changes it brought in the practices and language in the rites of passage, names etc. In this chapter we will discuss how Manipuri has been impacted primarily in the realm of vocabulary through religious revivalism. To enlarge its vocabulary Manipuri depends on its resources and linguistic purism. Sometimes it coins new words from native elements. The removal of Indo-Aryan origin words was part of a larger vocabulary maintenance, where all Indo-Aryan words are being targeted for eradication and replacement by pure Manipuri words. In the process they try to exploit or revive the extinct pure Manipuri words or to create new words based on the existing form or to translate the borrowed items to sound like Manipuri.

The final fifth chapter gives the Conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER- 2
ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN MEITEIRON

2.1. Background

The chapter deals with the practice of ancestor worship in Meitei speech community. Ancestor worship of Meitei speech
community is one of the oldest forms of religious beliefs and practices. Analysis of beliefs and practices associated with ancestor worship is very important for better understanding of the next chapters because indigenous elements in terms of language, ways of belief and practice are seen in ancestor worship of the Meiteis’. This clearly shows the pure identity of the Meitei and their ways of life and beliefs in god, which is not affected or influenced by any other religious beliefs and practices.

The structure of the chapter is as follows after a brief introduction, a general background of the ancestor worship is in order. It will be followed by the study of Ancestor Worship as Ritual and Belief in the Afterlife. Then the chapter discusses Meiteis’ Ancestor Worship. The section on Different Kinds of Meiteis Household Ancestor Worship has a section on Sanamahi as a Supreme Ancestor Worship. And under this section we will discuss /ɕiːraobə/ ‘Meitei new year’ and /sənaməhi-ɕəŋhəmbə/ ‘offering of uncooked rice to Sanamahi’. It will be followed by Clan Ancestors’ Worship under which /sagei-ɕopkə/ ‘ancestor who gives birth to lineage’ is analyzed. And Ancestral deities of household under which /pʰungə-ɕopkə kʰurumbə/ ‘worship of ancestor of household’ is discuss. The chapter further focuses on Ancestor Worship in Meitei religious ceremonies.
Previous research on the subject by renowned scholars suggests that the term ancestor worship, was coined in 1885 by the British philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer, referring to a ritualized innovation of dead kin. Ancestor worship (also called ancestor veneration) is a ritual practice that is based on the belief that deceased family members have a continued existence, takes an interest in the affairs of the world, and possess the ability to influence the fortune of the living. It is believed that the goal of ancestor worship is to ensure the ancestors continued well-being and positive disposition towards the living and sometimes to ask for special favors or assistance.

The social or nonreligious function of ancestor worship is "to cultivate kinship values like filial piety, family loyalty, and continuity of the family lineage" (Yang 1957). Rituals of ancestor worship most universally consist of offerings to the deceased to provide for their welfare in the afterlife, which is envisioned as being similar to the earthly life. Ancestor worship is a religious form of worship which emphasizes the influence of deceased relatives on the living. The worship is not a religion in and of itself, but a facet of religious expression which recognizes an element beyond human power. This form of worship is at the core of people's religious practices such as in China, tropical Africa, Malaysia, and Polynesia.
Aspects of this type of worship have also been traced to the ancient Egyptians and Romans also.

The basis of ancestor worship seems to be the principle idea that "those who have gone before" have a continual and beneficent interest in the affairs of the living. Ancestor Worship is generally any variety of religious beliefs and practices concerned with the spirits of dead persons regarded as relatives, some of whom may be mythical. However, the core of ancestor worship is the belief in the continuing existence of the dead and in a close relation between the living and the dead (who continue to influence the affairs of the living). Beliefs in a surviving element in a person, even in the afterlife, such as a soul, have been held in almost all societies. Some people fear these spirits (e.g. ghosts), while others revere and love them. Most of the time, it is thought that these spirits help the living unless they aren't properly appeased or propitiated.

Ancestors are worshiped in very elaborate rites. They were usually people of importance during their lifetime. Either they were parents, clan leader or members of another family. During the 19th century anthropological theorists Edward Burnett Tylor, Herbert Spencer, and Frank Byron Jevons deemed ancestor worship to be a first inchoate religion. They assumed the primitive people being observed, savages as they were called, were unable to comprehend
the unseen. They made further assumptions that the dead were seen as something unnatural, uncanny, to be feared and conciliated. However, further investigation has shown primitives do recognize the dead, but also, distinguish between their own kinsmen, who are commonly thought to have reciprocated friendship, and those who are to be feared. Attitudes toward ancestor worship vary among primitive societies. In Polynesian societies where social rank depends on the nearness on the descent from the gods and their successors the ancestors, the attitude is one of reverence and expectation of help and guidance, but it involves little worship. Malaysian family rites were addressed to diseased kindred who were thought to be always close by and always concerned that the traditional way of life should remain the same.

In China, the main importance of this worship is the continuity of the family and reverence for the wisdom of the elders. The practice, essentially a family affair, is held in homes and temples and consists of prayers and offerings before tablets. Ancestor worship in Chinese society usually starts with the death of one of the family members -- such as father, mother, grandmother and grandfather and as soon as
his or her family performs the rituals to respect or to worship the corpse.

In Japan this form of family worship is participated in from a sense of duty to elders and ancestors. It is fostered by the government. Also, it is modified by reciprocal obligations of parents to children. Ancestor worship does not play a part in the many religions of India although they do possess a strong reverence for the past. There is little trace of ancestral worship in ancient Egypt although it had an impressive cult of the dead. In this the mummification of the body plays an important part. There was a belief that at death the soul could live on if the body was preserved, joining the king of the dead, Osiris, in eternal happiness. Whatever ancestor worship existed in ancient Rome was a family affair, not a public one. The deceased joined the manes, the household gods. They visited the families and thus gained immortality by reliving on earth.

Talcott Parsons stated that, religion helps to validate and reinforce norms and values. It also plays a critical role in the maintenance of value consensus. He also expressed the opinion that religion can assist individuals in providing meaning to events over which they have no control.
O’Dea and O’Dea (1983), quoted in Chalfant and Labeff (1988), outlined six basic functions of religion. First, that religion is seen as providing support, consolation, and reconciliation for members of society. This is translated to mean that religion can provide a source of support in the face of uncertainties of life itself. Second, through religion, individuals find security and a firm sense of identity. The authors explained that in an individual relationship with a transcendent world, they can find answers to the question of the meaning of life and gain a sense of identity with the sacred. Fourth, Religion serves a prophetic function. Fifth, religion provides individual identity. In religion, individuals can find a secure sense of which they are and what values they stand for. This reduces much of the uncertainty associated with an individual’s decision. Finally, religion serves to give outward evidence of transitions in life. The many rituals associated with ‘rites of passage’ are celebrated by religious groups. Birth, baptism of infants and holy baptism shows that changes have occurred in the life of individuals and families.

2.2 Ancestor Worship as Ritual and Belief in the After Life

Ancestor worship has been the subject of attention in 19th-and early 20th-century of anthropology. For example, Tylor (1871) gives ancestor worship an important place in his Animistic theory of the origin of religion. In his theory, Tylor (1871) explains that at the
earliest level of mankind’s religious evolution, people believed that spirits lived around them or around their residences. The spirits have the power to influence the affairs of the living and have an important place in man’s life. In addition, the spirits became worship objects to which the humans offered rituals, prayers, food, drink, and other ritual materials. Although ancestor worship is a phenomenon which most people associate with primitive civilizations, it is still prevalent in many countries around the world today, including some who are generally accepted as modern societies and economies.

Whatever the concept of life in the hereafter may be, however, it is assumed that the welfare and happiness of the spirits of the dead depend very much upon the attentions of the living. People who carry such a belief feel a strong obligation to their ancestors and this obligation is fulfilled partly by the regular carrying out of the prescribed ritual duties of ancestor worship.

Helen Hardacre (1992) states: “The term ancestor worship designates rites and beliefs concerning deceased kinsmen. Rites of ancestor worship include personal devotions, domestic rites and the ancestral rites of a kinship group such as a lineage, periodic rites on the death day of the deceased and annual rites for the collective ancestors. Generally excluded from the category are rites for the dead
having no specific reference to kinsmen, and beliefs about the dead in general that lack any special reference to kinship.”

In countries such as Korea, Japan and Africa, this belief is intrinsic to the cosmology of the people and in turn, informs their ritual practices. In all three cases, there is the underlying belief that the dead will benefit from the actions of the living descendants. This is essentially a symbiotic relationship, since the living descendants are believed to gain protection and blessings in return for their veneration of the ancestors.

In Japanese, Korean and African culture, the dead are believed to interact and communicate with the living members of the family. For example, in African culture, all deceased members of the family are believed to become part of the collective ancestor group and have the ability to influence the lives of their descendants for the better or to the detriment of the family.

2.3. Meiteis’ Ancestor Worship

If the tradition of the Meiteis is strictly followed, there are no deities which cannot be brought under the term ancestral deities (Bhagychandra.1991). The understanding of Meiteis ancestor worship requires examining the belief and practices not only in terms
of how they are presently viewed but also in terms of the way, they were practice with certain beliefs in earlier days. Culturally defined ceremonies and rituals are practiced to honor a family’s ancestors (or the ancestors of another designated group such as a clan, household etc) and to encourage the spirits of the ancestors to protect and help the group or individual. The cult of ancestor worship or veneration stresses its roots on loyalty, good faith and respect for parents particularly the forefathers. As seen in some of the societies, Meiteis ancestor worship also forms the main theme of traditional beliefs.

Ancestor worship is an indispensable aspect of the traditional belief of the Meiteis. The Meitei community believes in immorality and transmigration of soul. The belief that this worldly birth was caused by the almighty god, from the clan progenitor to a long line of forefathers to the individual’s great-grandfather, grandfather and father. Under this belief Meiteis considered their parents as visible deity. So when a person dies it is known as /1ai-oikʰrabo/ (1ai-god + oikʰrabo-to become) for a male which literally means ‘to become god’ and /1ai- oikʰrabi/ (1ai -god + oikʰrabi -to become) for a female i.e. “to become god”. But there is also a belief that as a person dies, at the moment itself, the person does not becomes a god. According to the Meitei belief there are certain stages of becoming God by a departed
soul. When the deceased person was the great-grand father or great-grand mother of his or her lineage, they were exalted to the status of God. The Meiteis considers their parents as visible deity and expresses their obeisance as

ima ipa-di mit-no ubo lai-ni

mother father-DET eye-NOM see god-COP

our parents are the god(s) that we are able to see through our eyes

So parents are considered as their guides and benefactor in every aspect of their life. They owe forever to their parents, that if their parents were pleased with them, the almighty god will also be pleased with them. In order to appease them and to be bestowed with prosperity, long life and children the Meiteis worshipped their ancestors. Before the conversion of Hinduism, Meiteis believed in the worship of ancestors as supreme deity who controlled the universe in all aspects. The Meiteis worship their ancestors in two different aspects, one as the almighty /ə pokə/ (ancestor) while the other as /sidəbə məpu/ where /sidəbə/ ‘eternal’ and /məpu/ ‘master’ literally means “the master of eternity”. In the first instance men,
beasts, plants and the whole universe emerged from a single origin who has been called /əpokpə/.

In the second thought once the supreme deity /atiya kuru sidəba/ ‘immortal father in heaven’, (who created himself out of ether and who never perishes, never dies) wanted to give the responsibilities of maintaining the universe to one of his own sons, /sənaməhi/and /pakhəbə/, they were directed to complete the /noŋkhoŋ-koibə/ ‘to go round the world’ for the succession to the throne, the elder son Sanamahi started the journey but the younger son /pakhəbə/ as he was apprehensive could not undertook the journey. So their mother advised her younger son /pakhəbə/ to go round the royal throne of his father, he completed the /noŋkhoŋ-koibə/ before the return of his brother. Sanamahi came back after going round the whole land physically. When he found his younger brother as the king he was so furious that he swore to avenge the person who revealed the modus operandi to /pakhəbə/ in order to be the king. He promised to himself that if it were a man he will be killed and if it happened to be a woman, he would marry her. Surprisingly the one who advised /pakhəbə/ was none other than his own mother /ləimərən/. So in every Meitei household /Sənaməhi/ and /ləimərən/ resides together, but with a wall separating them. And also in order to pacify /sənaməhi’s/ anger he
was declared the king of all deities and also given the title /lainiŋθəu/ ‘king of all gods’ because /lainiŋθəu/ is a compound word of /lai/ ‘god’ and /niŋθəu/ ‘king’. And he was to be resided at the south west corner in every house as a household deity as the protector of all the household and controller of birth and death.

The Meiteis are polytheist revering all kinds of objects which are mysterious and unexplainable to them, including, natural phenomena etc and yet they do not come under the strict category of animist because they ascribe some supernatural power or virtue to such objects and events. The Meiteis have true faith in the divine power of vitality or which is known in Meiteiron as /jaibi-θəwai/ ‘soul of supernatural’. The Meiteis or the majority of the people of Manipur call the ancestral deities as /ə pokpə/. In Meiteiron the word /ə pokpə/ literally means, ‘father’, the one who give birth, but it also denotes ‘the ancestor’. The word /ə pokpə/ originated from the Manipuri word /pokpə/ which means ‘to give birth to’. /ə pokpə/ are treated as the domestic gods in every household of the Meiteis and they are kept under the care of the immediate family circle or sub-clan sphere.

There are different kinds of Meiteis ancestor worship, but the chapter will focus only on the household deities. The kinds
of household ancestor worships that the chapter will discuss are
Sanamahi, cheiraoba, Sanamahi cheng hongba, phunga apokpa,
clan apokpa, and mera wa yungba.

2.4. Different kinds of Meiteis’ Household Ancestor Worships

The household ancestor worship of Meiteis can be classified into
three. The classified deities considered as ancestors are
a) Sanamahi as a supreme ancestor of Meiteis.
b) Important deities associated with one particular yek ‘clan’.
c) The domestic deities which are the possession of particular clan or
   family groups. They are properly known as yumlai ‘deities of
   household’.

2.4.1. Sanamahi as a supreme ancestor of Meiteis

The oldest, popular, significant and best religious concept of the
Meiteis is the /ɔŋkɔ-latlong/ “worship of forefather” (ancestor
worship) which still exist under the well known and renowned
name and style of /sənaməhi-lainiŋ/ ‘Sanamahi beliefs and
practices’. The indigenous religion of the Meiteis is named after the god Sanamahi (Nilbir, 2003). The traditional religious faith which is known as Meitei faith or Sanamahism or Sanamahi religion has been one of the earliest form of religion for the Meiteis. /sənəməhi/ literally means ‘liquid of gold’ because /səna/ is ‘gold’ and /məhi/ is ‘liquid’ in Meiteiron. Worship of Sanamahi is also known as /ʔpokpə-хurumbə/ which is different from the traditional ritual for the worship of /sægi ʔpokpə/, /məɾə wa juʔbə/, /pʰʊŋə-ʔpokpə/. These rituals are performed annually whereas the worship of /sənəməhi/ is done every day in our household and also in every religious ceremonies like birth, marriage and death Sanamahi is the ultimate ancestor of the Meiteis, so in every household of the Meiteis, lord Sanamahi resides in the south western corner of their house. If the place of Sanamahi is disturbed or something unclean is done it is believed that there will be no peace in the family and odds things will happen in the family one after another. When such thing happens it is known as /sənəməhi məɾən thok e/ which means Sanamahi has gone out of the house as he has no proper place to stay. Since Sanamahi is the controller and protector of every household. The Meitei believed that the deity (Sanamahi) which normally stays in

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1 Meiteis indigenous religion will be inter-changeably refer as Meitei faith or Sanamahism in the thesis.
the dwelling house will create trouble in the family once it started roaming around. In such situation the family will worship their ancestor the Sanamahi to bless the members in the family and protect them from further troubles.

Before Hinduism became the state religion in the 18th century, God Sanamahi was worshipped with the belief that he was the /teŋbanbɔ mapu/ ‘the master who helps in every situation’. Sanamahi is worshipped in two levels, as the state deity and also as the household deity. King Kangba was considered as the one who introduced Sanamahi faith. But it was king Khagemba who moulded the image of Sanamahi from the bell-metal (it is an alloy of copper and tin) and began to worship the idol of Sanamahi.

As a state deity Sanamahi was worshipped for sound health, longevity and prosperity of the people as a whole. And as a household deity Sanamahi was worshipped everyday in the evening when the sun sets. It was customary for the Meiteis to bow one’s head before /lainiŋʰɔu/ ‘king of all deities’ the Sanamahi. At Sanamahi /kacin/ ‘corner’ which literary means the corner of the house where Sanamahi resides, every Meiteis bow their heads and seeks blessing from him before going for any work. Sanamahi is
inseparable from almost all the religious rituals of Meiteis. Mention maybe made of religious rituals like /cəiraoba/ ‘Meitei New Year’, /sənaməhi ceng hongba/ ‘offering of uncooked rice for peace and prosperity’.

In order to understand the importance of Sanamahi in the Meitei religious beliefs and practices we need to look into some of the religious rituals of Meiteis ancestor worship namely /cəiraoba/ ‘Meiteis New Year’, /sənaməhi-cəŋhəŋba/ ‘offering of uncooked rice to Sanamahi’.

2.4.1.1. cəiraoba ‘Meiteis New Year’

/cəiraoba/ ‘announcing the New year day by holding the stick’ is the new years day of Meiteis, is observed on the first day of /səgibu/ (April) of the Meitei lunar calendar. /cəiraoba/ is celebrated at every Meitei household. The deity in whose honour the festival is held is Sanamahi the administrator of the universe. The first day of the year begins by offering varieties of fresh vegetables (uncooked), rice etc to the supreme ancestor i.e. Sanamahi.
2.4.1.2. */sənaməhi-cəŋhoŋbə/ ‘worship of Sanamahi with offering of uncooked rice’*

/ʃənaməhi-ʃəŋhoŋbə/ ‘worship of Sanamahi with offering of uncooked rice’. It is held on 15\(^{th}\) day of the Meitei lunar month of *inga* ‘June-July’. In this ritual uncooked rice are offered to Sanamahi, the creator of all beings for peace and prosperity for all. The ritual is practices since long time back praying to Sanamahi that, there may not be scarcity of food for the whole year, as /-cəŋhoŋbə/ means /cəŋ/ ‘rice’ and /hoŋbə/ ‘abundance’. But now the Meitei faith followers have started to practice the same ritual at their homes also. Since every household has a corner of /ʃənaməhi/, on this day uncooked rice is offered praying for abundance of food for the whole family throughout the year.

2.4.2. Clan Ancestors’ Worship

- Progenitors of the sub-clan is known as /sagei əpəkə/
- And to worship the ancestor of the clan is known as /salai/ or /jek əpəkə/

As the Meitei assumed the /salai/ or /jek əpəkə/ as the synonymous nomenclature in their vocabulary in some aspect the ancestor of
/salai/ or /jek/ ‘clan’ are treated as one. Meitei were socially grouped into seven /salai/ ‘clan’. These seven clans are given below.

- Ningthouja
- Angom
- Luwang
- Khuman
- Moirang
- Khaba-Nganba
- Sarang Leisangthem

Meitei ancestor worship is in a sense part of the kinship system. These seven salais have their own respective ancestral deities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clan</th>
<th>Ancestor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ningthouja</td>
<td>Pakhangba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angom</td>
<td>Pureiromba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luwang</td>
<td>Poireiton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khuman</td>
<td>Thongaren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moirang</td>
<td>Ngangningsing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaba-Nganba</td>
<td>Khamdingon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When a particular /sagei/ ‘lineage’ increased in its size and strength, different /yumnak/ ‘surname’ branched off the main parent /sagei/. The significance of the Meitei clan system is visible in their marriage ceremony. Because of the clan and its ancestor Meitei has the exogamy system in their marriage ceremony. Intermarriage within the same clan is restricted with the belief that they have the same ancestor. So in the Meitei kinship system we find an element known as /yek/ the kinship system which traced from both the patrilineal and matrilineal sides and which is known as /yek-thoknəbə/. But the tracing of the blood relation is done only from the patrilineal side so /yək-thoknəbə/ is also known as /pu-tin.nəbə/ ‘having a same grandfather’. The information of social groups of Meitei society into existing seven clans through social amalgamation, myths and legends were created to explain the common origin of the seven clans. The versions of these mythological accounts differ slightly from one another, yet almost all of them agreed that all the seven clans were descended from the supreme ancestor /sidəbə məpu sənəməhi/.

2.4.2.1. sagei əpokpə ‘ancestor who gives birth to lineage’
Several /sagei/ constitute a clan. A /sagei/ is the family which is made up of a number of families, therefore /sagei apokpə/ means the progenitor of the families. The /sagei/ or the group of people having the same surnames in the Meitei society have their own family deities known as /sagei apokpə/.

It is believed that different /sagei/ emerged out with the increase of the population in a community or society and a surname were introduced to bring out a family. /sagei/ were basically the kin groups which traced descent from a common ancestor and bore the same family name that is /yumnak/ ‘surname’. Where /sa/ means ‘body’ and /gei/ ‘to bisect’ such that /sagei/ literally means ‘parts of the body’ or a group of families having the same surname. Each and every /sagei/ of the Meitei society had their own deity known as the /sagei /lai/ ‘god of the sagei’ or /sagei apokpə/ ‘forefather of the sagei’ who is considered to be the founder originator of each particular /sagei/.

The ritual of clan ancestor worship is a one day ceremony, the nature of propitiation was confined mainly to annual offering or a grand feast to the deity, with the strong belief that the deity will bless the /sagei/ with prosperity and offspring etc. Offerings of rice,

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2 Personal communication with B. Kulachandra Sharma
vegetables, fruits and sweets are made to the deity, then the /maibi/ ‘priestess’ giving divine oracles forms the essential part of the ritual. The oracle is confined mainly to the /sagei/. The ritual also includes presentation of fruits, sweetmeats, pan etc to the neighboring deities which is known as /pot–lanbə/ ‘to present gifts’ the word is a compound word form by /pot/ ‘thing’ and /lanbə/ ‘to pass’. After all this ritualistic performance offering will also be made to the evil spirits, and this ceremony is known as /səroi-khaŋbə/.

Meanwhile the foods cooked for the feast are placed in front of the deity. The cooked rice is lumped into an oval-shaped mound and is displayed on a round-shaped plantain leaf. Then pressing by the middle fingers vertically, three or nine slight ridges will be made such that it appears to have three or nine faces. From the features of this mound rice the name of the propitiation ritual came to be known as /cakloŋ-kətprə/ (/cak/ ‘rice’, /loŋ/ ‘prong’, /kətprə/ ‘to offer’) i.e. offering of rice with different parts or prongs. The meal thus offered to the deities with elaborate ritual was then partaken by the members of the /səgei/.

2.4.3. Ancestral deities of household
In Meitei parlance the domestic deities are known as /yum-laı/ “god of household or family, sub-clan or /sagei salai yek apokpa/ or /laı/.

They represent the deceased forefathers of the sub-clan/sagei who belonged to the social units, groups and communities of the Meitei society.

- Deceased heads of the individual family i.e. father, grand-father and great grand-father were worshiped. These ancestors are known as /pʰunge apokpa/

2.4.3.1.  pʰunge apokpa kʰurmø ‘worship of ancestor of the household’

/pʰunge apokpa/ is also known as /pʰunge-lairu/ it is a compound word where /pʰunge/ ‘hearth’ and /lairu/ is general combination of two words /lai/ ‘deity’ and /ərubə/ ‘important’, it is believe of Meitei faith that /pʰunge-lairu/ is the scared place from which emerges origin, growth or life, so /pʰunge-lairu/ is considered as a very important deity. The religious significance of /pʰunge apokpa/ in the Meitei dwelling house is an important religious identity. pʰunge apokpa are the immediate ancestors of
the household, the social unit under the existing social system. Because in the Meitei society the forefathers or immediate ancestor of three generations avoiding the ultimate progenitors, i.e. (1) living male or the head of the household, (2) the grandfather of the head of the family, (3) the great grandfather of the living head of the family, are respectively known as (1) /mɔpɔ/ ‘father’ (2) /mɔpɔ/ ‘grandfather or /mɔdɔ/ or /mɔdɔ-dɔ/ (3) /mɔpɔ-puren/ or /mɔdɔ-puren/ ‘great grandfather’ according to Meitei terminology.

Meiteis believe in the mystic power of the nature which get manifested in the worship of supernatural phenomena of the departed souls of their forefathers. So they adore the ancestors in the motive of procuring welfare of the family by performing prayer. Every household of the Meitei has a hearth (fireplace) at the centre of their house. The hearth is called /pʌŋgə/ ‘hearth’ which is symbolically presented by a three footed iron stand or tripod, where fire is always kept as red hot ashes or ember. It is supposed to be the place where deceased ancestors and progenitor of the house warm themselves imparting valuable lessons to their children. It is presumed that the deceased head of the family will warm themselves even after their lifetime at this place. Thus the fire is set with the faith that the divine ancestors will bestow welfare and development to the
living members of the house. From the description of the /pʰùngə/ ‘hearth’ the meaning of the /pʰùngə-ɚ̪oŋpə/ ‘the father of hearth’ is assumed as the departed person who was once the head of an individual household. Thus /pʰùngə-ɚ̪oŋpə/ generally denotes the three generation preceding to the living male member of the household, who is then the present head of the family. The /pʰùngə-ɚ̪oŋpə/ is venerated three times in every year.

This deity is worshipped in the month of June and July for the entreaty of wealth of the family. And they are also worshipped in the month of September and October for the welfare of children. Finally in the month of December and January the ancestor are worshipped by the family member for longevity of life.

The actual observance of the ritual begins with prayers offered through the moon spiritually inviting the deceased forefather to accept the invitation. So when the rays of the moonlight falls, floral offering are made to the moon so as to invite the deceased ancestors. The souls of the forefathers are believed to roam during the night around their house. On the following day the actual ritual is performed when the sun rises. What has been offered to sun god is put into a pot and buried in the west side of the hearth. That place is known as /pʰुŋɡə-laɪɾu/. /pʰुŋɡə-ɚ̪oŋpə/ worship is a private observance of the individual household. But the items to be offered to
the ancestor are to be the items prescribed for the clan in which the individual belongs to. The interesting part of the Meiteis ancestor worship is the belief they have in regards of the ritual. On the scheduled date (which is generally fixed on the new moon day). The buried pot is to be taken out and set on a plantain leaf. Then after opening the pot observation of the items offered are made. It is believed that if the paddy is found to be germinated the aspired objectives is predicted to be fulfilled. And even sometimes if the germinated peduncle is two in number the prediction of double fulfillment of desire is forecasted. Then the most important part of the ritual is the food to be offered to the invited ancestors.

2.5. Ancestor worship in Meitei religious ceremonies

Meiteis are very religious. They treated the house as the temple of important deities. They always kept separate places for the deities within the house. Ancestor worship lamlai, yumlai, umanglai forms and important part of their religious beliefs. The significance of ancestor worship in the religious ceremonies of Meiteis especially in the rites-of-passage birth, marriage and death is very predominant. Offering with prayers are made to the deity ancestors in every occasion of the rituals held in a family including life circle ceremonies viz birth, marriage and death. Every ceremony of Meiteis always begins with the propitiation of ancestral deities. Different ceremonies of Meitei propitiate different ancestors.
2.5.1. Propitiation in the birth ceremony

After the birth of the child on the sixth day the ritual /ipan-thabə/ ‘birth ceremony’ is performed. On this day the whole house will be sanctified which is known as /nahəirol/. Then the primal deity Sanamahi will be worshipped.

‘poklen pokpə satlen satpə mirel hənəə
sidəə ipuŋ loinəə əpokpə tərəŋ
jai marusidəə’

The goddess /ipan-ləimə/ ‘goddess of birth’ is also propitiated. It is believed that propitiation of goddess on this day is for the long life, welfare and prosperity of the child.

2.5.2. Propitiation of ancestor in the marriage ceremony

Meities actual marriage begins with the ritual of /həicini kʰərai pубə/ this is actually a ritual performed by both the bride and the bridegroom parties informing spiritually their respective ancestors. The ritual of /həicini kʰərai/ is performed at the bride’s place, where the boy’s parents will bring along with the /həicini kʰərai/ fruits and vegetables meant for the ancestor- the domestic deity Sanamahi and also of the local deity or deities. Then the ceremony proceeds with the prayer of the bride’s father and the father of the groom to the
supreme ultimate ancestor first and then the immediate seven ancestors. On the marriage day also the whole ceremony begins with the adherence to the ancestor. The groom will pray to the ultimate ancestor (Sanamahi) and the immediate seven ancestors under ritualistic formalities. Then he shall pray to his parents, as in the Meitei belief our father and mother are considered as the god whom we can see and feel physically.

2.6. Other kinds of Ancestor Worship

The ritual of /əpökə kʰərumbə/ ‘ancestor worship’ is quite different from the worship of God any other where the supplicants ask for some favour that can be granted by the deity. Ancestor worship is veneration of the ancestor and it is not related with asking favours etc. But it is the performance of ones’ filial duty. /əpökə kʰərumbə/ is based on the belief that the human soul survives in the afterlife and that our ancestors continue to exist with their personal identity beyond death. It is also believe that the deceased family ancestors possess the ability to influence the fortune of the living.

Every year in the month of November when the leaves fall, each Meitei family will fix or erect a tall bamboo into the ground in
the middle of the courtyard known as /məra/ ‘the month of October and November’ (in Meitei calendar) /wajʊŋbə/ is a compound word form by /wa/ ‘bamboo’ and /jʊŋbə/ ‘to fix or to erect’. At the top end of the bamboo a pulley is attached and with the help of a thin rope a lit lantern is hoisted at dusk every evening for one month. This ritual is celebrated with a new sense of devotion by the Meitei to their ancestors. This observance is done with the belief that the deceased ancestors would be visiting their homes during this month. It is also believed that the lit lantern would guide the deceased ancestors’ souls to their homes back on earth. This observation is done every year during the month of October and November. The social or non-religious function of Meitei ancestor veneration is to cultivate kinship values, such as filial piety, family loyalty, and continuity of the family lineage. Besides, this act of veneration does confer some belief that the departed ancestors have become some kind of deity. In some Eastern cultures, and in Native American traditions, the goal of ancestor veneration is to ensure the ancestors continued well-being and positive disposition towards the living.

In China ancestor worship known as Pinyin it seeks to honour the deeds of the deceased. In Korea, it is known as Jerye or Hanja ceremony and is performed periodically. In Vietnam practically
all Vietnamese regardless of religion, have an altar of their ancestors in their home.

In Britain and Ireland, Halloween is observed every year. Their ancestors are supposed to return on this night. Food for them is left outside and lights are left burning all night. In the United States and Canada, apart from celebrating Halloween, flowers, wreaths, candles and small pebbles are put on the graves all the year round as a way to honour the dead.

2.7. List of indigenous words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meiteiron</th>
<th>gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/lai-oikʰibə/</td>
<td>(‘to become god’ literally) ‘forefather’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/əpokɾə/</td>
<td>‘forefather’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/sidəbə-маpu/</td>
<td>‘eternal god’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/sənaməhi/</td>
<td>‘Sanamahi deity’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/pakʰŋəə/</td>
<td>‘Pakhangba deity’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
/jaibi-tʰəwai/  ‘soul’

/ʔapokpɛ-latpe/  ‘ancestor worship’

/sənaməhi-lainiŋ/  ‘Sanamahi faith’

/jum-lai/  ‘household deity’

/sagəi-ʔapokpɛ/  ‘originator of lineage’

/shalai-ʔapokpɛ/  ‘originator of clan’

/jek/  ‘exogamy’

/ phunγe-ʔapokpɛ/  ‘ancestor who resides at hearth’

/məpa/  ‘father’

/məpu/  ‘grand-father’

/məpu-puren/  ‘great-grandfather’

/phunγe-lairu/  ‘important ancestor who resides at hearth’

/pibɛ/  ‘any male of lineage head’
or clan head’

/isaipʰu/ ‘religious pitcher with full of water’

caklon-κητπ θ ‘to offer cooked rice’

/saroikʰανβ θ/ ‘offering and praying to evil spirits’

/nahεiron/ ‘sanctification’

/pu-tinnab θ/ ‘a lineage having same great grand father’

/jumnak/ ‘surname’

/lainιθʰυ/ ‘king of gods’

/noŋkʰοŋ-koib θ/ ‘to go round the world’

/sənamahi əpoiba/ ‘Sanamahi who roams around’

/ceiraoba/ ‘new year’
2.8. Conclusion

The study of Meiteis ancestor worship reveals that before the invasion of Hinduism, Meiteis are following their own indigenous beliefs and practices using own native language. Meiteis ancestor worship is one of the most indigenous processes of beliefs and practices. Meitei ancestor worship clearly gives the pure identity of the Meitei in their ways of life and beliefs in god, which is not affected or influenced by any other religious beliefs and practices.

Ancestor worship is in a sense to safeguard the kinship system. As R.Brown (1975) regards ancestor worship where it exists, as in a real sense part of the kinship system, constituted as it is by the relations of living persons to their deceased kindred, and affecting as it does the relations of living persons to one another.

Meiteis also worships their ancestor in order to safeguard the kinship system. So, the household ancestor has a very important significance in the Meiteis ancestor worship.

Since Meitei ancestor worship is one of the indigenous elements in terms of language, ways of beliefs and practices.
Meitei ancestor worship clearly gives the pure identity of the Meitei in their ways of life and beliefs in god, which is not affected or influenced by any other religious beliefs and practices.

The cult of ancestor worship or veneration stresses its roots on loyalty, good faith and respect for parents particularly the forefathers. As in some of the societies, Meiteis ancestor worship also forms the main theme of traditional beliefs. Ancestor worship is an indispensable aspect of the traditional belief of the Meiteis. Meiteis are the community who believe in immorality and transmigration of soul. With the belief that this worldly birth was caused by the almighty god, from the clan progenitor has descended a long line of forefathers to the individual’s great-grandfather, grandfather and father. Under this belief Meiteis considered their parents as visible deity. So when a person dies it is known as /lai-oik\textsuperscript{h}rəbə/ (lai-god + oik\textsuperscript{h}rəbə-to become) for a male which literally means ‘to become god’ and /lai- oik\textsuperscript{h}rəbi/ (lai-god + oik\textsuperscript{h}rəbi -to become) for a female i.e. “to become god”.

The oldest, popular, significant and best religious concept of the Meiteis is the /əpokra-latpə/ “worship of forefather” (ancestor worship) which still exist under the well known and renowned name and style of /sənaməhi-lainiŋ/ ‘Sanamahi beliefs and practices’. The indigenous religion of the Meiteis is named after god Sanamahi (Nilbir, 2003).

The Meiteis or the majority of the people of Manipur call the ancestral deities as /əpokra/. In Meiteiron the word /əpokra/ literally means, ‘father’, the one who give birth, but denotes ‘the ancestor’. The word /əpokra/ originated from the Manipuri word /pokra/ which means ‘to give birth to’. /əpokra/ are treated as the domestic gods in every household of the Meiteis and they are set under the care and caress of the immediate family circle or sub-clan sphere. Worship of Sanamahi is also known as /əpokra-khurumbə/ which is different from the worship of ancestral rituals for example worship /sagei əpokra/, /mɔra wa jũŋbo/, /pʰʊŋgə-əpokra/ are performed yearly whereas the worship of /sənaməhi/ is done every day in our household and also in every religious ceremonies like birth, marriage and death.

Meitei ancestor worship clearly gives the pure identity of the Meitei in their ways of life and beliefs in god, which is not affected or influenced by any other religious beliefs and practices. This can be clearly seen from the words like /sənaməhi/