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Gods, moral order and rituals: Shared rituals and religious beliefs of the ancient Meiteis of Manipur

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ABSTRACT

The Meitei in the early days are an enthusiastic people, vital, full of the zest of life and adventure. Their civilization, which is distinctly Meitei, is associated with their own political and social systems. They abide delicately scattered over the land, uninformed, ignorant and oblivion animist ethnic group, believing that a life force or soul substance was contained in all natural objects. By extension, this speculative sense produces a general animistic belief that all objects, phenomena, and forces of nature large and small, are lively with spirits or souls. Blending with this animistic conception, Nature's totems become deified into guardian spirits, while a supernatural belief in ill willed nature, goblins also arise out of a fear of the mysterious happenings myths are shaped. The idea of the separable soul thus evolved from visions and dreams and applied to godhead might assist in the making of several varying forms of deity, as in fetishism, totem, or the worship of the dead. What hints us predominantly, however, is their system, or rather systems, of philosophy, in which they follow matter and force and mind to their ultimate grounds in the venture to satisfy those two innate feelings, "to know," and "to worship," implanted in the heart of man.

Keywords: Emoinu, Helloi, Nonglao eshei, Phunga Wari, Sanamah, Saroi-Ngaroi, Sorarel

Introduction

In the early stage of human civilisation, we see the primitive people whom we usually consider as completely subservient to the need of not to get starve, just to survive in very harsh material surroundings, are perfectly capable of disinterested thinking; that is, they are moved by a need or a desire to understand the world around them, its nature and their society.ⁱ In order to make an explanation to the wonders of the nature some people blessed with artistic psyche invented myths, legends, fables, tales and handed down from

ancestors to youngsters. It is the philosophy and experience of life that has shaped the fundamental ideas regarding natural occurrences that leads to create gods, folk beliefs, and ethical norm and to perceive those elements logically in a culture.ⁱⁱ Gradually, such artistic creations have become the rare treasures of mankind in the form of great religious scriptures. Thus, the abstract thoughts and strange rituals in religion, art and literature are invented. The gamut of myths are ancient stories whose authors are unknown that attempt to explain a belief, custom, or forces of nature by telling the story of gods and goddesses and their interventions in the lives of mortals. It is heard and is repeated as it is remembered with or without additions or changes made by new tellers. Myths and legends are important to us today for a number of reasons. They have value as literature, offering timeless and universal themes; they give us insight into other times and places; and they help us to see how much humankind had and has in common. As Strauss (2005) has mark:

Whenever we find myths as disconnected elements, this is the result of a process of deterioration and disorganization; we can only find scattered elements of what was, earlier, a meaningful whole. Or we could hypothesize that the disconnected state was the archaic one, and that the myths were put together in an order by native wise men and philosophers who do not exist everywhere, but only in some societies of a given type.ⁱⁱⁱ

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Myths and legends should be part of our reading, never to be discarded as primitive, outdated, or unimportant. Myth becomes active, living belief of a people, tied to their ritual and religion. The themes of myths and legends are the same as those that are present in all great literature, just a few of which are man versus man, man versus nature, man versus the gods, man on a quest, family conflict, and coming of age. Most myths and legends include at least one of these great themes and often several. These are in the earliest “stories,” the ancestors of all literature that we read today. An interesting theory about the growth of the myth asserts that the myths are the distorted and fragmented accounts of true historical events, which in course of time have been magnified and elaborated until the figures in those stories assume the superhuman qualities.^{iv}

When human being tries to search for the cultural identity and its significance, the creation myth of a particular culture becomes omnipresent as our innate need to know where and how we came from which again is a cultural lives. Unfortunately no one was there who have witnesses the beginning, then we are left with the necessity to making stories by using metaphorical and symbolic narratives clothed in the elements of real life experiences. The creation myth is the most significant story because it serves as a model for everything we do, for human act of creation in whatever form it takes the creation of a family, the destroying of something, the building of a house, the crop growing in a field, the making of work of art.

The account of Meitei creation myth may be said to be as old as the history of Manipuri culture and literature. In Manipur, a myth is term as *Malem Leishemlol* meaning the creation of the world. Meitei creation myth is the *Ex-Nihilo creation* myth type in which a Supreme Lord exists alone in a pre-creation emptiness or void, creates an organized universe on his own. The Meitei religious fundamentalists insist on their sacred narratives not literal truth but metaphorical and symbolic power

and significance without which their lives would have no meaning, no root or even intolerable.

Scope and Relevance of the Study

The area of study incorporates discussing the importance of ancient Meitei rituals and beliefs as an intricately woven part of culture of the Meiteis as religious beliefs happens to be the expression of the vital elements of the Meiteis and their civilisation. The study also discusses the origin, growth and sustenance of the Meitei gods, rituals and moral codes through beliefs system. The relationship between literature and society is a complex phenomenon. The present study tries to bring out the contribution of the ancient Meitei literary texts to the developing and shaping of the socio-religious structures of the Meiteis.

Hymn to the Sun god

The concept of worshipping the natural objects and its phenomenon are universal as these are the things all the human races of different ethnic group, creed or caste shares in common. The Meiteis are traditionally believers in Sanamahi and Pakhangba worship, where Sanamahi is identified with the Sun and Pakhangba with the Moon. According to the Meitei mythology, Sanamahi and Pakhangba are the sons of Atingkok Sidaba (vast expanse), the creator of the Universe. *Sanamahi* (liquid gold) is given much privilege in the religion of Manipur because of his association with the creation of Earth. He is considered as a supreme deity and worshipped in a particular place in a south-west corner of every household of Meitei. Literature and religion of the pre-Vaishnavite Meitei is centre on Lord Sanamahi. Lord Sanamahi is the indigenous trust of the Meiteis and people who follow the religious decree is known as the *Sanamahism* or *Sanamahi Laining*. Sanamahi of the Meitei pantheon, sometimes identified with the sun, is the national god of the ancient Manipur because of the idea developed by the Meitei, the Lois community and also the Purum tribes who believe the colour of Sanamahi resembles the golden ray of the Sun. The Sun with its various aspects occupies an important place in the religious beliefs and mythology of the Meitei people of Manipur. So,

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Sanamahi is the amalgamation of spiritualism and naturalism. King Kangba of the Leishangthem Salai (clan) who reigned in the *Hayi chak* was the first to adore Lord Sanamahi.^v Atombapu Sharma tries to relate Sanamahi with *Syen* meaning Garuda who is a vehicle to Lord Vishnu.^{vi} His attempt to relate the ancient Meitei faith with Krishna Yajurveda is known to most of the people, since people are already acquainted with the Vedic religious tradition quite earlier in the history of its civilisation. There exists a corpus of ancient hymns and prayerful poems dedicate to the Sun god or Sanamahi. One of the specimens is as follows:

I human being, cannot describe in my way
the exhaustive attribute of the Immortal sun-
The god of gods. Oh sun, great jewel of
daytime, thou art fire giving warmth of
Earth's back; give unto me the solar gem,
the gift of immortality, that promotes the
longevity of life.^{vii}

Another Specimen of the Hymn to the Sun god (Sanamahi) goes as:

Oh thou art Heaven and Earth, thou born on
the stone, born on the white stone; thy
umbilical chord is cut by the leaves of
lemchang, thou who lightest the jungle and
water, and who shinest up to the top of the
loftiest bamboo. With thy brightness make
warm the heat of the sun on the water of
rivers, Oh sun-god may thy servants be pure
and sinless like thou. To thee we pray.^{viii}

This early Meitei piece of poetry is to pay
homage to a god of their time. It seeks to flatter and
worship Sanamahi so that he will continue to bless
his obedient followers. We can see how the poet is
endeavouring to draw himself nearer to the sun god
through ornate expressions and attentive worship.
The poem includes symbolic meaning, alliteration,
rhythm, and descriptive or intricate language as it
exists in verse.

Lord of the Sky: Meitei traditional religion and belief in the sky god

The worshipping of Sky God is one of the cultural traits of the Meitei. They worship the Sky god in the visual and material form of Thunder and Rain and by the name Sorarel they worship the impression of the Sky. Sorarel is like the Hindu god Indra. Both use the weapon thunder, *Nongthang* in Meitei language meaning the sword of the sky just like Vajra in Hindi. It is important to remember that a supreme sky being is always associated with the function of thunder. An ancient hymn to Soraren which shows that he was associated with the culture and administration of the Meitei:

O Soraren, Thy abode
Is in the sky,
O king, thou wieldest the
thunderbolt,
Strikest thou with unerring
aim.
.....
.....
Administrator of justice
Above the clouds
To thee we bow down,
Give us prosperity.^{ix}

Soraren is associated with sky in Meitei culture. It either inhabits the sky or is the sky itself. He is associated with creation myth of the Meiteis. He is also associated with the fertility and prosperity of the land. The sky covers the earth brings about all of the creation. There is a shrine of God *Sorarel* at Thoubal Haokha worshipped yearly by a section of people. There is a tradition that the family name Sorenshangbam has to offer thunderbolt made of iron to the deity. Ibohal (1986) writes "the most dreadful god was the sky-god" which the Meiteis believe "the thunder and lightning with clouds lowering down were his acts to crush them."^x

Nonglao Eshei (Calling out the rain)

The ancient Meiteis has adopted certain animistic culture if there is no seasonal rainfall which caused draught or heavy rainfall which caused flood. There

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exists a weird tradition of Rain making and Rain stopping ceremonies adopt which is a living practice. One of the most accepted song or *mantra* yell of calling out the rain known as the *Nonglao Eshai* is given below:

O rain, pour down
Submerge the peak of
Langjing
Float down maidens of
Patsoi
Let the youth of Unam
pick them up.
O Rain of KoubaKounu
O rain of Loijing Loiya
O rain of Ireng Kham
O rain of Thangjing Koirel
O rain of Wangbren, the
supreme deity of south
O rain of Shambum
Maharaba
O rain of the north-east
O rain of Haokap
chingsang
O rain of Khunpham
ngangjeng

Then after addressing the rain according to the names of the directional deities of the hill abode, the song follows as:

Come down in torrent
May the sky produce
thunder,
And may the clouds
rumble
Let the earth be heavy
May the goddess of water
glide rain
And may the goddess of
water shower rain on us.^{xi}

It is in simple diction. It is a living cultural practice that the *Nonglao Eshai* is performed by experts in a ritualistic method. These are the following lines to the above rhyme. R. K. Jhaljit Singh (1976) says, "Now we notice a song which was believed to cause rainfall. Manipur is blessed with good rainfall and

formerly there was no need for irrigation canals. But on rare occasions there was drought. Then priests would perform some rites and sing the following song."^{xii} Whenever there is a scarcity of rain, the priest and experts perform rain calling rites at Nongju Khong (Langjing hill). Many of the oral narratives and legends and beliefs along with rituals are stored in Meitei tradition regarding the rain and its associate God.

Frazer (2012) writes, "In Manipur, on a lofty hill to the east of the capital, there is a stone which the popular imagination likens to an umbrella. When rain is wanted, the rajah fetches water from a spring below and sprinkles it on the stone."^{xiii} So, ritual expresses the community's hopes and fears. It brings them together in an environment that permits such feelings to be openly expressed and shared. So, the ancient artistic creation is said to inspire from human experiences.

There is a legend where a lady by the name Seleima having no children worshipped Sorarel asking to bear her nine sons. With the blessings of Sorarel she gives birth to four stone children. She feels embarrassed of her children so she leaves home and comes to the Iril River. The river is flooded so she leaves behind her children and crosses the river alone. In the meantime, she gives birth to another five stone children. She leaves them on the spot and comes back for the earlier children who are crying after the separation from the mother. The mother then asks Sorarel about how to feed the strange children and *Sorarel* says that the god would stop the rain and the offerings that men made to procure rain will be the food for their children. Being assured by the god she transforms herself into a stone and stays with her four children in a small cavern at the Nongmaijing hill.

Particular family like Hijam and Salam are to look after the stones. According to Higgins (1997), when Angom and Luwang are at war two family of Luwang clan, Hijam and Salam are deserted by the Angom king Sigonglanthaba and

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they are made *maibas* and placed in charge of the mother and four children. When there is no rain in the land, a particular person given the title *Nonglamba* from either family with rituals separated the small stones from the big one, and then the small stones will cry.^{xiv} When Sorarel hears the cry he will send the rain. The invocation of rain calling mantra is lengthy. Mr. Shakespear (1913) writes:

It commences with an enumeration of all the hills in the neighbourhood whence the rain is supposed to come, and calls on them to send rain and make the rivers increase. It then goes through a long list of insects, which it says are stretching themselves, with stiff backbones and wide open eyes, challenging the rain. "Therefore, O! Rain, fall, and increase the waters." Next a number of animals, and lastly, a number of birds, are mentioned, which are said to be defying the rain in the same way, and it is therefore invited to descend.^{xv}

Just like the family of Hijam and Salam are assigned for the task of rain making, the family of Konjengbam is assigned for rain stopping. There are certain rituals to be performed like the placing of white cloth on the rock assuming the god will ascend on it. Then two or three fine plantain leaf are cut round and the ritual objects like betel nut and *Pan* is place-on one of the leaf and some fruits well slice into pieces on the other with a lamp set for the offering to the rain god. The prayer addresses as, *Sibo linga, Sri Swar Sanamahi, Sibolinga Sri Swar Thangjing, maikai ngakpa Bishnu He! Narayan*. If the rain happens to stop the rain stopper may stop the rain for three months, if the articles are kept untouched and the lamp remains to burn. If Sanamahi could not stop the rain the recourse is turned to Sorarel, the Rain god. In the worship of the Sorarel an earthen pot is half filled with sand and put on to the fire. The manuscript containing the rituals of rain stopping is reposed on a platform made on top the hearth. The rain stopper stirred the sand with a spoon chanting the charm *Ong Karo Ong karo*. It

is believed that when the book and the sand are warm, Sorarel will warm the earth and the air. If this ritual also doesn't work, the words *Ong Karo Ong karo* is writing on a billet of wood and weave it round his head until the cloud breaks. While weaving, he pronounces the word:

Guru thangdi chumthangni, Gurugi chunggoi di leichinne, leichin nongphai kaibane, Setkaiu settumu, Mapugi thang di tongonba, haikup, haiphra. Thabat, thabat hiragi di thangne haidatlo. Ong Durga Debi kapacheyo! Ong Jadurakha Debi, kapacheyo. Swarha Ong Debi, kapacheyo, Swarha! Durgagi thang ne Segak segak Khaio! Khaio! Tumo. Gurugi thang di chumthangne. Gurugi chunggoi di leichinne. Leichin nongphai kaibane. Setkaiu settumu.^{xvi}

The literal translation of the above hymn may be deciphered as:

Rainbow is the sword of the almighty, Cloud is the shield, and cloud separates, separates the cloud, it's an arch sword, play the sword, Slash it to cut, Ohh Durga, Ohh Jadurakha Debi, Swarha Debi! It's a sword of Durga, Slice it apart, Rainbow is the sword of the almighty, Cloud is the shield, and cloud separates.

The outcome of such forceful imposition of Hinduism to the ancient faith can be traced in the invocation of present Manipur. M. Kirti (2007) writes:

The Meiteis used incantations, hymns, etc. very frequently along with those of Hindu and Buddhist origin and thus also set a Living example of synthesis in this place wherein Tantricism was thought to lie in words and phrases Mystic significance of the Vedic syllable Om and Tantric symbol Hum occur in the available treatises.^{xvii}

The compositions of ballads using different languages are found abundant reflecting the

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assimilation of different cultures. There is a mixture of Bengali, Sanskrit, Hindi and Manipuri expressions such as “kalgi samay Matam (Time) Syam Kanhai Sakhenba, Brajagi Ningthou Mapari,” the English rendering of which is given as: “Shyam Kanhai, the fine looking, the son of the King of Vraja.”^{xviii} Such a unique mixture of Sanskrit words with the Manipuri invocation, and the impartial appeal to the gods of the Hindu pantheon and the local divinities, precisely shows the religion of the present Manipur. Hodson (1908: 188) gives a personal observation about the religion of the land. He says: “The Meitheis are now in a stage, through which many now most orthodox Hindu clans must have passed. But it may safely be prophesied that the resultant faith will bear clear marks of the Meitheis ancient animism.”^{xix} The extraordinary mixture of Sanskrit words with the Manipuri invocation and appeals to the Hindu gods and local deities exactly shows the religion of the time which Shakespear (1911) says as “is typical of the religious muddle in which the people are”.^{xx} Robinson (2004) asserts that:

In Manipur, Hinduism was adopted by the state and with it came the hegemony of the Bangla language. Many rare Meitei *puranas* and manuscripts were destroyed because they were once perceived as a hindrance to the spread through modes of singing and devotional meetings.for instance, it was as late as in the second quarter of the eighteenth century that through the efforts of the King’s preceptor, a Bengali Brahmin and follower of Ramananda named Santidas, attempts were made to organize Meitei society on caste lines by giving recognition to the Meiteis themselves as Kshatriyas and instating the immigrant Bengali Brahmins as the Brahmins of Meitei society.^{xxi}

When we look into the matter philosophically, we must regard it as a matter of civilisation, dealing with misfortunes followed by

natural calamities. There is rain and draught even though we do not sacrifice or perform rituals.

So, the Meitei cultural use of ritualistic ceremony is to express the community’s hopes and fears. It brings them together in an environment that permits such feelings to be openly expressed and shared. So, the ancient artistic Meitei composition is said to inspire from human experiences. Having developed music, dance and poetry during group labour and feeling the need to contend against Natures, the ancient Meitei conceptualizes a sense of collective inspiration and strength experienced in the acts of singing, dancing and chanting poetry, imagining these as generating a power able to overcome Nature’s agents. The invention of musical instruments and dance is prompted by a need to harmonize the supernatural forces and to direct climatic changes, so that fruits and grains will ripe and all forms of life can thrive normally.

Phunga Wari (Story told near the hearth)

Phunga (hearth) is closely interwoven with the Meitei cultural practice of storytelling. While waiting for the food to be cooked by mother the other members of the family, grand parents and children sat around the hearth and grandparents tell stories, folk tales, fables and riddles to the children to awaken them before eating. Since the story is told near the hearth it is called *Phunga Wari*^{xxii} and again it is told while waiting for evening meal it is also known as the *Chak Ngai wari*.^{xxiii} At the end of each story, the children try to relate the events to their natural social environment, discuss the theme of the stories, describe the characters, raise many questions and parents offer them explanations. In this way, the society succeeds in handling on to its children the collective wisdom for centuries of years. Besides cultural practice of storytelling, the hearth locally known as *Phunga* in Meitei language is closely interwoven with the Meitei a sacred place essential to venerate fire. Fire worship is practiced depending on the construction of fire myths and legends of a particular culture. Unlike the Greeks Hestia, Vesta of the Romans and the *Grihagni* of the Hindus, the ancient Meitei style of worshipping fire is of

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different origin. Fire is made by various methods like striking flint and steel called ‘meiyei’, and ‘meiba chakmom’, ‘khambi’ are produced by rubbing a bamboo strip on dry wood are used for sacred rituals.^{xxiv}

Hymn to the goddess Emoinu Ahongbi

The deity reciting the fireplace of every Meitei household is a goddess name Emoinu Ahongbi, the goddess of material needs and prosperity which acts as a counterpart of the Hindu Goddess Lakshmi. This fire is supposed to be maintained day and night. People pray to Goddess Emoinu residing in the fireplace of every Meitei household, to stay in the house forever. The goddess is venerated every year on the 12th day of the month of ‘Wakching’ (January). Every home lit up hearth to welcome Emoinu Ahongbi. The religious rituals for the worship of goddess Emoinu Ahongbi include the offering of Whitefish, fruits, flowers, vegetables, one meant for Lainingthou Sanamahi and other for *Phunga Lairu*.

These are the opening lines of prayers to the goddess:

He Ima leishirel Leipunbi,
Leimarel shawon oiribi.
Achi tat-tabi, akhong
kangdabi;
Emoinu Ahong Achaobi.
Tara chakning khakna
chaksoubi,
Wanglei yenning khakna
yensoubi.
Wayel wangam
thourangbi,
Huyel langcheng
Shaphabi.....^{xxv}

The free translation of the above poem is as:

O mother of cherish and
nurture
Manifestation of supreme
Goddess Leimarel
Never to be unfilled, never
to be empty

Emoinu, goddess of wealth
and soothe
Thou serve of food with
endorsement
Thou deal with impartial
judgment
Robust at the time of
warfare....

In a simple sense, the fire in the kitchen symbolises the abundance of food, for the reason that if there is no fire in the house we take it as the scarcity of food to cook that implies to poverty. Thus making the conviction in a religious means by saying that ‘fire in the kitchen must be kept ablaze day and night’ our ancestors devise the community through divine intervention to put you out to earn bread and milk. It is more secular than religious in its thematic structure; it has similarities with the wisdom literature of the *Bible* or the *Bhagavata Gita* in a sense that the instructive appeals of the wise saying not only serves as moral guideline rather every statement of the Meitei anecdote reveals the deeper problems of value of life, of good and evil and it represents a collection of moral ideas and principles based on experience and universal application.

One of the legends says that Emoinu Ahongbi is taking shelter in the disguise of an old woman at King Luwang Punshiba’s place. The king has nine wives all well behaved which create peace and harmony in the Royal family and so the kingdom prospers. The king loves his youngest wife Khayoirol Ngannu Thumbi more than the others that makes the others wives jealous which intrigues against Khayoirol Ngannu Thumbi. She could not tolerate and left the king. She comes back with her son Senba Mimaba at her parent’s place at Khuman principality. When Mimaba becomes young lad, one day as if it is predestined, he sees a big deer metamorphose by his uncle Luwang Pudangkoi. He throws a spear and the deer gets hurt. The deer crosses the Luwang province and the farmhouse of the Luwang King. King of Luwang feels pity of the

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deer and tells the hunter to ask a price for the exchange of the deer. Mimaba runs back to his mother and asks her what the price would be. The clever mother tells her son to ask the King for the old woman sitting near the hearth as the exchange price. Punshiba with intent agrees to the deal and allows his son to carry away the woman along with him. So, witty Thumbi make it in bringing Emoinu Ahongbi to the Khuman territory that prospers the Khuman land.

The analysis of the above legend gives the implication that Emoinu being the imagery of health, wealth and good moral conduct, stays in the family that pursue certain enriching behavior on the conduct of family life. If there arise any dispute or disintegration among the members of the family, Emoinu begins to think for an escaped plan. In Meitei philosophy Emoinu believes to transmit the whole principle of do's and don'ts on every family member in every Meitei houses. Emoinu installs moral tag to the married couples by diffusing the value of a good woman who adores her husband, who can calm down her husband, to preserve fire of the hearth and not to offer it during night time, household's confidentiality, not to receive anything without offering to the God. In short, Emoinu Ahongbi is a goddess who composes family and good moral conduct.

Totemic and fetish ritualistic practice in Meitei culture

The primitive people worshipped the natural phenomena such as fire, sun, moon, air, water, earth, and the sky as manifestations of gods. The prodigy of the origin of ritualistic practices in the history of Meitei culture comes out from the increasing Man's wishes and will day by day, and then he has full of pride because of his dominance. In order to suppress the supremacy of man, the Supreme Lord call up all the gods and goddesses, 'Lairembi' (demigod), 'Saroi Ngaroi' (animal and fish supernatural being accompanying the Supreme lord), 'Tinmu Laimu Phataba'(demon and ghost) and spirit like 'Lumleima Sampubi' (fairy). Shakespear (1913)

asserts that the *Sa-roi-nga-roi* are "evil spirits which are always on the lookout to injure human beings; the *Helloi*, beautiful female forms which lure foolish men into waste places and then disappear, leaving their victims bereft of reason; and *Hingchabis* or witches."^{xxvi} So people consider them as evil spirit.

But the 'Saroi Ngarois' are not wicked. They are assigned by the supreme lord to lure, bait and tempt the mankind who doesn't act properly in life. (1997) has written about the nature and ordeal of the 'Saroi Ngaroi'. The Supreme Lord gives ordain as:

If the human beings he (Supreme Lord) was about to create did not feed them, they might inflict all sorts of troubles on them. These beings are all males and are known as Saroi Ngaroi. When any large concourse of people gathers, they collect in large numbers and must be fed at the conclusion of the gathering, or else they will trouble people. If a person is carried home sick from a journey, they will follow him home and cause trouble if they are not fed.^{xxvii}

They accept the arrangement from the Supreme Lord and spread everywhere to give a sign to let man know the existence of the god. Sinful man who is ignorant of such super natural activities encounters one or the other of these spirits such as the tale of Henjunaha. Henjunaha once go to meet his girl named Lairou Lembi in late night. On the way he finds a group of horde circling around each other and having a feast. Without knowing who they are Henjunaha join them. While distributing their meal Henjunaha also gets a cut out little finger. He comes to know that they are not human and he runs away. He has a *Kangjei* on his hand with which he tries to defend himself from the Saroi Ngaroi. The Saroi Ngarois cannot harm him until he has the *Kangjei*. Unfortunately, the angle of the *Kangjei* (mallet) hooks at the bamboo bar (gate) of Lairou Lembi's house and slips off from Henjunaha's hand. At the moment, Henjunaha becomes the prey of the

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Saroi Ngaroi right in front of the step ladder of Lairou Lembi's house.

Likewise, man can become mad, some of them even faint, some of them start doing frolic dance, and some babble with unknown dialects if they happen to encounter Saroi Ngaroi. Man becomes so much confused and worried and they don't know whom to complain for such miseries. Seeing the miseries and woes of the man, god decides to come in their dream and instructs them about how to behave in the world. He also tells man the necessary items to be given to *Saroi Ngaroi*, *Tinmu Laimu*, and *Sampubi* for rituals and offerings along with their food. Since then the offering has been is practiced even today on every first Saturday of the month of *Lamta* (March) known as the *Saroi Khangba*^{xxviii}. In the morning, the senior ladies of the localities of the villages collect rice and vegetables from each house, in order to perform offerings to the *Saroi Ngaroi* at a junction where three roads meet. Hence *Hanu Kokchao*, *Hanu Leikham* and *Lammaba Tummaba*, *Lamsengba*, *Tusengba* take the offerings and settle back to their places without giving harm to the people. As mystical response, divination is practiced long before the era of the Meitei political suzerainty. By the era of Pakhangba or so, divination is used in combination with sacrificial appeal, signaling an active endeavour to manage Nature in order to protect human livelihood.

Besides, the *Hellois* (sirens nymph) who lure people and take away into waste place, devoid of the earthly life. Like the Homer's (1891) *Kalypso*^{xxix} of Ogygian Island that keeps seducing *Odysseus* to make him her lover, the *Hellois* symbolize the forces that divert men from their objective. Most of the victims are male and some of them even become fanatic. They are the seven daughters of *Soura Laihatpa Thouba*, namely *Sana Changningkhombi*, *Sana Lengkombi*, *Sana Lenglengkombi*, *Sana Manikkombi*, *Sana Tharungkombi*, *Sana Yoirengkombi* and *Chingnung Ngangbi Sananu*.^{xxx} They are so beautiful, even more beautiful than the dancers of the supreme Lord *Sorarel*. The youngest is believed to be the most

beautiful and most perilous. Keeping in mind that these *Hellois* are the seductress, the significance is to explain the hardships and experiences waiting to intercept the ignorant young man by taking advantage of the difficulty of the journey by offering the alluring presence of unreal pleasure. So, they are named as *Helloi* meaning (no one exceeds their beauty). They then ask their parents about how to live. Then, their father tells them that any person whoever meet them would go mad, then they could live in the waste by eating the offerings made for the cure of their victims. A sevenfold offering is made by the *maiba* to cure the madness. Betel nut, *pan*, *heiruk* (fruits arranged in a presentable manner), a scarf and *phanek*,^{xxxii} plantains and *kabok* (pop rice) bought from seven different markets.^{xxxiii} There is a belief that a man who put on a *lugun* (sacred thread) is out of harm from the *Hellois*.

The *Hingchabis* originally numbering into seven but increases according to time. These *Hingchabis* are wicked than the above-mentioned troubles. Its nature is to enter the body of one who is afflicted. It is said that when a *Hingchabi* stares at a food one is eating he/she will get afflicted. There is an ancient measure to avoid such conditions. It is to grasp both the knees and mistreatment her utterly. Whether there is some logic on it or not the Meitei practice it whole heartedly and is brought down through tradition as a part of culture. Certain offerings are also prepared to expel the spirit like sacrificing of the *Mithun* in the past days now substituted by a fish *Ngakra*.^{xxxiii}

These rituals are performed by special category of people and include priests, sorcerers, etc. such as, "offering rice, plantains, sugar cane, and a cock or hen according to the sex of the particular person to the *Laipham* (abode of God), and after praying to the god, a fowl is released with the other articles left before the deity's abode."^{xxxiv} The idea of 'humanism' being the core basis of ancient Meitei philosophy is retained in the heart of every people to fix complex problems by providing the notion that

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divine intervention is the way to solve the struggles of the individual and the world.

For instance, during the due ceremony of dead, one narrates the journey of the dead soul to the other world so that the dead soul may be able to assist to his destination through such narrative. As Boyer (2001) writes:

People fear death, and religion makes them believe that it is not the end—is certainly insufficient because the human mind does not produce adequate comforting delusions against all situations of stress or fear. Indeed, any organism that was prone to such delusions would not survive long. Also, in as much as some religious thoughts do allay anxiety, our problem is to explain how they become plausible enough that they can play this role. To entertain a comforting fantasy seems simple enough, but to act on it requires that it be taken as more than a fantasy. The experience of comfort alone could not create the necessary level of plausibility.^{xxxv}

So, the Meitei culture has prepared ritual to harmonize all human life and activities with the cosmic forces which governed heaven and earth, and at the same time, it constitutes an attempt to control the unpredictable elements of human experience. There is a large variation in the observance of these customs and rituals in different religious groups, communities and regions. In many cases, even in divided families, they have their own set of customs and rituals. Most of the rituals take place at different

points in one's life cycle, seasons, festivals etc. There are even similarities in rituals across the religions. But with the contentment of the existence of a Supreme Being, all others became subservient to Him.

Conclusion

Thus, Meitei creation myths deals with the efforts of man to account for his existence and that of the world in which he lives, the origin of Heaven and Earth and all that is in them are among the most deeply interesting manifestations of human mental activity and progress. It originates from wonder, curiosity, and the desire to know and understand. It tries to discover the nature of truth and knowledge and to get the fundamental value and importance in life. Man, in the ancient days was surrounded by the hostile forces of nature beyond their control; they try to explain the experiences of life, both the good and bad things of life. We want to know how we came to be, we want to understand the natural world around us, and we yearn for some deity we can praise and blame. So, the story is constructed by handling the theory of creation understood by the people of Manipur at the time of composition by using local materials. They express anger, jealousy and joy, like man does. Strength, fear, unfaithful, love, admiration, beauty, hunting, farming, education; there is a God of every human activity and expression. The expansion of various gods and goddesses are the replica of expansion of human population.

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