* would offer fruits and flowers to the *lai* and she would arrange a pot full with water which was used later by the woman to cleanse herself so that her strength could be regained during pregnancy and childbirth. After giving birth the child would be placed separately and *Maibi* would do the cleansing and then she cut the umbilical cord with a bamboo knife.”¹⁹⁸

In tribal areas such as Pallel, Aimol, Maring and other neighbouring villages of Kakching midwives were engaged more often to attend the delivery. This suggested that the service of the *Maibi* were quite important during delivery and therefore they were called as ‘midwives’ in contemporary period.

It is said that the first of wailing of a child was essential. It was questionable if the child did not cry and it was considered as *tatnaba* (no link). Generally a ritual was generally performed

¹⁹⁵ Robert H. Lowie, *An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, New York: Rinehart, 1940, p. 548.

¹⁹⁶ Melville J. Herskovits, *Man and His Works*, New York, 1948, p56

¹⁹⁷ Roshan singh L, op. Cit. p40-41.

¹⁹⁸ Parrat, S .L. op. Cit., p77

on the sixth day of child's birth. This was due to protect the child from any evil consequences. The birth date, the hour when the baby was born, correct minutes and seconds, etc. were noted cautiously. This would tell the future of the child and the determining factors in his or her future life. After the delivery of the child, the umbilical cord was cut leaving three fingers length with a bamboo split by the *Maibi*.¹⁹⁹

In the early days, after the delivery if the mother had no breast milk then a woman called *khomeinbi* (the one who breastfeed) was asked to breastfeed the child until the mother had enough milk.²⁰⁰ In the Meitei society the *Maibi* and other who assisted the mother at the time of delivery would be invited for a special treat after the birth and rituals were over.²⁰¹

In the past, the *yupanthaba* (ritual ceremony) was performed in the morning of the fifth day after the birth of a child and on the night of the same day, a kind of worship for the prosperity of the newly born babe was also held by the *Maibi*.

Yupanthaba was held by the *Maibi* and she arranged the entire required items for the ceremony. Food was cooked to offer to goddess *Leimaren* and then the offered food was given to the child. Before she fed the child she held the child on her left sitting east ward of the house where the ritual was taken place. The *Maibi* then fed the child with the prepared mixed food symbolically by chanting six times with the following words:

“Napa chak, napu chak, pangal chak,

Nadayai sidayai chak,

Ngasidagi Taibang Chinjak Charabani,

Mum ... Mum ... Mum ... Ku ... Ku ... Ku

The literal translation goes

(Father's food, grandfather's food, strength's food, Immortal food.

From today eat the food of life

¹⁹⁹ Bihari Huren, *Folklife Folklore Meiteis Methodology Migration Mingthomba Topography Valley*, Guwahati University, 1985, p. 79

²⁰⁰ Interviewed with M.Subadani, Kakching Chumnang Leikai, 27th July, 2018

²⁰¹ Bihari Huren op. Cit .p. 31

*Mum ... Mum ... Mum ... Ku ... Ku ... Ku).*²⁰²

Another rite called *Mihunba* was conducted after the three days of delivery which was arranged by the *Maibi*. “Tradition believed that the soul of infants was usually attempted by the evil spirit to cause harm. Hence the ritual of *mihunba* was conducted in order to protect the child from the evil spirit and seek blessing from god for the welfare of the baby, to have long life, and success. The necessary items during the rituals time were fresh vegetables, banana, fresh *ngamu*(fish) water and all were placed on the *yangkok*(basket used for winnowing rice chaff). The *Maibi* placed the baby near the *yankok* and would pretend to feed the child by reciting

kok kok kok

mi mi mi.”²⁰³.

4.5.1. Death Ceremonies

Maiba played an important role during the death rituals ceremony. According to ancient literature and chronicles like *Sakok Lamlen Ahanba*, *Poireiton Khunthok*, *Thirel Layat*, *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, etc. there were four methods of corpse disposal in the Meitei society.

“They were:

1. Disposal in air (Nungshit Potloi): In this method the dead body was left in the open air and this was particularly meant for unnatural death. This was known from the legend of Meiteis which says that a woman named *Mainu Pemcha* hanged herself and her mortal remains were disposed at *Mangarak Kanbi* (a forbidden place on the hill slope) and were left to decay; second,
2. Disposal in water (Eshing Potloi): the dead body was submerged into the river or lake and slowly the body was decomposed in the water. It was believed that once the dead body was thrown into the water, the departed soul could join the divine world. This 1 type of disposal was quite common in the early days; third,

²⁰²Bihari Huren, op. Cit. P.32.

²⁰³Interviewed with Subadani M. Kakching Chumnang Leikai on 27th July, 2018.

3. Burial into the ground (Leipak Potloi): A grave was dug into the ground and the dead body was buried by performing rituals by the *Maiba*. This was mainly done to the dead bodies of the premature child only; fourth,
4. Cremation (Meigi Potloi): A funeral pyre was arranged and the deceased body was placed on it and after the ritual was performed by the *Maiba* the body was then burned. This practice of cremation began as early as the time of *Poireiton*, the first crowned king of the Meitei who came to settle in Manipur. After he saw smoke at a distance he inquired about it and was told that the cremation rite of a person was in the process. This incident was found to be recorded both in *Poireiton Khunthok* and *Ningthourol Lambuba*, the old Manipuri manuscript.”²⁰⁴

The above mentioned practices were similar to the practices of the people of Kakching. During the time of burial besides the person, baked peanuts or mustard seeds were buried alongside the dead body. The sign of germination from the ground would reveal whether the child would come back or not.²⁰⁵

In their early days, there were two phases of burial system known as *Maithong thingba* (closing the door of the grave) and *Maithong Hangba* (opening the door of the grave) usually conducted by the *Maiba*. *Maithong thingba* was performed right after the body was placed inside the coffin along with the belongings and after one year another ceremony called *mangthong hangba* was arranged by the *Maiba*. Usually an expert was called for this purpose to dig out of the grave. A person would collect the decomposed body parts from the grave in a basket called *shakuwalong* during the opening *mangthong hangba* time.

“After washing three times the parts were dried under the sun for five. The dried bones were then arranged with flowers and the *Maiba* performed rituals called *saru leitengba* (decoration of bone) then the parts were put inside a big earthen jar called *kharung*. After sometimes the *Maiba* would arrange rituals to bury the parts again at a place called *mangpung* (burial place) and *Maiba* would finally perform the ritual of *mangthong*

²⁰⁴Dr R.K. Mushuksana, *Changing Phases of Corpse Disposal in Meitei Society*, E-Pao, <http://e-pao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=manipur.Arts> and Culture. Changing Phases of Corpse Disposal in Meitei Society

²⁰⁵Interviewed with Bhorot Singh N. Kakching Sumak Leikai, 29th June, 2018.

thingba.²⁰⁶ Madhob and Khelchandra also talked about the above mentioned types of the disposal of corpse.²⁰⁷

Traditionally speaking the role of *Maiba* is very important when person near to death. His duty was to check the sick person body. There were two ways to know to what extent the person would survive. One was according to the birth horoscope and another was the language of the pulse. The *Maiba* would usually check the month of the death of the birth both odd and even days, and the days and *Maiba* would look unto when the sick person first learnt to stand or walk or on which animals he or she sat was questioned according to the horoscope.

According to tradition it was believed that the departure of the soul usually took place if the person falls on *kwakyen* (one particular bird). After checking all these above conditions he would know that the sick person condition was serious or not. If the departure was near for the person then he would inform the family to orchestrate the rituals. And until the sick person died the *Maiba* would stay with the sick person and he would persistently check his pulse and the beat.

Before the person died the *Maiba* would chant and place his hand on the abdomen and uttered on the sick person ears not to overlook the names of guardians by any means. He would help and show which direction his soul had to go i.e. from his brow, so that the person could reach *Atiya Guru Sidaba* (immortal God). After the person died he was taken out of the house and set in the small hut made by Poaceae grass (*e*) called *Khangembam* (a place where a death person was kept) and a pillow using banana stem would be placed under his head and a white shawl would cover his entire body. The following rituals and ceremonies were taken care by the *Maiba* so that his soul would rest in harmony and he would achieve accomplishment in the following life.²⁰⁸

However after the coming of Hinduism, the dates and the nature of the rituals and services was changed and the language of the chants was totally replaced by the new religion. For instance, on the eleventh day after the passing, a ceremony called *sorat* was usually conducted which been now moved on the fourteenth. The hut was now covered by white

²⁰⁶ Mushuksana, R.K. op.cit. E- Pao

²⁰⁷ Th. Madhob and N. Khelchandra, *Khunung Lichat Sajat*, Imphal, 1970, p. 69.

²⁰⁸ Interviewed with N. Sanatomba, Kakching Chumnang Leikai, on 27th December, 2018

shawl rather than the grass(e).²⁰⁹“Before the person died, the Brahmin would asked the sick person whether he would be willing to born again in the next life (which is called *petra*) or not(*veiragha*- no desire to reborn in the next life). If it was *Veiragha* then he would be given a pillow made by flower instead of banana stem. The ceremonies were conducted uniquely in contrast to the person who decided not to return. The family needed to go without meat and every morning it was compulsory take bath and offered meal for the soul for 12 days.”²¹⁰

In those days children up to the age of twelve years were usually buried and in case of the infant child, the body was put in an earthen pot and was disposed far place the village. After three months a ritual called *Soiren Thingatpa* (sending the deceased soul of infant child) was performed so that the soul would no longer return to the family.²¹¹ The items for the offering during the rituals were banana, *lang ahingba*(thread), fried *sagol hawai*(kind of pluses) and *Heibi mana singju*(Leaf of bedstraw salad). All these articles were placed in a basket and the Maibi would chant to the god not to repeat such kind of incident in the family.²¹²

In case of death during child-birth, death of an unmarried man or woman, the ceremony of *chupsaba*(making doll of opposite sex) was performed by the *Maiba*. Offering was arranged during the *chupsaba* ceremony to please the god and the *Maiba* would pray to the god not to make it happened such unforeseen death.²¹³ During the rituals, if the decease body was male then the *Maiba* would make a female partner doll along with the necessary items. The required items were similar with soiren thingatpa which included banana, cotton white cloth, one basket of paddy, thread, *Heibi mana*(one fruit leaf).²¹⁴

A common ritual called *Chaban Thaba* used to be performed when any person had an encounter with the evil spirits. It was done to ward off the evil spirits. Offering were arranged by the *Maibi* which included *tharoi ahamba*(snail cover), *Nganu marum*(egg duck) ,*kabok nachan taret*,(seven basket of rice), *latoi lafang ama*(a set of banana).²¹⁵

4.5.2. Traditional Health Practitioners

²⁰⁹Interviewed with M. Modhuchandra, Kakching wairi, 18th December, 2018

²¹⁰ Interviewed with Shamurailakpam Dhamu Sharma, on 5th January, 2019, Kakching Chumnang Leikai.

²¹¹ Interviewed with Borot Singh N. Kakching Sumak Leikai, 29th June, 2018.

²¹² Interviewed with Subadani, M. at Kakching Chumnang Leikai on 27th July, 2018.

²¹³ . Khelchandra Singh, op. Cit, p. 178

²¹⁴ Interviewed with M. Subadani, Kakching Chumnang, July, 2018.

²¹⁵ Interviewed with M. Subadani

From the above accounts we know that the male *Meitei Maiba* also acted as a traditional healer using indigenous medicinal substances for the treatment of different diseases and sickness. Their purpose was to go in the woods and to collect indigenous substance which had medicinal properties.

It is stated that “the *Meetei* kings had their personal *Maibas* or Herbalists such as *Konnok Thengra* and *Meidingu Lalhamba* as their *Maibas* respectively.”²¹⁶ Such knowledge had been passed either through generations or through *Mangtak*(told in the dream). One *Maiba* narrated his story during the interview that while he was sleeping in his dream, the god showed him the particular plant and the place where he would find such plants. And that particular plant was found at the exact spot that was told in his dream.²¹⁷

Most of the *Maiba* healers utilized composite traditional knowledge and practices. For instances

- (i) Herbalist Reflexologies *Maiba* used *mana mashing* or herbals and body massage with oil. Oil was mainly extracted from the plants seeds mainly. Sometimes they used to stay for a week at the house of the sick person if the condition was severe. Their main medicine was extracted from plants and herbs.
- (ii) Herbalist Sprain Setter *Maiba* used herbals for healing sprain injuries, sprain twisted etc.”²¹⁸

In Kakching the common traditional healing methods were bamboo splints locally known as *watchap thaba*. Bamboo was cut into many pieces in the same size and the *Maiba* would wrap the bamboo around the affected area and kept for sometime until it was completely healed.

Thus the *Maiba* and *Maibi* were the traditional priests/ priestess and medical practitioners who played an important role in the society. Tradition believes that the origin of the *Maibi* was related with the creation of the world. The myth revealed that *Nongthangleimawho* was

²¹⁶ Tomba A. Meetei, *Traditional Medicinal Knowledge in North Eastern Region of India*, International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies (IJIMS), 2017, Vol 4, No.2,105-111. 105

²¹⁷ Interviewed with Dr.Kalanjoy at Phumlou on 2nd August 2018

²¹⁸ A. Meetei, *Traditional Medicinal Knowledge in North Eastern Region of India*.

considered as the first *Maibi* who was created by god *Sanamahi* to persuade and attract god *Pakhangba* (another son of the supreme god) who destroyed the creation carried out by God *Sanamahi*. In order to make her dwelling place on the earth, the big institution called *Maibi Shanglen* (house of *Maibi*) was sent down from heaven since then the *Maibi* community has been set up. Their role and purpose were various according to the needs of the society and also according to their gifts and talents that were given from *lai*(god).

Maiba and Maibi also acted as religious priests, performed rites, chants, oracles, counsel people, also acted as midwives and medicinal healers using herbs and vegetation. They were also good dancers they performed traditional dance of the Meiteis during the *lai haraoba* and during rituals. The study reveals that the life of the *Maibi* seems to be difficult. No one in the society wanted to become a *Maibi*. Once they became *Maibi* their married life and family life had been affected because of the relationship with the *lais*. In some cases they continue to live like ordinary people with their husband and family. Their family also believed that they were the peace maker of the society to bring harmony in the land. Because of their great sacrificial work they were highly regarded and rewarded with gifts. The *Maibi* institution is still prevalent till today as they were highly demanded even after the introduction of modern medicine in Kakching.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The familiarity with the uses of plants in the field of medicine dated back to the beginning of civilization. The tribal people and ethnic races throughout the world have developed their own cultures, customs, cults, religious rites, taboos, legends and myths, folktales, medicinal plants etc. Society irrespective of their culture, area, modernism and innovation has their own traditional medical beliefs and practices.

All these beliefs and knowledge about the way they perceived their health was interwoven with their culture. It is true that when there was no proper treatment, more people relied on the traditional medicines and in serious cases they took the help of the medicinal practitioners. The traditional way of treatment were based on their knowledge of the natural environment.

In India the knowledge of using plants as medicinal treatment was developed from early period. Even the earliest literature of India Rig Veda mentioned about the nature of medicine and its uses. It recorded the use of medicinal herbs and plants. *Ayurveda*, the oldest Indian medicinal system consists of different plants and herbs along with its uses which goal was to stay healthy and strong.

The role of traditional medicine and its value were known to the early people of Meiteis. The present dissertation locates the background of traditional medicinal knowledge and practiced in the Kakching District of Manipur. The resaerch examined the awareness of traditional healthcare system which had been existed long time ago. The finding reveals that

the belief and culture and the role of the medicinal practitioners had shaped the social institution and the Meiteis of Kakching.

In former years Kakching was a part of seven clan and later alienated due to their conflict with the King of Manipur called *Nongda Lairen Pakhangba*. Since then they were termed as *loi* (degraded group of people). However the people of kakching had strong social, political, cultural institution. In the Meitei manuscript it is written that King *Yairangcha* ruled as a King of Kakching during the reign of *Meidingu Thawanthaba*(1117-1153 A.D). From the accounts of Meitei Puwari (History), it is recorded that Kakching was famous for iron smelting industry and though it the people paid their tribute to the King of Manipur.

Apart from this Kakching was also well known for promoting traditional medicines. It was believed that the oldest *Maibi* (practitioners) was the *Chakpa Lamlang Amaibi* (from *loi* community) who was the head of the *Shanglen*. The finding also reveals that the *loi* people had already developed the institution of *Maiba Maibi layen patha* (medicinal Department of *Maiba Maibi*) since early days.

Among the people of Kakching, the understanding of the sources of sickness was of different types. They believed that sickness was caused due to their disobedience to God or as a result of offending god or an encounter with the evil spirits. Magic, chants, rituals and rites to their respective gods became a way to seek healing and wholeness. Some believed that it was due to the metaphysical cause in the body or from natural incidents. Through various examinations and errors or proving, the early people of Kakching had developed certain ways of preventing sickness or ailment. The early Kakching people also believed that the surrounding environment and the nature had provided a good number of flora and fauna which would help them to cure various sickness and ailments.

The knowledge gained from the respondents through an interview also suggested that the early Meitei *Maiba* and *Maibi* also developed a system of curing sickness by using traditional medicinal practices known as '*Maiba Maibigi laiyeng pathap*'. Since time immemorial they had carried out extensive work which concerned with treating people using traditional healing methods under an institution called *Ametpa loishang* (medical department) which was set up by the King of Manipur. The department of *Ametpa* and *Maiba Loishang* was bigger in size and was given greater importance than its counterparts.

The Meitei people of Kakching not only had a deep understanding of the use of plants and vegetables, they also used a wide range of varieties of plants for their dietary consumption. Such vegetable salad (*singju*), boiled delicacy with chilli (*eromba*) vegetable soup (*chamthong*), fruit delicacy (*hei thonga*) and so on.

The study also finds out that the Meitei myth has mentioned about the story of a King who was completely cured after he was treated with seven types of plants which had medical values. The Meitei also had known the concept of diseases since ancient days. The common diseases found were cough, cold, fever, piles, skin diseases, dysentery, snake bite, jaundice, women problem etc. For instance, the treatment of the above mentioned diseases of traditional medicines were used and applied to such ailments. *Lamangkha* was widely used for common cold, cough and fever; *Haona* was used for cut and injuries; *singju pan* were used for blood purification; and *pakhangleiton* for dysentery and *lamthabi* for Jaundice and kidney problem. Various plants were also used for different types for ailments. This shows that the early people of Kakching had tremendous knowledge and deep understanding about their surrounding environment especially of medicinal plants and its values.

The study finds that the plants and herbs for health treatment were quite common. The *Maibi* and *Maiba* also used different plants and herbs for religious purposes, rituals and rites. They had the knowledge of *Tairen* leaves which was commonly used for the sanctification process of *lai* during *Lai Haraoba*. When a spirit possessed a person a twig of *tairen* was used to ward off the *lai*. Apart from plants and herbs, animal meats were used for medicinal treatment. Boiled dog soup was served for tuberculosis and to regain the strength of the sick person. Roasted *ngamu* (a kind of fish) was usually given to a delivery woman to purify blood and to increase haemoglobin level. *Maiba* and *Maibi* also used *ngamu* for ritualistic purposes.

The health practitioners were quite efficient in dealing with sickness and ailments. They played an important role while serving the society. They spent their entire life for the welfare of the people and to protect them from harm and sickness. Study revealed that Kakching people believed that some of the practitioners were chosen by god and through examination. The chosen ones were more gifted, and were more talented too. Sometimes in their dream god also revealed certain plants and herbs which had medicinal properties for specific sickness. The study suggested that Meitei priest and priestess were more or less like shaman, the middle man who stands in the gap between man and divine. They were a great religious players who played a major role in times of festivals and ceremonies.

The research finding shows that the Meiteis of Kakching worshipped several gods and goddess and this testify the early religious system of Meiteis. The society had a strong reverence for the god and goddess. They believed that they were the one who protected them and looked after them. Giving reverence, adoration and worshipping them would bring harmony, peace and prosperity not only in the family and also society. To offend them would caused sickness, death and bad omen would fall on the family. Hence, people began to worship god and goddess in adoration and to please them by performing rituals, ceremonies, festivals so that good health, prosperity, and good fortune would fall on the society, families and individuals.

One of the uniqueness of the people of Kakching was ancestor worship. Their religious practice was based on the belief that the deceased family members have a continue existence, take an interest in the affairs of the world, and possess the ability to influence the fortune of the living. It was an indispensable aspect of the traditional belief of the Meiteis of Kakching. Some of their ancestors of Kakching were *Ibudhou (great grandfather) Khamnangba, Ibudhou Nagollai, Chumnang Lairembi*, etc. Every year the people of Kakching organised a religious ceremony called *Lai Haraoba* (pleasing of God) to please the departed soul of their ancestors.

The study reveals that *Lai Haroba* (rejoicing of god) was one of the most important traditional forms of festivals. The main theme of the festivals showed the nature of the creation of the universe by the Almighty God (*Atiya Guru Sidaba*) along with his wife *Leimaren Sidaba* and two sons *Sanamahi* and *Pakhngba*. The *Maibi* and *Maiba* performed the creation story through a series of dances (Jagoi). It is stated that "*LaiHaraoba* is but an expression of the whole human life from birth to death. Human enjoyment is the reflection of the very image of divine happiness. The pleasing of the gods is expressed as *LaiHaraoba*." (Y. Tamphajao)

Cheiraoba was another festival of the Meiteis as a whole. It is the New Year's festival which takes place in the first day of the month *Sajibu* (March) for the Meitei speaking community of Kakching. Since time immemorial the festival has been observed every year to bid goodbye to the old year and to welcome the New Year. On the day of *Cheiraoba* God *Sanamahi* and *Leimaren* were worshipped in every household of Kakching. In the morning the women of the household cleaned the area where the deity was placed. It was a custom to change the pot

water and placed the flowers, vegetables, live *ngamu* (acephaloe pantatus), fruits and *langthrei*. The position of *Ngamu* could indicate the fortune of the family.

The study reveals that there was a great change in the religious practices of Kakching people. The coming of Vaishnavism or Hinduism had completely transformed the traditional festivals of the Meiteis. The *Heikru Hidongbaan* another traditional Meitei festivals which had been practiced in the name of god *Pakhangba* was later substituted by *Shri Bijoy Govinda*. However the uniqueness about this festival is still kept by the people. Boat racing was the main programme of this festival. It was led by the two individuals of each team. All the members would wear the beautiful traditional attire of Meiteis and the winner was adorned with the garland made by one hundred and eight *Heikru* (a fruit) along with the gold and silver. The festival was named as after this fruit called *Heikru* which was used to cure certain sickness. This shows the deep connection of the people with the religion and natural environment.

As mentioned above the people of Kakching had a great tie with their surrounding or environment. The people had the tradition of worshipping tree. The most sacred tree was the *Tairen* (*Cedrela toona*) and its leaves were used for various ceremonial purifications by all the *Maibis*. This particular tree was considered as sacred and was regarded as the abode of the spirits of *Lais*. Till today *Tairen* is used by the *Maiba* for the rituals ceremony. Such belief has developed to the emergence of sacred groves and continued to be ingrained in the Meitei culture.

The preservation of forests and tree in the name of god also helped to conserve certain valuables plants which had medicinal properties. The study shows that *Kwak- Tobgpham* at *Uyokching* a sacred hill at Kakching served an important place purpose for the conservation of rare medicinal plants like *Kwamanbi* (*Smilas lanceifolia Roxb*) *Heinouman* (*Syzogium fruitcosum D.C*) and its roots were widely used for the treatment of dysentery and urinary problems. Through careful research it is observed that the religion and belief had a strong link in conserving the surrounding environment and this had provided the main source of medicinal plants.

The main player behind the religious ceremonies of Meitei festivals, rituals and rites and the medicinal healing methods were the *Maiba* and *Maibi*. Truly *Maiba* was someone who worked as a medicinal practitioner or a doctor to whom men would seek for help in times of needs. They were the main player in all the ceremonies where magical rites and

rituals were involved. They were the traditional priests and priestesses of the old Meitei religion’.

The Maibi were of different types according to their gifts and the activities they engaged themselves. The *Maibi* who were the attendant of child birth were different from the other *Maibis* who performed religious ceremonies. The rituals and ceremonies performer was engaged during birth. Before the child was born or during pregnancy a ritual called *kokthok chamthokpa* (cleansing ritual) was performed by *Maibi* to regain the strength of a pregnant woman. At the time of delivery the attendant (*Maibi*) would attend the mother of the child for various purposes.

The study shows that the ancient literature and the chronicles mentioned the methods of disposal of death or burial system wherein the *Maiba* played a major role for such rituals. It was the duty of the *Maiba* to check the deceased body. He was more or less a modern medicinal doctor. The *Maiba* would understand according to his pulse rate that how long the person would stay and the family would arrange the burial ceremony. When the deceased soul was believed to be departed from his body, certain rituals were followed which were performed by *Maiba*. The *Maiba* and *Maibi* were greatly honored by the society. The words of the *Maibi* were believed to be the words of god and were obeyed with great sincerity. Even in Meitei marriage ceremony the *Sanamahi Maiba* called *pudit* would lead the rituals.

The 17 and 18 centuries witnessed a tremendous transformation in the social, religious and culture of Manipur. The new religion called Hinduism entered all over the places of Manipur including Kakching. The study shows that of the great Kings of Manipur namely *Charairongba*, *Garibniwaza* and *Bhagyachandra* witnessed this religious transformation and played an important role in embracing and propagating the new religion. It was also known that during the reign of King *Garibaniwaz*, a total change could be seen in the Meitei society of Kakching.

From the royal account it is learned that the King *Garibniwaza* tried his utmost to wipe away the traditional faith, belief and practices. This was followed by the demolition of traditional forts, shrines of deities and construction of new temples in the name of Hindu gods. Other accounts also talked about Manipur King *Garibaniwaza* made an attempt to collect the remains of the ancestor from the burial ground and were later cremated in the new tradition of Hinduism and the ashes were thrown in the *Ningthi River*. The study finds that propagation of the new faith

was in full swing after 1720 under the guidance of Shanti Das. A preacher from Sylhet district, Bangladesh. Shanti Das was successful in converting the Manipuri King Garibaniwaz.

One interesting point to be noted here is that about a hundreds of meiteis scripts were burnt by the Hindu Vienavites who entered Manipur. This was mark by mass conversion into Hindusim and the faith became the state religion. The traditional social order was replaced by new social heirachy. The social division that was hardly addressed to be now reflected more under the new caste system- such as Kshatriya and the Brahmin. The traditional family names were now replaced under new titles. This was the most influence changes that was ever experience in the traditional kakching society. Tradition was now more or less expressed under foreign innovation.

Another interesting point is that as the influence of new faith had gradually impact in the Meitei society and culture some section of the Lois also began to embrace and follow the new lifestyle of Hindusim. The research found that it was due to upgrade their status in the society. This was more or less similar to ther term 'Sanskritisation' coined by M.N. Srinivas to identify 'the process by which a low caste Hindu or tribal group changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of the high or twice-born caste.' It was in fact the King who had freely allowed them to change their identity. This was mainly for regenerating the Kings power and wealth- exanssion of hegemony.

It is also known that in Khurkhul villages with the section of the king the Hinduised Loi constructed a temple with a mandap(a place for perfroming ceremonies) and a dwelling place for the Brahmins installation of Hindu temples in *Loi* villages was another step taken by the King to convert the masses. Ch. Budhi Singh in his work mentioned about the installation of one temple in each loi villages along with a brahim was sent to assign the work of the society. In Khurkhul, the hinduised Loi constructed a temple with a mandap (a big pandal in front where all religious festivals are celebrated) and a dwelling place for Brahmin which was ordered by the king.

However the study reveals that there were resistance against the new religion and was more pronounced in the *Loi* villages like Kakching. The study finds that the majority of the *Loi* villages continued to keep old traditional values and practices that were followed by their forefathers. *Maibasand Maibis* continued to perform their respective rituals and rites during

religious ceremonies and festivals. They were considered as ritual specialists rather than the Brahmins. It was only after the introduction of modern medicines by the colonialist that traditional healing lost its value and importance like before. The study finds that due to the introduction of modern medicine there was a wide gap between the *Maiba* and the wider society of Kakching people. The activities of the *Maiba* were less acknowledge and the applications of traditional helaing were within the family circle only. However the study reavealed that till today there are various aliments and diseases which cannot be treated by using modern medicine. In such cases the role of *Maiba* and *Maibi* and the local practitioners could not be replaced by the modern doctor. The Meitei people of Kakching still regared the traditional medicine and its practices which were highly regaraded by their forefathers as a lifeline of the society.

Table 1: Protected plants in sacred groves of Manipur

Name and location of the sacred grove	Protected plants in the Groves
Yumjao Lairembi, Khurai, Imphal East, Manipur	Bamboos, <i>Rhus chinensis</i>
Lainingthou puthiba, Khurai, Imphal East, Manipur	<i>Tectona grandis</i> (teak), <i>Ziziphus jujuba</i> , <i>Eucalyptus sp.</i> , <i>Caesalpinia pulcherrima</i> (Gold mohur), <i>Toona ciliata</i> (Australian red cedar), <i>Eupatorium birmanicum</i> , and others
Yangoiningthou lainingthou, Khurai, Imphal East, Manipur	<i>Eucalyptus sp.</i> , <i>C. pulcherrima</i> (Gold Mohur)
Lai awangba, Khurai, Imphal East, Manipur	<i>Zingiber officinalis</i> , <i>Citrus sp.</i> , <i>Eucalyptus sp.</i> , <i>Rhus chinensis</i> , <i>Mangifera indica</i> , <i>Ziziphus jujuba</i> , <i>C. pulcherrima</i> (Gold mohur), and others
Konthoujam lairembi	<i>Ficus sp.</i> (10 plants in of <i>Ficus</i> series)
Koubru, Phayeng, Manipur	<i>Rhus chinensis</i> , <i>Citrus sp.</i>
Mayokpha, Elangbam leikai, Imphal, Manipur	<i>Terminalia arjuna</i>
Phayeng <i>umanglai</i> , Phayeng Forest Reserve	<i>Rhus chinensis</i> , <i>pine</i> , <i>bamboo</i> , and others

Source: L. Jeetendro Singh, N. Biraj Singh and Abhik Gupta

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