Chapter-II

Ancestral Deities

Ancestral deities are those divinities who are defied from the ancestors or forefathers who were once flourished as human being in flesh and blood. They were the persons who have been descended as offspring through generations to form families, sub-clans, tribes etc. They are believed to have been the well wishers of the descendants. Obviously they belonged to ‘Apokpa’, the founder of the Salai or tribe, ‘Umanlais’ or ‘forest gods’ and political ‘Heroes’ or Heroines’.

The term ‘Apokpa’ originates from the Meeteis or Manipuri word ‘Pokpa’ means to beget, breed or to give birth to. The Apokpas are treated as domestic gods in every household under the sole care of the immediate family circle. They may be divided into three categories viz. (1) The Phunga Apokpa, (II) the Sagei Apokpa and (III) the Salai or Yek Apokpa. i) The Phunga Apokpas are the immediate ancestors of the household who were deceased heads of the individual family i.e. Father, Grandfather and great-grandfather. These are termed as Mapa, mapu and Mapu puren in the Meitei terminology. ii) The ‘Sagei Apokpas’ are the progenitors of the sub-clans or Sageis. They were the spirits of the founder chiefs of the sub-clans or cultural heroes and heroines of the concerned subclans. In most cases they were not real ancestors of the Sagei. Rather, they were political and cultural heroes and heroines. Such ancestors are amongst the categories of Umanlais. Some examples of Sagei Apokpa are “Haobakok” of Kangngabam
family of Ningthouja Yek (clan), \(^1\) “Yaurei” of Mayengbam family of Luwang Yek (clan), \(^2\) Kongnga of Sougaijam family of Khuman Yek, \(^3\) etc. salai or Yek Apokpa is the progenitor of a salai or Yek. The Ancient Meetei scholars give synonymous meanings, denotation and connotations of the Salai and Yek, but modern scholars differentiate them as sub clan and clan respectively. Therefore the Salai Apopka is the progenitor of a salai or sub-clan which is made up of Sageis. The example is Moirang Yek (clan) has five Salais viz. i) Moirang Ewang/ Moirangthem (those who lived on the banks of Loktak lake) ii) Moirang Kouba/ Thokchom (those who lived in the Koubru region) iii) Moirang Khwang iv) Moirang Munngyang (actually and ethnically belongs to Ningthouja clan and v) Khomdram. These sub-clans have their own ultimate and immediate progenitors as Ngangningsing and Urakonthouba, \(^4\) Ngahunthok and Kouba Angangnga, Khwang ahanba and Haorongjam Kritchandra, Mungyang Chaoba and Moroi haoba respectively. But the ultimate progenitors as the almighty are Thanjing Koirenlai, Nganghunthok and Ngangningsing. The same pattern has also been followed by other Yeks. Thus the following ultimate progenitors as Almighty \(^5\) are emerged for other Yeks.

i) Nongda Leiren Pakhangba - Ningthouja/Mangang Yek

ii) Cheengwanglakkee Pereiromba Angom Yek

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\(^1\) Kangabam Sagei puya, MS.
\(^3\) Sougaijam Kullachandra (Peeba), Sougaijam Shagei Phungga Yumjangbagee Yundaba Puya, Imphal, 2000, p.4.
iii) Poreiton - Luwang Yek  
iv) Lungba ahanba - Khuman Yek  
v) Taurenkhaba and Khamchingkhom - Khaba - Nganba Yek  
vi) Mungmaringba and Nungnou yumtangba - Sarang Leishang Yek

Besides it, the spirits of the king, paramount chief specially, the founder chiefs of the tribes, cultural heroes and heroines were treated as generalized ancestors of the community (Meetei). At the same time they were also treated as the progenitors of certain clan or sub-clans. Such deities (ancestors) were venerated by all members of the society. As for instance, Atiya Kuru Shidaba, Ashiba alias Sanamahi and nine laibangthous were worshipped by the Meeteis regardless of clan or sub-clans. At the same time it was also believed that veneration of nine laibungthous was a compulsory one. Importance of Sanamahi was much emphasized from the seventeenth century onward. The god was raised to the status of generalized ancestor and he was described as ‘Poklen Pokpa Satlen Shatpa.’ God makes men, on the contrary men makes god. From a humble and disgraceful position Radha the consort of Lord Krishna is raised to a status of supreme goddess. Similarly Sanamahi become a supreme god from the seventeenth century till now in the Meetei society by the patronage of King Khagemba. The name of the eponymous ancestors, as given by T.C.Hodson, is given as Luwang Pokpa or the ancestors of the Luwangs, Khuman Pokpa, ancestor of the Khuman, apparent expectations to this being the tribal deities of the

Ningthouja and the Angom clans, which are called Nongpok ningthou, or the King of the East alias Pakhangba, whom we know from other sources to be reputed ancestor of the clan in question (the Ninghouja) and Puleiromba. The aliases of the other tribal deities are Poireiton for the Luangs; Khamdingou, for the Khamdinbas, Thangaren, for the Khumans and Ngangningsing, for the Moirangs and Nungaoyumthangba for Chengleis.

O. Bhogeshore Singh\(^7\) has given the name of the ‘Apopka’ of the Salais in Hayi Chak (the earliest traditional age of the Meetei) Konjil Yaiphaba, Ingaoraba, Asanba, Imumgagba, Khumnba, Ashanba Memanba and Muwaoba. The same writer\(^8\) has identified Ingaoraba with Angom, Ashanba with Nganba, Imuramgba with Luwang Salai, Ashan Memanba with Khaba and Muwaoba with Moirang Salai. On the basis of the above identifications, Konjil Yaiphaba may be identified with Ningthouja.

In Konnachak, (beginning of Christian era) during the reign of Nongda Leiren Pakhangba, there were seven groups in the valley of Manipur formed by (i) Shitapung, who married Shanthong Punembi, known as Luwang salai, (ii) Arong another son of Shitapung and Shanthong Punembi, known as Khuman Salai (iii) Nganghunthok, son of Ngaren Hanba Ngangshaba and Leinung Chakhanu Ngaingshabi, known as Moirang Salai (iv) Phanthong Khaba and Mahon Ningthou known as Khaba Salai. (v) Takhuk and Tangkhoi, known as Khaba

\(^8\) Ibid, p.19.
Salai, (vi) Takhuk and Tangthoi as Nganba Salai (vii) Nungou Imthang, son of Huimu Leima known as Chenglei Salai and (viii) Khongleishang. In “Karthong Lamalen’ Khongrichang was given as ‘Nongleishang’ who gave birth to Pakhangba. According to Loitangbam Khelchand Singh, in ancient days, there were nine Salais namely i) Ningthouja ii) Angom iii) Luwang iv) Khuman, v) Moirang, vi) Khaba vii) Nganba viii) Sarang Leishangthem and Chenglei. Later, Khaba and Nganba merged as Khaba-Nganba to form one salai the last two groups Sarang Leishangthem and Chenglei also grouped to form one salai Sarang-Leisangthem. According to Moirangthem Narendra Singh Sarang-Leisangthem Salai was the combination of two Salais- one led by Naophang Ahanba of Chenglei another by Naophang Yaiphaba of Leisangthem when the latter became the chief or king the Sarang Leishangthem came to be known as Chenglei.

There are different views or accounts of the origin of the Salais in the Meetei literatures, which could not be treated as historically but used as a source of history. The said views or accounts may broadly be categorized into two groups: i) The Seven Salais sprang from different parts of the head of Taibangpanba Mapu and ii) the distribution of different parts of his body, with his head towards the north to seven Salai.

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9 Ibid. Pp.139-142.
10 Karthong Lamlen (MS).
“Thiren Meiram Liba”\textsuperscript{13} has stated that the Salais originated from different parts of the Taibangpanba Mapu as Angom was born from the right eye, Ningthouja from the left eye, Luwang from the right ear, Khuman from the left ear, Sarang Leisangthem from the right nostril, Nganba (Khaba Nganba) from the left nostril and Moirang from the teeth. But the account prepared for T.C. Hodson\textsuperscript{14} states that “the Ningthouja were born from his left eye, the Angom form his right eye, the Khaba-Nganba from his left ear, the Luwang from his right nostril, the Khuman from his left nostril and Moirang from his teeth.” In connection with the above account prepared for him, Hodson\textsuperscript{15} remarked. The symmetry of the second version is apt to excite the suspicion that the orthodoxy of the reporter might have misled him.” However, according to N. Ibochouba, ‘the birth of the Salais from the different organs or parts of the Taibangpanba Mapu pointed out to the seats occupied by the ‘Pibas’ or the heads of the seven Salais in the Kangla, the centre of the administration.’\textsuperscript{16} He further states that it also indicated the distribution of powers and functions among the heads of the Salais in the political hierarchy of the country.\textsuperscript{17} It was also clear from Thiren Meiram Liba\textsuperscript{18} that all the heads or Pibas, were said to be the kings or heads of the Salais, Laibungthous who were backbones of the administration. The importance or the indispensability of the ‘Pibas’ of the Salais in the administration the

\textsuperscript{14} T.C. Hodson, op. cit., p.100.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{16} N. Ibochouba, op. cit., p.21.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. 24.
administration of the state was vividly given in Ningthourol Sheireng. As for instance the writer\textsuperscript{19} describes Khoiyum Konjil Touthokpa (Ningthouja Salai), who was the supreme head of all Pibas of the Salais as carrying on the administration with the help of Pibas of Salais.

The Umang Lais also are important ancestral deities of the Meeteis. In Cheitharol Kumbaba\textsuperscript{20} mention is made of the term Umangalai only from the year 1723 during the reign of Garib Niwaz, who successfully introduced ‘Hinduism’ into the valley of Manipur among the Meeties. As evident from the record of Cheitharol Kumbaba, the beginning of the use of the term Umanglai coincided with the advent of the pantheon of Hindu god in the Manipur valley. These gods of the Hindus were well housed in the temples big or small whereas the traditional indigenous deities of the Meeteis had their abodes at open places. As time rolled on, such places turned into forests. Lightfoot observes, “Now, they are called ‘Forest spirits’ probably because thin original environment is preserved around them. Ancient trees grow at the shrines and new ones up untouched”.\textsuperscript{21} Since the shrines of the traditional deities of Meeteis, felling down the trees of such shrines incurred the displeasure of the deity and resulted in the death of the person who cut the trees. As for instance, during the recent Japanese invasion in 1942 one American soldier who, despite warning given by the local people, cut down many

\textsuperscript{19} O. Bhogeshore, op. cit., p.19.


trees of the forest of the lai for firewood or because it was thought that the trees might be sheltering enemies, became suddenly ill and died on the same night.\textsuperscript{22}

However, the producer of the grove could be used in the service of the lai, but at Andro, Paman Ningthou, god of the Chakpas, objected the products of his grove being used even in his own service.\textsuperscript{23} As such, the traditional deities of the Meeteis were formally associated with the forests as their abode. Thus the term Umangalai came to be used to mean the traditional deities of the Meeteis.

The Sagei and Salai/Yek Apopka are used to venerate as those were belonged to the ‘Umangalai’, the indigenous deities in the polytheistic realm of the Meetei. However, various interpretations of the term ‘Umangalai’ are knowingly or unknowingly furnished by different scholars in connection with the mottos and motives of the Meetei cult and theistic worship. T.C. Hodson\textsuperscript{24} gives the meaning of the term Umangalai as the deities of the forest or jungle only in the literal sense not in the colloquial denotation, connotation and meaning. J. Shakespear\textsuperscript{25} also agrees to Hodson with no scrutiny and justification taken up by him. O. Bhogeshore\textsuperscript{26} has given that ‘Umanglais’ has not been so called for being worshipped merely in the forest. We have called Umanglais as such because, as a thick forest cannot be seen though with our eyes, that god or deity is also

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{24} T.C.Hodson, The Meetheis, Delhi, 2003, p.96.
\textsuperscript{25} J. Shakespeare, op. cit., p.407.
\textsuperscript{26} O. Bhogeshore op. cit., p. 20.
mysterious to our knowledge. In truth ‘Umanglai’ may be considered knowledge “Infinite and all pervading” here it may be noted that in ancient texts only the term ‘Lai’ was used.\textsuperscript{27} The number of Umanglais is said to be either 361 or 365. They include tutelary, ancestral, domestic and Yek (clannish) deities.\textsuperscript{28} Again the meaning of ‘Umang” is not merely the forest/ Jungles but also the bowers, groves, arbors etc. According to the opinion of S.N. Parratt, the Meetei Umanglais are divided into four groups\textsuperscript{29} viz.

i) Ancestors (or ancestral divinities) or deities which are believed to have human existence at some point of time in the past. Examples of these are (Nongda Leiren) Pakhangba, Nongpok Ningthou (Kainou Cheengsomba), Poireiton etc.

ii) Important Lai associated with one particular Yek (clan) Salai or Sagei.

iii) The domestic deities who are in possession of particular clan or family groups. They are called Yumjao Lai.

iv) Tutelary deities i.e. guardian spirits connected with particular places or areas. There are various places in Manipur which are regarded as sacred. These are often found on hills, which are associated with a

\textsuperscript{28} O. Bhogeshore, op. cit., p. 21.
\textsuperscript{29} S.N. Paratt, Religion of Manipur, 1980, p.9.
particular deity. Examples of this are the Thangjing hill in Moirang with divine Thangjing and Nongmaijing (the hill of Nongmai) which was formerly associated with Nongpok Ningthou and subsequently with Siva.

From the above circumstances and findings, it is obviously found that the ancestral divinities are regarded as belong to the Umanglais (Sylvan and arboreal gods) but all the Umanglais are descended from Atiya Guru Shidaba, the immortal perceptorial sky. In Meetei polytheistic sphere the boundless sky is personified and treated as the undying preceptor of all inmates of various and different sphere of the universe or the sole breeder of all that bred.

Some Umanglais were treated as the guardians of different directions or certain areas or villages. It was believed that each and every Umanglai has his or her own area or sphere of influence. As for instance in the haraoba of Khamlengba not only the Harem people of Kakching but all the villagers joined. In this way Konthoujam Leirembi was worshipped by all the villagers of Konthoujam. Since a good number of Umanglais increased from generation to generation, the king distributed some important Umanglais to certain Sagei for its management. Others remained in the custody of the villagers where the original shrine of a particular deity resided and particular Sagei or individuals who installed the deity. In course of time the event was forgotten by new generation and they began to consider the deity as their real ancestor i.e. Sagei Apopka. As for
instance, the management for the worship of Lainingthou Hanba was given to Irom Sagei, a unit of Ningthoujam clan. But in reality Lainingthou Hanba was the progenitor of Nganba Khumukcham. Similarly, Puthiba of Angom clan was given to Moirangthem Sagei of Moirang clan. By chance or by accident the real progenitor was handed over to its descendants i.e. management for Konthoujam Leirembi and Yaoreibi to Konthoujam and Mayengbam respectively. Some Umanglais were given special attention for specific purpose, as for instance, Nungkhong Nunghoibi for rain, Phouoibi for paddy and Emoinu for wealth. They were venerated by all i.e. by the State, individual, Sagei, villages etc.

A section of traditional deities comprises political Heroes or Heroines viz. Kings or chiefs. They were venerated with an equal degree of respects and care. Besides the political heroes and heroines there are the cultural heroes and heroines also. As for instance, Nongami Petanga, Konthoujam Leirembi, Nungthel Leima, Yumjao Leirembi etc. the Meetei exalted all the ideal and extraordinary figures in their society to the status of god or goddess. In most cases the political heroes were treated as progenitor of the clan or tribe. As for example, Poireiton an immigrant was treated as progenitor of the two clans viz., Khumans and Luwang, but in reality he was an outsider who became the overlord of the said clans at a particular stage of the history.

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30 Yunnakna Lai Shangba, unpublished, M.S Lahtup
Similarly a little later a prince of the Luwang clan by name Lungba became the chief of the Khuman clan.\textsuperscript{31} But no wonder he was worshipped by the Khuman Clan as their progenitor. There are similar cases of accepting a political leader as progenitor among the Shan states of east Burma. A Sakya prince named Binaka raja who founded a Hindu Kingdom in upper Burma during the 10\textsuperscript{th} and 9\textsuperscript{th} century B.C. was claimed as their progenitor. More than seventy five percent of the Umanglais worshipped by the Meeteis were political chiefs specially founder chiefs and cultural heroes and heroines. As for instance, the people of Kakching used to worship Khamlangba as their progenitor. But in reality he heads a political progenitor rather than real ancestor. Most were brought by Khamlangba as dowry and followers of his second wife, Kalika form Tripura.\textsuperscript{32} They were under the category of Nongchup haram.

The ancestral deities are also described as the guardian spirits by some scholars as in the following:

\textit{\ldots but besides the clan totem, which was hereditary either in the male or the female line and was shared by every member of the clan, many North American Indian stood individually in a certain mystics relationship to a supernatural being, commonly called spirits which they neither shared with others nor transmitted to their descendants. As their guardian spirits generally appeared the form of an animal and as the man often, though nor always, respected the...}

\textsuperscript{31} Khagemba Yungi, (MS).
\textsuperscript{32} W. Lukhoi, Kakching Haraoba, the Cultural Forum, Manipur, 1985, also see Khamlangba Khuntholdol.
species of animal in which he believed his mysterious patron to be embodied, it is clear that these guardian spirits or tutelary animals bear some resemblance to totems to distinguish them from the hereditary totem of clan.33

The ancestral deities of Manipur belong to the indigenous divinities set under the division of non-Hindu deities termed as Umanglais or Sylvan (aboral/bower/grove) god. The Meetei, being polytheistic people have two broad divisions of the divinities, i.e. i) Non Hindu and ii) Hindu deities. The list of ancestral divinities of the Meitei-s or Manipur goes as:

1. Thangjing – i) Koiren Leima Ngashabi alias Ayang Leima kabok Chaibee I or Lera leima Laisana Thanbee I and ii) Ayang Leima (Panthoibii) II.
5. Soraren - Korou- Leima Nahuinu, alias Konthoujam Tampha Leiremma or Cheengthang Leima.
6. Pureiromba –
   i) Haoneengshangnu Leisangbee
   ii) Leeklabeecha Nongdamnee
   iii) Pithet Leima Leihou Ningthou Chanu.

8. Oknaren alias Kouba Angangnga – Wangngam-ion Lairok Lenbee.
9. Thangnaren alias Yoithokchao alias Khoinai Ahanba- Luwang Punshiba’s daughter, named Yanggen Chaobee.
11. Tongbram Lairemma- Tongbram Apokpa.
15. Khunjaoba (1652-66A.D.)
18. Tonshen- Kangngabam Yumjao Leima
20. Huidrom Pokpa – Huidrom Yumjao Leima
27. Laiренjam Pokpa – Laiренjam Laiремма.
33. Luwang Pokpa alias Hongnem Luwang Ningthou Punsiba –
   i) Cheengnung Haoba- Chanu.
   ii) Hauku- Leima.
   iii) Nganurol Thongngaiba Chanu.
   iv) Haoshiyang Puyangba- Chanu.
   v) Eerem Naushangkhu.
   vi) Eerom Taitan Leima.
   vii) Nauthong- Kaibee.
   viii) Nganuro Khutyai Chenbee.
   ix) Khayoiron Nganu-Thumbee.
34. Moriba alias Sanamahi – Langmai / Umasana Cheengjaroibee.
35. Meisnam Pokpa – Meinam Laiремма.
40. Poireiton – Lainaotabee.
41. Khumomba (1263 - 78 A.D.) – Khayoiron Yanglei Ngambee.
42. Khangjing Lairemba alias Khagemba (1597-1652)-Nongpallon Nongthil Chaibee.
43. Mungyamba (1562-97 A.D.) – Changbombee.
44. Paikhomba (1666- 97 A.D.) – Haobamchanu Ponglenkhombee.
45. Laimuba alias Yoimongba alias Mongbahanba – Hounuhan etc.

These are some of the ancestral deities who have their shrines or temples at different village of this country. Some of them have different names in accordance with the traditional heritages of the villages; the same god is also worshipped in two, three, at etc. different villages.³⁴

Ancestor worship

Ancestor worship is religious practice based on the belief that 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. It was an indispensable aspect of the traditional belief of the Meeteis. At particular stage of their history, ancestor worship formed their own religion. They believed that without the blessing of their ancestors, the god shall never be pleased with them.

The Meitei or the majority people of the total population of Manipur called ancient deities as Apokpa. Literally meaning father but colloquially denotes ‘the ancestor’. They (Meetei) believed in the immortality and transmigration of the soul. It is believed that life on earth is a mission given by the Almighty God (Kuru). From the clan progenitor has descended a long line of forefathers ending to one’s individual great grandfather, grandfather and father. So the relation between the almighty god and one was believed to have been made though the agencies of one’s progenitors. So ancestors were regarded as the incarnation of the Almighty God. Under this belief, they considered their parents as visible deity.\(^{35}\)

The Oldest, most popular, familiar, significant and best religions concept of the Meetei is the “Apopka Latpa” or ancestor worship cult which still exists under the Sanamahi Laining or divine Sanamahi (worship) cult.

T.C. Hodson unknowingly believed the ancestor worship cult of Manipur or Meetei as to have its roots to the Hindu origin. He stated that “if the definition of ancestor worship is strictly narrowed, we have in Manipur, among the Meetei only, the form of ancestor worship which is practiced by all Hindu, but if it be enlarged as in the circumstances it ought to be, we find several curious phenomena to which attention should be given.”\(^{36}\)

There is no division of ancestor worship in the Hindu heritage as there are Phunga Apopka, Sagei Apopka or Yek (clan) Apopka.

\(^{35}\) N. Birachandra, Ancestor worship among the Meetei, North East India History association Proceeding 3rd session 1982, Imphal.

\(^{36}\) T.C. Hodson, op. cit., p.99.
‘Apokpa Thouniba’ or Apokpa Khurumba was the term which meant the ancestor worship consisted of rites carried out by the members of the Salai headed by the ‘Piba’, who was the ritual head of the Salai. There is no valid reason to suppose that ‘piba’ was originally priests; only that assumed priestly functions as being heads and representatives of the Salai or Community. The rites, in which the members of the Salai only participated, normally included making of offerings and sacrifices to the Apokpas or ancestors.

The offerings or sacrifices to the Apokpas were said to have three kinds - ‘Charot’, ‘Karot’ and ‘Marot’. In Yaibirok, it was given as Charat, Karat and Marat.

‘Charat’ or ‘Charot’ according to N. Ibochouba was the earliest practice of human sacrifice. The practice was corroborated by a reference in ‘Lai Khunda’ which stated that ‘the nine lainingthous ate human flesh, animals, fish, and drank wine’. The throwing away of a rag doll during a ceremony at Wangbren’s or Khanachaoba’s ‘laipham might have been a symbolic of human sacrifice. According to a report, which J. Shakespeare had taken, in good old days, before the state was taken over by the British Government in 1891, solitary warfare was seized after darkness in some unfrequented spot and a little blood from the sole of his foot was drawn and his nails and hair cut; and then this was

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38 N. Ibochouba, op.cit., p.40.
39 Lai Khunda (MS).
buried in the laipham, after laying before the ‘lai’. Such cases might be looked upon as representing human sacrifice. This practice of human sacrifice might have probably been a common feature while the Salais were independent of each other. When the independent character of the Salais had been lost and integrated under the suzerainty of the Ningthouja Salai in the valley of Manipur, human sacrifice might have been replaced by animal sacrifice ‘Karot’ or ‘Karat’ meant, as given in ‘Yeibirok’ and ‘Thiren Layat’ as sacrificing of animals, like cattle, buffaloes, bison, cats and young dogs.

According to N. Ibochouba, the sacrificing came in place which remained in force until very recent times. J. Shakespeare described two interesting ceremonies, witnessed by him while accompanying the then Raja Churachand, one at Santhong’s laipham where one buffalo, two pigs and a cock were sacrificed and another at Khanachaoba’s laipham where too a pig was sacrificed. Kyamba who ruled in the fifteenth century A.D. offered a bison at the foot of Khori Chinng (Khori hill) in 1470 A.D. for favour of victory over Kabo Kyang (now in Burma). During the tenor of Lainingthou Khagemba (1597-1651) the same source refers to two other instances of animal sacrifices. In the

42 N. Amuyaima, Yeibirok, p.2.
43 N. Ibochouba op.cit. footnote p.4.
44 Ibid. p.40.
45 J. Shakespeare op.cit. p.438.
Cheitharol Kumbaba\textsuperscript{47} it is stated that in 1618 A.D., Marjing Ninghtou, a lai of the north east direction was appeared with offerings, which included wild pig, dog, duck, hen, and pigeon, at every ‘hidden’ a place on the river bank where the boats were secured and the people frequented to use the water. In 1613 A.D. on another occasion a large number of animals, namely buffalo, goat. Sheep, ox, geese, pig, hen, pigeon, dog, etc. of hundred each were sacrificed to a number of deities including Koubru, a deity of the North West direction, asking for long life.\textsuperscript{48} In Thiren Meiram Leeba,\textsuperscript{49} the following birds and animals were prescribed for different Salais:

Angom - Nongoubi, Luwang - Mongba, Nganba - Oak, Moirang - Urembi, Sarang Leishangthem - Sabi, Khuman - Uthum and Ningthouja - Nonglee.

Instead of the above mentioned two blood sacrifices\textsuperscript{50} (Human and Animal), ‘Morat’ or Marat’, the offerings of fish, fruits, flowers etc. became a normal feature of worship of the ‘lais’ among the Meeteis, these articles were strictly prescribed or laid down in the Meetei puyas (texts) for each Salais. According to Thiren Meiram Leeba\textsuperscript{51} the following fish prescribed for different Salais:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, p.25
\textsuperscript{48} Lainenmayum Ibunghohal and Ningthoujam Khelchandra Singh (ed.) Cheitharol Kumbaba first edition, Imphal, 1967, p.27
\textsuperscript{51} N. Ibouchouba, Thiren Meiram Leeba, 1982, Pp.30-32.
\end{flushright}
Angom - Sareng,
Luwang - Ngamu,
Nganba - Sareng,
Moirang - Ngatil,
Sarang Leishangthem - Ngara,
Khuman - Ngatin,
Ningthem( Ningthouja) - Ngatin.

According to Ng. Kulachandra Singh,\textsuperscript{52}

\begin{align*}
\text{Luwang} & \quad \text{- Ngamu Sangleinaba}, \\
\text{Khaba-Nganba} & \quad \text{- Sareng Ngangna Langba}, \\
\text{Moirang} & \quad \text{- Sareng Arangba}, \\
\text{Sarang Leishangthem} & \quad \text{- Sareng Mureinaba}, \\
\text{Khuman} & \quad \text{- Sareng Amuba}, \\
\text{Ningthem( Ningthouja)} & \quad \text{- Sareng Angangba}.
\end{align*}

According to L. Kalachand,\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{align*}
\text{Angom} & \quad \text{- Sareng Angouba}, \\
\text{Luwang} & \quad \text{- Sareng Shangleinaba}, \\
\text{Nganba} & \quad \text{- Sareng Ngangna Langba}, \\
\text{Moirang} & \quad \text{- Sareng Arangba}, \\
\text{Sarang Leishangthem} & \quad \text{- Sareng Muna Langba}, \\
\text{Khuman} & \quad \text{- Sareng Amuba}, \\
\text{Ningthem( Ningthouja)} & \quad \text{- Sareng Angangba}.
\end{align*}

\textsuperscript{52} Ng. Kulachandra Singh, Apokpa Thounirol, 1967, Pp.4-5.
\textsuperscript{53} L. Kalachand, Sagei Salilon, Imphal, 1965, Pp.138-142.
According to Y. Bhudichandra and Ningthoumacha Manisana, Angom - Sareng Angouba, Luwang - Sareng Awaoba, Kha-Nganba - Sareng Ngangna Langba, Moirang - Sareng Arangba, Sarang Leishangthem - Sareng Ngangna Langba, Khuman - Sareng Amuba, Ningthem (Ningthouja) (Mangang) - Sareng Angangba.

The above prescriptions clearly showed that Sareng fish of different colours which suited for different Salais were offered as sacrifices.

Likewise the fruits also offered differently for different Salais. According to Rajmohon


As given by Budhichandra and Ningthoumacha Manisana,

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Heibung was prescribed for Khuman, Heiba for Khaba-Nganba, Keibung for Angaom. L. Kalachand Singh\textsuperscript{57} related that Heipong (Heibong) was for Khuman and for the Nganba. The same prescription was also five by Ng. Kulachandra.\textsuperscript{58} Quite a different fruits were given in Thiren Meiram Leeba\textsuperscript{59}:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Angom</th>
<th>- Heibung,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luwang</td>
<td>- Heiba,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nganba</td>
<td>- Heinura,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moirang</td>
<td>- Heirit,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarang- Leishangthem</td>
<td>- Heitup,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khuman</td>
<td>- Heikru,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the contrary arises between scholars on the fruits for a particular ‘Salai’, it seemed that either of fruits might have been used as offering.

In regards to floral offering, it was laid down in Thiren Meiram Leeba\textsuperscript{60} as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Angom</th>
<th>- Leishang,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luwang</td>
<td>- Uyum,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangang (Khaba- Nganba)</td>
<td>- Haorei,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moirang</td>
<td>- Langthrei,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarang- Leishangthem</td>
<td>- Sangkuplei,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khuman</td>
<td>- Leikham,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ningthouja</td>
<td>- Nongleishang.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{56} Y. Budhichandra and Ningthoumacha Manisana, op. cit., Pp. 35-42.
\textsuperscript{57} L. Kalachand, op.cit. Pp. 140-141.
\textsuperscript{58} Ng. Kulachandra, ‘Apopka Thounirol’, Pp. 5-6.
Ng. Kulachandra and L. Kalachand could not agree on the prescription given in Thiren Meiram Leeba. According to Ng. Kulachandra\textsuperscript{61} the following were prescribed for every Salai of the Meeteis:

- Angom - Tharo Angouba,
- Luwang - Melei,
- Khaba- Nganba - Leishang,
- Moirang - Yerumlei,
- Sarang- Leishangthem - Leikham-leishang,
- Khuman - Kwaklei,
- Ningthouja - Thambal Angouba.

It should be pointed out that no articles should be offered to or used for the ‘lai’ before it has been purified by sprinkling water of a particular pond or lake or river sacred to them with the leaves or grasses which were prescribed by different scholars. According to Kalachand\textsuperscript{62}

- Angom - Tairen,
- Luwang - U-Khok maton,
- Khaba- Nganba - Nabnas-olu,
- Moirang - Naohang,
- Sarang- Leishangthem - Napi Sheenbi,
- Khuman - Pongphai,
- Ningthouja - Urumkon.

\textsuperscript{61} Ng. Kulachandra, Apopka Thounirol, Imphal, 1967, Pp.4-7.
According to Budhichandra,\textsuperscript{63}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Leaf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angom</td>
<td>Tairen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luwang</td>
<td>U-Khok maton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaba- Nganba</td>
<td>Napu-Nashen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moirang</td>
<td>Naohing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarang- Leishangthem</td>
<td>Napi Sheenbi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khuman</td>
<td>Pongphai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ningthouja</td>
<td>Urum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Rajmohon,\textsuperscript{64}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Leaf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angom</td>
<td>Tairen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luwang</td>
<td>U-Khong taikhok tairen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaba- Nganba</td>
<td>Napi Nasheng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moirang</td>
<td>Laoudri Tandrei Nahei Tairen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarang- Leishangthem</td>
<td>Napee Sheengbi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khuman</td>
<td>Pungphai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangang</td>
<td>Urukon Tairen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above given information of different scholars seemed to be used in earlier days but in later days it seemed that only tairen leaves were commonly used by all the Salais.\textsuperscript{65}

Sacred water used by different Salais in their purification rituals are given below:

\textsuperscript{64} Rajmohon, op.cit., Pp.127-133.
\textsuperscript{65} Apopka Kherumba, (MS).
Angom - Kongba river
Luwang - Lamphel lake
Khaba- Nganba - Leitang lake
Moirang - Loktak lake
Sarang- Leishangthem - Kakna kha lake
Khuman - Pumlen lake
Ningthouja - Nungjing pond

The purified articles after sprinkling sacred water with Tairen leaves were offered to the ancestor on broad leaves prescribed for every Salai.

According to Ng. Kulachandra, 67

Angom - Lakhong
Luwang - Larong
Kha- Nganba - Leira
Moirang - Khang-gra
Sarang- Leishangthem - Layai, Thamna
Khuman - Cangbee la
Ningthouja - Changbee la

According to Rajmohon, 68

Angom - Larong
Luwang - Larong

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According to Madhap and Kulachandra\(^6^9\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kha- Nganba</th>
<th>Leihou La</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moirang</td>
<td>Khang-gra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarang- Leishangthem</td>
<td>Layai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khuman</td>
<td>Changbee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ningthouja</td>
<td>Thamna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Kh.Yaima\(^7^0\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Angom</th>
<th>Larong, Lakoi and Leihoul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luwang</td>
<td>Larong, Layai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kha- Nganba</td>
<td>Leihou La, Larong la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moirang</td>
<td>Khang-gra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Sarang- Leishangthem           | Leihoura, Thamna, Ithamla,
                                 | Ahangbee, Layai           |
| Khuman                        | Changbee, Kwakla, Khangla |
| Ningthouja                    | Thamna                    |

This culture of using prescribed leaves for different Salais fives the opportunity of identification of the Salai after verifying the left over leaves in their absence.

The knives used in the ritual were known by various names such as:

- Angom - Pukak Thang
- Luwang - Tontumba (maton Tumba)
- Kha- Nganba - Chin -Naiba
- Moirang - Yemba tok
- Sarang- Leishangthem - Khunthok-thang
- Khuman - Tonkakpa
- Ningthouja - Chak- Thang

During the offering session to the ancestors, the ancestry was recited by the ‘piba’, the ritual head of the Salai, to glorify the ancestors of the Salais. The articles of food should be cooled exclusively on a special fire which had been lit by ‘Meiba’ (fire made by friction of a band of cane drawn across a piece of dry wood and also by ‘Meithang’ light taken from the fire of the neighbour and ignited a small heap of sticks and from that ignited another heap repeated five of seven times, according to the prescription. The prescribed methods adopted by different Salais were given below:

Angom - Meiba
Luwang - Kambi Khoiju Mei (Fire taken by burning Khoiju Leaves)
Khaba- Nganba - Leikhan Mei (fire taken by burning Khoiju Leikham leaves),
Moirang - Meithanag Ahum (ignition repeated three times,
Sarang- Leishangthem - Meithang Manga (ignition repeated five times)
Khuman - Meithang or Meithang taret
Ningthouja - Meiyai or Meithang Taret igniting the heap of small sticks repeated seven times

Food thus, cooked was consumed by the members of the particular salai only. The leftover was buried in a hole so that animals and birds etc. should not eat it. In this way, the annual ancestral ritual concluded with communal feasting exclusively, of the members of a particular Salai.

Phungga Apokpa khurumba

The Meitei are the strong believers in the mystic powers of the nature which manifest into the supernatural phenomena of the departed souls of the forefathers. So they adore the ancestors in the motive of procuring welfare of the units of the society which is performed privately and individually. Every household of the Meitei has a hearth at the centre of every house of the Manipuri society. The hearth is called “Phungga” and supposed to be the place of deceased ancestors and progenitors of household in the house. It is presumed to conceive the
idea from the fact that the old men or deceased heads of the households had
warmed themselves in the heat of the fire of the hearth during their lifetimes. So to
set such fire-place in a house is to look into the matter of the faith of the divinities
to bestow welfare and development to the living members of the house. On the
other hand, in the sense of the social institutions of the Meitei society, a Phungga
is an individual unit of the community and is made up of a father, a mother and
their children. Thus the father is the head of the household or Phungga and the
others (mother and children) are the members of the Phungga. So the Meitei
assume that the Phungga was originated from the father and to pay homage to this
father for giving birth of the Phungga is necessary. The Phungga Apokpa is
venerated three times in every year and the motto and motive of this ancestor
worship is provided as\textsuperscript{72}:

1) To adore in the Meitei lunar month of Eengā (June-July) for entreaty
of wealth.

2) To venerate in the Meitei lunar month of Langban (September-
October) for praying of child.

3) To worship in the Meitei lunar month of Poinu (December-January)
for devoting longevity of life.

From the description of Phungga, the meaning of Phungga Apokpa is
extracted as the departed persons who once acted as the head of an individual
household. Thus the Phungga Apokpa generally denoted the three fathers of three

\textsuperscript{72} Rajmohon, ‘Puwari Khabi Thiren Thounirol’, p.104.
generations antecedent or precedent to the living male member of the household, who is then the present head of the house. This means that the Phungga Apokpas are the father, grandfather and great grandfather of the living head of the household of an individual house.\textsuperscript{73}

There is process and procedure for the worship of forefathers of an individual household. Those go as the followings:

(1) Invitations: For observance of such ceremonial worship invitation to the deceased personnel is necessary. As they were no more in this human world the invitation is to be sent through the moon-god. On the Full moon day of the month in which the observance of the Phungga Apokpa khurumba is to be carried out on a near ensuing day of the porch (manggon) of the house is to be cleared with smearing the floor with water. When the rays of the moon light fall on the floor at about the middle of the porch floral offerings are to be made to the moon so as to invite the deceased ancestors and the items to be used as the rites are:

A pot, nine buds of Hanurei (Mussaenda frondosa fam, Rubiaceae) and Thingthou (Durba), 9 rice grains, 9 grains of black sesame, one betel nut germinated, a handful of paddy, some fruits, betel nut and betel leaf, khoiru thoumei (candle of wax), a coin and 3 pieces of peiya (thin split of bamboo) are to

\textsuperscript{73} Shagolsem Rajmuhon Mangang, Moirangthem Manao-Ibungo, Moirang Apopka Khurumba, Wangjing, 1996, p. 2 and Tharon (Meitei Scripture), Manuscript.
be arranged for offering. With offering these as rite, some spells for sending the invitation with the proper date on which the observance is to be made are to be recited as ritual for invitation. Then after the end of the invitation, the offered articles are to be set in the pot and it is to be buried at the middle of the hearth which is place of divinity’s shrine (Phungga lairu) after covering the mouth of the pot with seven layers of plantain leaves. The offered fruits and betels are not to be set inside the pot and those are to be kept over the place where the pot is buried.

(2) Observance: On the scheduled date (which is generally fixed on the new moon day) when the rays of the sun fall at about the middle of the open frontal room in the morning, the floor is to be smeared with water. The buried pot is to be taken out from its burial ground and set on a plantain leaf at the centre of the smeared floor of the porch of the house.

Then the covering of the pot is to be opened to make observation of the items of floral offering set inside the pot. It is provided that if the paddy is found to be in germination, the aspiring objective is predicted to be fulfilled. If the germinating peduncle is two in number the prediction of double fulfillments of the desire is forecasted.

The ground for observance of Phungga Apokpa khurumba is prescribed at the spot in front of the first post (Urep) of the house lying in front of the partition of the household god, divine Sanamahi. A worshipping point is to be set up at the
cited spot by screening with cloth after the erection of four small posts and the worshipping point is to be faced towards the north. Three seats are to be set with three cloths inside the worshipping yard.\textsuperscript{74}

Procedure: - The Phungga Apokpa khurumba, as cited above is the worship of three forefathers, viz. the father, the grandfather and the great grandfather. After the ground of observance is ready, the Amaiba will purify all the family household members with the incantation of Anam Athou. He is to instruct the worshipper to establish the fancied images of the deceased father, grandfather and great grandfather who are to be produce from his (worshipper’s) private part and the ancestor are also to be imagined to have been associated by their respective spouses. As aforementioned the Phungga Apokpa khurumba is private observance of the individual person or household and it is not a public celebration, but the materials to be offered to the ancestors are to be the items prescribed for the clan in which the individual belongs to. These items are provided as the totemic articles of the clan.\textsuperscript{75}

On the very outset the departed father is to be render to be seated at the centre 1) by invoking him with the root hymen “Ha Hang”. (Ho Hang). Then the deceased grandfather is made to be seated on the right side of the seat of the seat of late father inspiring him with seed hymnal words of “Ra Rang” (Ro Rang).

\textsuperscript{74} Shagolsem Rajmuhon Mangang and M.M.M, op.cit., p.5. 
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. p.61.
Finally the great grandfather is also rendered to sit on the left of the seat of the departed father with word of invocation of Sa-Sang (So-Sang).

These three ancestors are to be praying with the enumeration of the clannish totemic objects such as stone, lake for water, plant for symbol, the clannish metal representation of clannish deities, the name of progenitor of the clan and family.

Offering of feast: - The offering feast is conceived to be the most precious and greatest offering so far made offer to the divinities. So offering of a feast in the Manipuri cult of Apokpa latpa is generally included as a procedure or an item of offering to the deceased ancestors. All the Meitei clans and sub clans have their own proper kind of items of floral and faunal foodstuffs.

For the Phungga Apokpa Khurumba all these items are to be arranged and these foodstuffs are offered in raw ones which are termed as Saren chanba. In the ritual an incantation or a spell is always associated. Then the raw foodstuffs are cooked in the traditional way of Meitei cooking. The cooked foods are also offered again to the ancestors. Three dishes are made for the offering of feast in the Phungga Apokpa khurumba for the three forefathers. Other two dishes, one of Khaobunai (accompanied servant) and one for Kasa (bad ominous spirit) are also to be made and offered. The dining spot of the three ancestors are to be set before their respective seats and those of the Khaobunai and Kasa are to be arranged at houdong- chakthakpham and Naktha- churi tapham. At every site where there is a
dish of meal, a seat made of stem of plantain tree and lamps of wax are also to be

provided.

The remaining of all the items offered to the Phungga Apokpa is not

allowed to provide to the persons of the other household and it remains as taboo to

the Meitei society.\(^{76}\)

Shagei Apokpa Khurumba

“Shagei” as cited above is the family which is made up of a number of sub

families or households. Therefore, Shagei Apokpa means the progenitor of the

family. The Shageis or the groups of the people having the same surnames in the

Meitei society have their own family deities known as Shagei Apokpas or Shagei

lais and the Shagei Apokpa is considered to be the progenitor of the family as it

were accustomed to the cases of the sub-clans, clans and tribes. The Shageis are

emerged out with the increase of the population in a community and a surname

was introduced to bring out a family or Shagei by a person. This introducer of the

surname by separation of the household or the family from another bigger family

having a different surname is generally accepted to be the progenitor of the family.

It is because of the fact that he has a different and separate entity to live in his

community. His descendants regard him to be their progenitor. He is believed by

the Meiteis to have generally looked after and cared for the members of the family

especially for welfare, prosperity and development. Among his male lineal

members the eldest one is placed with due respects as the head of the Shagei or

\(^{76}\) Ibid. p. 65.
family. He, the head of the Shagei is given the title of Shagei Piba over and above the Shallai and Yekki Pibas. The office of the Piba as cited previously, is occupied by the eldest male and is determined by the rule of primogeniture.  

The Piba is the axial agent and acting priest of the Shagei or Shallai/Yekki Apokpa khurumba. Every year all the members of the Shagei pay homage in the honour and obedience to their ancestral progenitor with rituals under the guidance and leadership of the Piba. The motto and motive of the annual Shagei, Shallai and Yekki Apokpa khurumba are in the same trait and trend.

The number of Shagei-lai

The total number of Shageis or families, i.e. lineages of the population of the Meitei is appeared to have different figures. While Dr. Konsom Manikchand claims the total number of Shagei to be 645, W. Ibohal Singh puts the figure as 712 but according to L. Ibungohal Singh there are traditionally 446 Shageis, each of which has its own Shagei Apokpa. It is also to have the full understanding of the meanings of Shagei Apokpa or the deified progenitor of the family and Shagei lai, the deity used to worship as the allotment of duty to worship by the monarchial authority under the division of labour of the past kingdom of Manipur. These allotted deities to the Meitei families during the historical periods of Manipur are vividly providing in the Loiyamba Laikhai and yumnak Lai shangba.
and these are not belong to the ancestral deities. Some examples of Shagei Apokpa are- i) Wahengbam Yumjao Lairemma ii) Kainou Cheengshomba (Nongpok ningthou), iii) Keisam Yumjao Leima, etc.

From the above facts the total number of the Shagei Apokpa or Shagei Apokpa Lai has the figure of at least 780.\textsuperscript{82} It is because of the fact that there are many families having the same surnames which are belonging to different clans as they have different progenitors. To set an example is Konjengbam which belongs to i) Khaba-Nganba ii) Moirang iii) Chenglei and iv) Angom.\textsuperscript{83} So, this Konjengbambam family or surname has four progenitors who are the Shagei Apokpas belonging to different clans.

The special worship of the Shagei Apokpa

The annual worship of the Shagei Apokpa or the family progenitor there is a special worship of this progenitor. This special adoration is termed by the Meitei as Apok-Ashat-Thaba (corruptly Apok-Asha-Thaba). This veneration is carried out by the time when the hand of a girl of a family is going to offer. By the time of marriage the progenitors of the families of the bride and bridegroom are to be adored to bestow approved of the marriage. On another way this worship is the model of introduction of the progenitors and proginitresses of the bride and the bridegroom by exchanges of presents and sweat meats.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{82} B. Kulachandra Sharma (60), Brahmmapur Thangapat Mapal Imphal -795001, Manipur- personal talk.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Shagolsemcha Rajmuhon Mangang and Moirangthemcha Manaoo-Ibunng Moiung, op.cit., p.57.
Ibudhou Thangjing Temple, Moirang

Icon of Ibudhou and Ibendhou of Moirang Thangjing