Chapter-III
Emergence of the Sanamahi Cult

Introduction

Divine Sanamahi is one of the greatest gods in the polytheistic realm of the Manipuris who are living in various communities in the circles of the hill-dwellers and plain-settlers. His divinity is provided to have been worshipped as the household deity in every house of almost all the communities prior to the advent of Christianity and as one of the creative nine functionaries (Laibangthou Mapal) in the divine service and affairs of every shrine of each and every arboreal divinities or Meitei sylvan gods over and above his divine beings adoration as the State or kingdom’s deity at some specific places in Manipur.¹ No Manipuri with special reference to those living in the central valley of Manipur dares to deny his diviness.

Divine Sanamahi has various names prior to his divinity’s owing the popular nomenclature of “Sanamahi” in C.1778 A.D.² His first and foremost name after the attainment of diviness with the deification from being the eldest prince (Wapeehan) is appeared to be the “LAI” which was attunded during the regime of Meitei-lord Khagemba (1597-1652 A.D.) in C.1616 A.D.³ His divinity won the name of “Laiyingthou Taibangkhaiba (divine king of gods, acts as the separator of celestial and terrestrial spheres)” during the reign of

¹ The places – i) Wangon at Kangla, ii) Uphong-yumpham (Tollong leikai present 1st M.R. Cantonment), iii) Wanggoi Imphal West-II), Wakha, Nongmaijing hills, etc.
² Lm. Ibungohal and N. Khelchandra, op.cit.,p.131.
Meitei-lord Paikhomba (1666-97 A.D.) in C.1685 A.D., “Laiwa-Haiba (the god who speaks human language) during the tenure of kingship of Meitei lord Tubee Charairongba (1697-1709 A.D.) in C. 1700 A.D., Laiyingthou Phalloukhomba (deities’ king who conquered the domain of Phallou) during the rule of Meitei-lord Garibaniwaza (1709-48A.D.) since C.1733 A.D. and the most popular and familiar name Sanamahi as cited above during the regime of Meitei-lord Cheengthangkhomba (1763-98A.D.) alais Jay Singh, Karta, Rajashri (saint-king) Bhagyachandra, etc.

The Manipuri appellation “Sanamahi” is a compound word of the terms “Sana” and “Mahi” and these two terms bear the corresponding meanings of gold and liquid respectively. But the word Sana is a derivative or adoption of the Banglee term which is written as “Sana” but pronounced as “Sona” which itself was a loan word “Swarna” in the Sanskrit vocabulary bearing the same meaning of gold. Hence, the word Sana in the Meitei dialect is a recent word which came into the Meitei tongue when the Meitei obtained the knowledges of metallurgy and metallic properties of the gold or Sana. The said knowledge is appeared to obtain by the Meitei during the regime of Meitei lord Khagemba in 1623 A.D. but more advancedly during the regime of Meitei-lord Cheengthangkhomba as evidenced by the articles of the eneffective first and second Anglo-Manipuri Treaties of 1762 and 1763. The combined meaning of

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5 Ibid, p.63.
6 Ibid, p.93.
7 Ibid, p.37.
Sana and Mahi or Sanamahi is the “liquid of gold”, “gold liquid”, etc. i.e. the “melted gold”, “molten gold” and liquidized gold”. Hence, the name of the god, Taibangkhaiba means, the deity who is appeared to be in the complexion and appearance of the molten gold.

What is His Status, Rank, etc.

Divine Sanamahi is conceived by the Manipuri theologians as the incarnation of Cheengngu (great divinity) Kanglei Ashiba. The great divine Ashiba was the first or second son of the Almighty Guru in the Meitei theological realm and was the creator of all the celestial, terrestrial and nether spheres. He was also appointed to be the lord king of all gods and goddesses in the Meitei theological or polytheistic domain and tutelary divinity of every household of all the human beings, evil spirits and spiritual divinities. He is provided as the same person of Atiya Guru Shidaba (the immortal preceptorial sky) in the Meitei scripture Leithak-Leikharol.

From the above provisions it is observed that Ashiba is the immediately supreme godhead while divine Atiya Guru Shidaba or the Almighty Atingnga Guru are the proto-ultimate and ultimate godheads respectively. As divine Sanamahi is the incarnation of divine Kanglei Ashiba he inherited all the powers, status and virtues of divine Ashiba who is identified as the counterpart of the Hindu great god Brahma. So some Meitei scholar desirously writes the

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12 Bhagya Singh, Yenkhoiba, op.cit.p.23.
name of divine Sanamahi instead of the name and appellation of divine Ashiba.\(^{13}\) Over and above these virtues divine Sanamahi is attributed as the counterpart of divine Vishnu of the Hindu polytheistic circle. The provision in this regard is showing hereunder.\(^{14}\)

\[\ldots\ldots\text{Cheengngu matik aruba Maha Vishnu Thoikhoiba Aanadi Aadi Purusha Ahanba yawa khonjen lenna Chenglou Shakthong oina chongthoklakaye haibageebu khoimom koloi mamingthongbu Ahanba-o touna kou-ye}|\ldots\ldots\]

From this fact and find it is proved that divine Sanamahi is attributed the power, function, duties and virtues of Lord Vishnu in the Hindu pantheon. In this regard he is described to function the act of sustenance and preservation of the universe or the three worlds as the said Hindu divinity. The provision of being the sustainer of the world or human being of the world is:\(^{15}\)

\[\ldots\ldots\text{Taibang Apakma Pumnamapu Langpan Kaoren Sansenpakum Ayuk Anganpata Konthokpa, Numitang Athengpata Konchinpilipa, Cheengngu Thawai Meepokpa}\ldots\ldots\]

Divine Sanamahi is also attributed as the god of dissolution over and above his virtues and powers of creation, constructions and reconstruction as well as the deity of preservation, conservation and sustenance. His name in this regard is titled “Sanamahi Apoiba” or haunting and hovering Sanamahi. This aspect of divine Sanamahi is regarded as devil of devils and lord of all the evil

\(^{13}\) Nodiachand Amaiba Peeba, Eyek Salai Amasung Numit-Thapan, Imphal, 1981, Pp.76-84.
\(^{15}\) B. Kulachandra Sharma, Sanamahi Puya, Imphal, 2007, p.53.
spirits and master of all the dissolutions. The information of this regard goes as:\(^{16}\)

“….Khoimom Laiyingthoudi poirei yumlak Changna Khoiba Leeroulakle ||… Tubee Sana Yoikonungdasung Khambee Meipokthok, Malem Leikam Hunna Oinarakle ||…Akhara phambeerenda Guru Shivameechi Athoipana Santh Mangam Touringei Tauching heiso Thangbu Laangtharakye.....”

Meitei scripture “Sanamahi Laikan” provides many other aspects of performance of malicious act put forth by divine Sanamahi.\(^{17}\) So divine Ashiba acted as Brahma, the creator and lord Vishnu, the sustainer of the Universe,\(^{18}\) is the god of dissolution and destruction as the Lord Shiva is conceived and regarded in the Hindu pantheon. Hence, it is obviously found that divine Sanamahi in the Manipuri theology has the corresponding virtues and powers of the Hindu Trinity (i.e. Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar/Shiva). Therefore, the status and rank of divine Sanamahi in the Manipuri pantheon are high and he is revered as next one to the Supreme Almighty in the Meitei religious thought and philosophy.

**Different Aspects of Sanamahi**

Divine Sanamahi has different aspects and some of his aspects with regards to the functions in the matters of the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe have been described above. But his various aspects in other affairs of the Meitei cultic realm are adherently inspire to his greatness

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\(^{16}\) O. Bhogeshoar, Khagemba Langjei, 2001, Pp. 50-51.

\(^{17}\) i) Sanamahi Laikan, MS ii) O. Bhogeshoar, Sanamahi Leikan, Pp. 67-76, 84-86, 90-92.

\(^{18}\) Ibid, Pp.2-6 and 90.
to attain the status, dignity, etc. as the administrator of the celestial world where the gods and goddesses are living. Divine Sanamahi was conferred the power to exercise to rectify any wrong line of administrative service carried out by divine Pakhangba who was appointed to be the ruler of the human world by the honourable father, the Almighty Preceptor.\textsuperscript{19} The example of the appearance of divine Sanamahi or Cheengngu Kanglei Ashiba is showing at different times in disguises of the human being in the Meitei Usillon (system of offering substitute of an aggrieved person) and other affairs.\textsuperscript{20} He is revered by the Meitei-s as the adorable god of different and various affairs and he possess various aspects in the services of protection and subtenence of lively beings.

Different aspects of divine Sanamahi as a divinity of veneration are as under:

1) The Household God

Divine Sanamahi as aforecited elsewhere above is worshipped as the benevolent household deity who has showered his blessings to bestow all the essential commodities and grant all the desirous needs of the household. He has been named in different hill tribes, such as the Tangkhul, Kabui, Maring, Chothe, etc. and he is venerated under the name and style of Kairao (deity of the house) in a Kabui house.\textsuperscript{21} This is an example of the adoration of divine Sanamahi. The thought and philosophy of the Meitei reverence and worship of divine Phallou-khomba or Taibangkhaiba are more than mythical belief of being an abstract god of natural personification as this faith and belief are

\textsuperscript{19} Shree Bhagya Singh, Yenkoiba, op.cit. P.23 and O.Bhogeshoar, Ningthourol Sheireng, p.16.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, Pp.103-106 and 216-219.
\textsuperscript{21} K.B. Singh, An Introduction to Tribal Language and Culture of Manipur, 7 tribes, Imphal 1976, Pp.50-51.
firmly fastened by conspicuous ideas and inspiration of ancestor-worship cult. The worship of divine Sanamahi is vested on the historical facts and finds even when a fantastic fancy of deification of a historical prince as the incarnation of an abstract god titled Cheengngu Kanglei Ashiba. Even though the paying homage to divine Sanamahi as a household god is probable to concur with the erection of a memorial building after the deification of the departed prince in the name of the house of the Lai or god in the domestic yard of the royal palace of Meitei-lord Khagemba in 1617 A.D.\textsuperscript{22} the ancestor worship cult was ruling over the religious heritage of the Meitei society since the laying of the foundation stone of the Meitei monarchical principality by Meitei-lord Nongdalairen Pakhangba. It is because of the fact that the Meiteis were the immigrants from the birth-place and cradle-ground of the cult of forefathers worship.\textsuperscript{23} The root of the efflorescence of the veneration of the divine Sanamahi is appeared to have made provision in the Meitei scriptures as under:\textsuperscript{24}

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\textsuperscript{22} Lm. Ibungohal and N.Khelchandra, op.cit. p.34
\textsuperscript{23} Readers Digest Association, Last two Million years, London 1974, p.46.
\textsuperscript{24} i) O. Bhogeshwar, Khagemba Langjei, p.36, ii) K.Manikchand, op.cit. p.37, and Sanamahee Laihui (Achouba) M.S.
It is the opinion of the Meitei scholars that the worship of divine Sanamahi as the household god who looks after the inmates of the house is based on the above provision of the Meitei scriptures. Thus the Meitei-s worship divine Sanamahi regularly in the south western corner of the rear room of the customary house building of nine, seven, five or three segments. The worshipping sanctum of divine Sanamahi is placed at this south-western corner of the back room of the house, by calling the backroom of house as “Laiyingthou Sana-ka (room of gods king Sana as Sanamahi)\textsuperscript{25} and this setting of divine Sanamahi’s sanctum is made due to the concept of finding the divinity’s properties (toy hockey and the piece of cloth) at the said corner. Thus, the altar of divine Sanamahi and his consort Langmai Cheengjaroibee with their sacred seat made of Utang bamboo (Bambusa tulda, fam poaceae) was set at the south western corner while the shrine sanctum of Leimaren Shidabee (the prominent divine dame who moulded and bound the earth), the divine mother of Cheengngu Kanglei Ashiba\textsuperscript{26} is designed to lei on the opposite side at the diagonal position so as to look after and caress her beloved son and daughter-in-law.

2) Sanamahi, the outdoor Deity

The aspect of divine Sanamahi as the outdoor deity has two features in the characters and characteristics of the i) benevolent and ii) malevolent virtues and efficacies. The former is more emphasized in the sense of presiding divinity of place, zone, region, etc. while the latter is in the concept of the


\textsuperscript{26} i) Khamnung Eengal Leishaba MS. ii) Leisemilon Ariba, MS.
haunting and hovering spirit (Sanamahi Apoiba). The brief accounts of these two features are as follows:

i) The benevolent Sanamahi of outdoors

The benevolent Sanamahi of outdoors is placed as a sylvan deity. He is appeared to exist since the Meitei concept of his marriage to Langmai Cheengcharoibee, the youngest daughter of Nongpok-kainou Cheengshomba and Tampha Wangngamlon Panthoibee (or Apanbee). From his marriage to Langmai Cheengcharoibee he was offered the hill range of Wakha in the Nongmaijing hills the parental home of Cheengcharoibee. So he was given the title name of Wakha-Lakpa Palluba. He is thus conceived by the Meitei to live and preside over the area of Wakha hill range in Nongmaijing hill over and above his presiding over every spot of a house as Naktha-Lakpa on the left side flank of the frontal open room of a Meitei-house, Thongngaren at point of main door, Lairuba at the back (western) side of the household hearth, Shaigang Polleeiba on the eves of the house, Hui-Naha Khwangnouba at Sandangkha (the part of the roof beneath the rear part of the riding of roof), etc. His residence at Wakha of the Nongmaijeeng hills is evidenced by the meitei scripture named Sanamahi Laikan and Khagemba Langjei. 

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27 Lm. Ibungohal and N.Khelchandra, op.cit, p.41.
29 B. Kulachandra, op.cit, p.27.
30 O.Bhogeshwar, Sanamahee Laikan, Imphal, 1974, Pp.96-98.
ii) The Malevolent Sanamahi of outdoors

The Malevolent Sanamahi of outdoors is none other than the Sanamahi Apoiba. Some accounts of these aspects of Sanamahi have already been described elsewhere above. He has also various names in accordance with different places, states and conditions as- Leirak Shathouba (driving one of the cattles on the routes), when he is on the road, Khongban Lalluba (ambushing one on the side of drains) when he is near the streams, Thangjing Sanamahi, Marjeeng Sanamahi, Tangkhul Tomba Sanamahi, Maring Tomba Sanamahi, etc.\(^{32}\) He is not only cause of destructions, but also the agent of dissolutions, damages, hurts, etc.

The aspects of the malevolent Sanamahi is turned up when divine creator Cheengngu Kanglei Ashiba manifested to shoot out Saamadon Ayangba (the swift flying winged horse) to destroy the cutting of vegetables divine Apanba (Pongnaoton) and Leinung-Chakha Khongjombee.\(^{33}\) This provision of the theory of the Meitei universal creation may be treated as the origin of the malevolent Sanamahi as divine Sanamahi was the incarnation of Ashiba, the creator. Sanamahi Apoiba is a great threat to the Meitei.

3) Divine Sanamahi, the Kingdom’s god.

The worship and reverence of divine Sanamahi as kingdoms god of all the territorial jurisdiction of the monarchial kingdom of Manipur and a Deity Who accompanied the Meitei Monarch in all the situations and circumstances is appeared to introduced under the name of Lai (god), the first and foremost

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title name of the divinity in 1617 A.D. along with the construction of his brick temple inside the royal palace yard reserved for the young princes and princesses (Wanggon). In this regard Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal Chronicle records as:  

...... Chanamba Kharoigee Kumdi Shaka 1539 da Wanggonda Phura Laiyim Shai-e||...

From the above information of the royal chronicle it is brought to light that divine Sanamahi was adored in the temple constructed at the site of royal princes and princesses abode, the then lying in the royal domestic yard of the royal reserved line in the complex so as to provide advantage and facility to pay homage to the god by the general and common people in public. Thus the personal deity of the Meitei-monarch and private domestic god of the Meitei royal dynastic household god is seemed to turn in public divinity in 1551 saka (1629 A.D.) even the building of the brick temple started in 1549 saka (1627 A.D.)

The mode of Monarch’s personal Deity

Divine Sanamahi was customarily modeled as the Meitei Monarch’s personal association who accompanied in almost all the acts, deeds, etc. prior to the substitution of this companionship by divine Vishnu of Hindu pantheon after 1779 A.D. during the regime of Meitei-lord Cheengthangkhomba (1763-98

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34 Lm.Ibungohal and N.Khechandra,op.cit.p.36.
Divine Sanamahi being the companion of the Meitei king accompanied him in the annual calendarized festive observance of worshipping the outgoing and incoming years called “Hiyanggei Hitong”. The information goes as:

“…Moirang Tonagee Kum Shaka 1557…Hiyanggei Hidongbada Laiga Ningthemga Hi Tongbasu Adungei Hou-e ||..”

Thus divine Sanamahi under his first deified name Lai swayed as the ever associated companion of reality until the reign of Meitei-lord Cheengthangkhomba.

During Garibanawaza’s Rule

Even though Meitei kings and their followers initiated into Hinduism in 1704 A.D. and adopted Hindu religious sects of sakta kalika adoration, Vaisnavite coupling Radha and Krishna worship (Nimandi sect), vaisnavite coupling Rama and Sita veneration, they never set aside their indigenous cult of divine Sanamahi adoration. Meitei-lord Garibaniwaza is provided by man Meitei scriptured as one of the greatest devotees of divine Sanamahi. It is evidenced by the fact and find of His Majesty Garibaniwaza’s prayer to divine Sanamahi to fulfill his aspiration to adopt the worship of Shree Rama and to give permission to follow the religious sect in the name of Shree Rama.

Divine Lai-wa-haiba or Phallou-Khomba became the greatest god in position, status, standard, dignity etc. as the kingdom’s deity and public
domestic and household deity during the regime of Meitei-monarch Garibaniwaza (1709-48). The cult of Pakhangba, being established and started during the reign of Meitei-lord Tubee Charairongba (1697-1709A.D.) in 1705 A.D. was beginning to efflorence with having divine Pakhangba was a worshipping god of the king inside the royal domestic abode. He remained as a minor god unless and until Meitei-lord Garibanawaza rendered him to sit on the coronation seat erected at appended foot hill of the Hancheeng hill at Heingang (Imphal-east district) in 1747A.D. Thus divine Sanamahi was regarded as the greatest state divinity over and above all the personal and private gods and goddesses revered by the then people of Manipur. As reported by many writings of modern and archaic divine Lai-wa-haiba was always accompanied with His Majesty Garibanawaza in different battle fields and warfare. One of such statement recorded in the royal chronicle is portraying here under:

Heisnam Laibagee Kum Shaka 1639…Poinu tha- Tha ahumnong Shagolshenda Laiyingthou Wa-Haiba Matu-manai yaona Leima-yaoba Oina Dollaibu Phi Lei-Shangbana Koiduna Changkhi-e||

From the above record it is obvious that divine Sanamahi was the archetype of divine Hindu Vishnu to carry everywhere the Meitei King goes. This tradition of association of divine Sanamahi with the Meitei King is seemed to be an imitated model of the Buddhist Burmese who always carried a

41 Lm.Ibungohal and N.Khelchandra, op.cit,p.69
42 Ibid, p.113.
45 Lm.Ibungohal and N.Khelchandra, op.cit, p.78.
votive image of lord Buddha everywhere where they go for their times of prayers.

Worshipping Shrines of State Deity

The worshipping holy shrine of divine Sanamahi as the kingdoms deity, as aforesaid was introduced at the royal palace complex of the capital compound of kangla for the first time. Again, the shrine for general and public worship was made by shifting the sacred sanctum to an open public place from special area of the royal palace complex. But after some time, the worshipping shrine of divine Lai-wa-Haiba was established also at Leishangkhong and the area where the shrine with erection of temple of the divinity is probable to name wanggoi after the sense and conception of the first site of the shrine-temple of the deity elevated at Wanggon in the Kangla capital complex of Imphal. The establishment of the arboreal shrine of divine Taibang-Khaiba at Wanggoi, Leisang Khong is attributed as to have been carried by Meitei-King Khagemba but the actual date of erection of the shrine is in obscurity. Thus Wanggoi in the area of Leishangkhong became the second holy place of divine Sanamahi since the regime of Meitei-lord Khagemba.

The third holy place of divine Sanamahi as the kingdom’s deity was established at the Uphong-yumpham [the site of house of the bird Uphong or Rosy white pelican]. Even though the name of the palace Thollong Lammahan where the Upho-yumpham leis was mentioned during the time of Meitei-lord

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Khagemba\textsuperscript{47} the actual establishment of the arboreal Shrine and erection of the temple is emphatically provided as to been carried out by Meitei lord Garibanawaza as the Tollong Lammahan was the dwelling locality of Moirang Lanhamba.\textsuperscript{48} The parental shrine of this kingdom’s god was in the area of Kangla under the name and style of Lai Maharajage Kangla\textsuperscript{49} or Lai-Kangla.\textsuperscript{50}

The 4\textsuperscript{th} shrine of divine Sanamahi as a kingdom’s god is at Kumbi Santhong where he is titled Santhong Ningthou/Moriba.

The Moulding of Sculpture

The moulding of sculpture of the Meitei cultic deities is appeared to start in 1699A.D. according to Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal chronicle of Manipur. But many a scholars have provided the moulded during the regime of Meitei lord Khagemba outside the pan of the records of Cheitharol kumbaba and other Meitei scriptures and manuscripts. The information of the first moulding of Meitei cultic deity is as under:\textsuperscript{51}

\begin{verbatim}
.....Shairom Mansheigee Kum Shaka 1621....Poinu tha....6ni Eeraida Panthoibeegee Murti Heigadabbagee Aheiba Hanjaba Tarina Leimi Tam-e || 11ni Yumshakeishada Panthoibeegee Murti Hei-e ||
\end{verbatim}

With the beginning of sculpture the idol of divine Panthoibee, the iconographic image of divine Sanamahi was also sculpted on Friday, the 4\textsuperscript{th}
Eenga (June-July) in 1700 A.D. \(^{52}\) As the tradition of sculpturing the indigenous cultic divinities of the Burmese and Manipuri-s runs in the fashions of the Kommai (the facial anatomic structure in metal) Konloo (metallic structure of the head) and Murti (anthromorphic metal image), the iconographic statue of divine Sanamahi, as provided and evidenced by the Meitei scriptures Sanamahi Laihui or Khagembam Langjee\(^ {53}\) and Sanamahi Laikan\(^ {54}\) is the full anthropomorphic feature. But the image of divine Panthoibi cited preceedingly is seemed to be of Konmai and many of the nats, the native cultic deities of Burmese are also sculpted in this fashion.

The above mentioned metal image of divine Lai-wa-haiba moulded in bell metal in 1700 A.D. during the tenure of kingship of Tubee charairongba was destructed by breaking up in 1726 A.D. but reestablished the worship of the divinity with remoulding the metal image and reinstalling the metal image after animation in 1730 A.D. \(^{55}\) But the same image was again destroyed by breaking up with the strikes of hammer in 1732 A.D. \(^{56}\) A new image was again recasted in the next year of 1733 A.D. \(^{57}\) Thus the image of divine Sanamahi who was adored as the kingdoms god suffered a lot of destruction.

**Divine Sanamahi in the Shrines of Every Meitei Arboreal Deity**

Divine Sanamahi, being the incarnation of Cheengngu Kanglei Ashiba, the creator of the universe is attributed to present in the shrines of every Meitei

\(^{52}\) Ibid, p.63.
\(^{53}\) O. Bhogeshwar, Khagembam Langjei, p. 100, and Sanamahi Laihui (manuscript).
\(^{54}\) O. Bhogeshwar, Sanamahi Laikan, Pp. 102-104, and Sanamahi Laikan (manuscript).
\(^{55}\) Lm. Ibungohal and N. Khelchandra, op.cit., Pp. 87-90.
\(^{56}\) Ibid, p.93.
\(^{57}\) Ibid, p.93.
arboreal deity as the representative Ashiba in among the nine creative functionary of the arboreal deity termed them by the Meiteis as the Laibangthou Mapan (nine grand proginitorial gods). These nine gods along with 7(seven) Lai nuras (divine damsels) are assumed to be the first and foremost companions of divine Konjin Tingthokpa. These Laibangthous who are conceived by the Meitei as the gods who helped divine Ashiba in the creation of the earth’s crust or the hydrosphere and the lithosphere of the earth. But they were on side of divine Konjin Tingthokpa. Pakhangba when divine Ashiba attempted to destroy Konjin Tingthokpa for the contest of the throne of universe.

The Laibangthou Mapan are also assumed as Laiphangthou (nine administrative machineries). In the true sense these Laibangthou are the administrative functionaries who help the local gods each of whom is attributed to preside over a specific area of land as provided by the Meitei polytheistic religious system. But the origin and the chronology of the inclusion of divine Sanamahi as a god in among the nine Laibangthou of the Meitei arboreal gods is in obscurity.

The introduction of local presiding gods by setting up shrines and adoring the same’s in every village of Manipur valley is appeared as to be in the late period. This cultic fashion is seemed to run in parallel with the village nat cult of Myanmar. The Nat worship cultural heritage and Umang-lai cultural heritage of Myanmar and the Meitei are appeared to be outside the Pans and

Pantheons of their adopted religious creeds of the Buddhism and Hinduism respectively as their indigenous native theisms.

Divine Sanamahi in the Shrines of Every Great Arboreal Deity

Most of the Meitei great arboreal deities are destined to the areas of the territorial boundaries of the central valley and hills of Manipur. Most of them have their shrines on hills and are treated as sylvan or forest gods in this regard. Some examples are :- i) Koubru, ii) Marjeeng, iii) Wangbren, iv) Thangjeeng v) Luwang Ningthou Punshiba (Hongnem), vi) Kainou Cheengshomba Pureiromba (Nongpokiningthou), vii) Nongshaba viii) Soraren or Lai Kasa, ix) Cheengwanglakkee Pureiromba (Angouba), x) Chakhaba, xi) Khomlangba, xii) Khoiri-phaba xiii) Lokningthou or (Uteen-Ukang Ningthou or Thanga Cheengningthou) xiv) Laiyingthou-Hanba, etc. all these great deities are worshipped in their respective shrines with divine Sanamahi over and above His Divinity Sanamahi’s presence as a deity in the inclusion of the Laibangthou mapan.

Divine Sanamahi in Association with the regent of Cardinal Quarters

The Meitei have the deities who acted as the regent of directions as there are Dikpala (presiding deities of directions) in the Hindu Pantheon. The most popular and well known Meitei sylvan gods in this regard are: i) Koubru (the regent of the north-western quarter), ii) Marjeeng (the regent of the north-eastern direction), iii) Wangbren (the regent of the south-eastern direction) and iv) Thangjeeng (the regent of the south-western quarter). All these deities are worshipped in association with divine Sanamahi as one of the deity of the
Laibangthou mapan or over accompanied companions. Both the cases may be found in the worships of divine Thangjeeng as the first case (a deity among the nine functional gods) and divine Panam Ningthou of Andro and divine Lokningthou of Thangjeeng village.

The origin and chronology of adoration of divine Sanamahi in association with the great gods and gods of directional regent ship are not yet found out in the proper manner. But the said matters may be presumed as to have been introduced during the regime of Meitei-lord Khagemba who introduced the cult of divine Sanamahi and worship of the great arboreal gods. These facts may be supported and evidenced by the informatinos are:\(^{60}\)

\[\begin{align*}
&i)….Chanamba Khoiroigee kundai Shaka 1539 da Wangonda phura Lai-yim shai-e||
&ii) Laishram Maitekkee Kum Shaka 1553 Laiyingthou Khagee-ngambana Lamda Tha 10 panba Yumshakeishada Kangla Hou-e ||
&\quad Tanna Hong-e|| Koubrunachingba Lai-khibikpu Phijang Khanduna Iroi 100, Hameng 100, Yao 100, Shan 100….. Theengam Haingamdana Thouniduna Pundi Leinee ||
\end{align*}\]

The above information brought to light that the cult of divine Sanamahi was carried out in the eyes of the general people publicly by adoring the deity by setting on the altar and sanctum of a brick temple at Wanggon inside palace complex in 1617A.D. and other gods and goddesses led by devine Koubru were also venerated at Kuchu, the royal office in the palace complex in 1631A.D. Here, the other gods and goddesses led by divine Koubru mean to denote the

\(^{60}\) Lm. Ibungohal and N.Khelchandra, op.cit. Pp.36, 38.
enumeration of deities mentioned as to have been existed during the regime of Meitei-lord Khagemba, such as- i) divine Thangjeeng 2) Marjeeng 3) Koubru 4) Nongshaba 5) Lai Kasa (Soraren) 6) Nongpokningthou and 7) Panthoibee. With regard to the unmentioned names of gods – 1) Wangbren 2) Chakhaba 3) Khamlangba 4) Laiyingthou-Hanba 5) Naukan 6) Mongbahanba etc. these gods are the members of the Meitei Umang-Lai Mapan. ⁶¹

The axial god in the mainstream of the Meitei cultic heritage concurred during the regime of Khagemba was divine “Lai” Sanamahi. ⁶² So the association of divine Sanamahi in the worships of these great gods is observed as to have been started since the regime of Meitei-lord Khagemba.

Emergence of Sanamahi cult

Divine Sanamahi as afore described is axis of the Meitei native and indigenous religious heritage. He is the lord of all the inmates in the Meitei spiritual universe as his father; the Almighty preceptor had granted and conferred all the powers, functions duties and responsibilities. Even though there are same contesting matters as the conducive manner motivation and conduct against the cult of divine Sanamahi by the cult of Pakhangba as the progenitor of the ruling and administering section and its royalistic clan, the Sanamahi cult is appeared to remain aloft in the general opinion of the mass people.

⁶² Lm. Ibungohal  and N. Khelchandra, op.cit., Pp. 36, 38, 39.
Socio-Religious Heritage of Manipur

The dominion of Manipuri is the homeland of the Manipuri-s which is a composite people of plain-settlers and hill-dwellers. The majority people of the general mass of populace are titled the Meitei and this term seems to include all the valley-inhabitants. The important sections of the mainstream population of the Meitei, as the modern scholars conventionally opine to be the migrated descendants of the different regions of dominion of ancient and medieval China via the mainland of South-East Asia, specially the western part of the said mainland. Hence the religious mind of the inhabitants of Manipur is sticking to the Chinese religion of Confucianism and observed to have full inclination on the ancestor worship. But other-faiths and beliefs have also effected to some extents even after their full adoption of the Hinduism since 1704 A.D.63 Some of the faiths and beliefs still existing in association with the concurring cults and religion are as bellows:

1) Aimisim

The faith of animism is conventionally agreed to be the belief of the first order and the simplest manner and nature in the religious concept and theistic sphere of humankind. The definition and brief account of animism is described universally as:64

Animism - A belief in individual spiritual being and in a future state. Probably originated in the Paleolithic age, such concepts as the Polynesian

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63 Ibid, p.68.
mana and the Indian Orenda and manitou (qq.6) represent the spiritual and nonpersonalized quality which is believed by the animist to be present in the universe. It has been suggested that the concept first arose as a result of the difference between the dead and the living and such phenomena as sleep, trace, and dreams, so that each person might be presumed to have a physical life as well as phantom life. Marett suggested that there was a level of preanimism in which there was no life-phantom distinction. The animist may be regarded as one who carries over to things the attitudes and procedures used to handle people.

This definition of animism brings to light that it is a religious thought of the attribution of a soul to natural objects and phenomena. The Indian worship of stones as the phallus, and the representation of lord Visnu (Visnu chakra) and one of his several incarnations (Shila-roopa or Salgrama) may also be preserved as the example. As the Meitei adopted the Hindu religious thought and philosophy, they use to believe to pay homage to plants (tulsi or oeimrem sanctum, ficus religiousa or pipal tree), pebbles, etc. over and above their indigenous concept of existence of life in pebbles (as phou-oibee, the goddess of cereals), old coins (more than the temple coins), plants (bamboo called “Tebi-Tesha-Waa”).

The animism faith of the Meitei is appeared as to have been in association with their primal belief of the ancestor worship. The representation of the progenitor and proginitress by the metallic object (Khallong65 or ladle-

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65 Lm. Ibungohal and N. Khelchandra, op.cit., p. 597.
like structure) and other totemic articles prove the admixture of animism with the ancestor worship cult of the Meitei.

2) Spirit worship

Spirit worship is the faith and belief to pay homage to the spirit. With regard to the term spirit it is viciously and virtuously proved as:

An immaterial nondivine being of fairly independent existence. It may be associated with a particular nature feature. There may be many different kinds of spirits, even in one culture. Spirits cannot be perceived directly by the sense. The wind, the sun, a disease, may be regarded as having a spirit or being one, spirit may be linked with fairies, gnomes, and similar figures. The concept of a soul (q.v.) that can be separated from the body is the model for the nonhuman spirit. The spirit helped the growth of advanced religion by facilitating dualistic conceptions of the material and the immaterial. Usually there are more spirits on the earth than human beings. Many spirits in nonliterate religions worked for man or against him and their force could be seen in almost any unusual happening. The notion in some religions that each person enjoys the protection of a guardian angel and faces the snares set by a tempting demon may derive from the belief in spirits. Spirits are sometimes confused with ghost (q.v.) who loiter around their homes.

From this provision it is brought to light that the spirits are the immaterial beings not belonging to or proceeding from a god, a superhuman

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being or an object of adoration. But it is not to be confused with the ghost who is provided as: 67

Ghost-1. In folklore, the soul of the deceased when it is believed to perceptible to human.

But in the general sense, the ghost belongs to the spirit. 68 The spirit veneraton is one of the most popular beliefs in among the developing countries. With regards to this faith in the respect of the Burmese, the nearest neighbouring nation is afforded as: 69

Another side of Burmese life which is not strictly in accordance with Buddhist teachings is spirit-worship. Like the other peoples of Burma, the Burmese were spirits worshippers before the arrival of Buddhism. The Burmese use the word “nat” to mean supernatural beings, the good ones who dwell in the various heavens as well as the frightening ones who interfere in the affairs of the human world. Little nat shrines can often be seen in Burma especially under big trees which are believed to harbour spirits. There are people who take nat worship very seriously in spite of their belief in Buddhism. Even those who avoid having anything to do with spirit-worship will not do anything which is known to be offensive to nats.

The nat-worship of Myanmar is almost similar to the Umang-lai-veneration of Manipur. Even though there are some Umang-lais

67 Ibid, p.22.
68 E.B. Tyler, op.cit., p. 228.
(arboreal/sylvan deities) who belong to the ancestor-divinities (Pakhangba), abstract gods (Konjin Tingthokpa) and nature-gods (Korou-hanba) some of them belong to the spirits. The example of these sylvan deities belonging to spirit category are 1) Khamlangba, 2) Chakhaba, 3) Loiyalakpa, 4) Wangbren, 5) Koubru, 6) Marjing etc. Thus the spirit-veneration is still enduring in the Meitei society along with other faiths and beliefs.

The spirits who are revered by the Meitei-s can be divided into the malevolent, benevolent and mischievous nature and characters. The benevolent ones are adored as the guardian deities of the state, region(s) or localities. Some of the benevolent spirits gods are attributed to have been followed by mischivious spirits and these are termed as “Sharoi” or accompanying ones of animality. The malevolent spirits are termed Laimu-Teemu (evil spirits), Lai-hingchaba (demonic spirit), Lai-phattaba (devilish spirit), etc. The term Laingou-Teenngou is appeared to denote any spirit who protects human being when attempted to harm a human. The mischievous, not malicious spirits who appear in the personifications of damsels are termed Helloi (beautiful maiden).

Any body falls ill in the Meitei society, it is thought that the person is suffering the illness by attack of a spirit, especially of evil kind. So offering to the evil spirit which caused the illness to the person is carried to ward off the evil spirit for the recovery of health of the said person. So the general notion of the spirits is appeared still to rule over all religious heritages of Manipur. Again the Manipuri also believed to stay a benevolent spirit where there is a
malevolent spirit so as to check the harmful attack of the evil spirits in the polytheistic pantheon of Manipuris.

3) Ancestor worship

The cult of ancestor-worship is seemed to be the oldest cultic heritage in the Meitei religious universe and brought through their genetic inheritance. The original place and cradle of this forefather’s adoration are pointed to the common valley of Yang-tse and Ho-wang-ho Rivers in the conventional view of the modern scholars of the world. The descriptive and intensive accounts of this cult with regard to the Manipuri-s have already been fully asserted in the previous chapter.

4) Theism with named deity

The theism with the named deity means to worship a god/goddess which has a particular name. Even though the Meitei have their own heritage of religious heritage since their beginning of settlement and organizations of small communities which later brought together to form the common Meitei society, the emergence of the named gods goddesses was a particular title under the Meitei nomenclature is appeared to start in 1589 A.D. according to the royal chronicle of Manipur and the information is set hereunder.\footnote{Lm. Ibungohal and N. Khelchandra, op.cit., p. 30.}

---Loitongbam Tengkon-gee Kum Shaka 15||
Tangkhuttamdo hiyam thok-e|| Khachraicha-gee Mee Shiye||
Leirong Koubeega Nungkarang Koubiga Eerattuna Meeyam Shiba Phaye||

\footnote{70}
From the above information it is obvious that these two divinities are female evil spirits who caused to suffer dead of the tribal people of Khacharaicha. These two female spirits with particular names are the first and foremost ones so far concerned to the records of the royal chronicle. With regard to the Meitei word of “Eeratpa” it bears both the meaning of worship and sacrifice and the Meitei have four different aspects of worships and sacrifice according to sacrificial objects and victims. (The accounts will be found in the following chapter).

Named Deities of Benevolence

The particularized names of benevolent deities, worth to revere are appeared to mention during the regime of Meitei monarch Khagemba in 1617 A.D. in the records of royal chronicle of Manipur. The information goes as under:71

Chanamba Tharoigee Kum Shaka 1539….
Kabo Nunggoitongba Chanubu Thangjeeng Ningthouda Thajei-e||

The first and foremost deity who was destined to worship in the brick temple by installation of an altar inside the temple was still having the common name “Lai”of the deities. The incident of mentioning particular name of benevolent deity and installation of sanctum of Meitei deity with the construction of brick temple were running in the same year of 1617 A.D.72 The other gods and goddess with the distinct or particular names cited during the

71 Ibid, p.36.
72 Ibid, p.36.
tenure of kingship of Meitei-king Khagemba are\textsuperscript{73}-Maring, Koubru, Nongshaba, Kasa Nongpok (Kainou Cheengshomba or Nongpok-ningthou and Apanbee (Panthoibee).

As the Meitei conceived that the gods and goddesses are also in the natures, characters, habits, socio-cultured traits and trend, etc. they need and require all the essential commodities, domestic articles, household objects in the material culture as the human beings. They have consorts, children, relatives, etc. as in the human society. So they are offered all the articles, objects, etc. which are in uses of the human beings in the socio-cultural, politico-economic, etc. lives. Thus the offerings made to the divinities in the polytheistic sphere in the aspect and respect of foodstuff, domesticated cattles and fowls and decorative floral items are examplifyings provided as below:\textsuperscript{74}

Laishram Maitekkee Kum Shaka 1553 Laiyingthou Khagee- ngamba Lamda tha 10 panba Yumshakeishada Kangla Hou-e || Tanna Hong-e|| Koubrunachingba Laikhibikpu Kuchuda Pheejang Khanduna iroi 100, Hameng 100, Yao 100, Shan 100, Kangnga 100, Hei-Lei Leiribakhibisux Mashing 100/100, Sheeng Maram Kheibikpu Masheeng 100/100 Theengam Huingamdana Thouneeduna Punsi Leinee-e || Loi-bu Khong Ching-e ||

From the facts and finds it is highlighted the Meiteis concept of the gods and goddesses as the equivalent physical, social and cultural characteristics even when the deities are revered as the supernatural and mystical beings far superior to the human beings in all the matters. Thus the gods out of the range

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, p.36,38,39,41.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, p.38.
of the ancestor worship cult also have their wifely goddesses and vice versa as well as their sons and daughters.\textsuperscript{75} Thus the Meiteis concept of god or gods is coincided with the worlds or universal thought of the god or gods.

The Birth of Aana Wapihan

Meidingngu Macha Ahanba or Sana Wapihan or the eldest prince was the first name of divine Sanamahi and this name is appeared to possess by the divinity when he was swaying in human life as the assumed incarnation of divine Kanglei Ashiba. When the duration of the pregnancy of Korou Nongthin-chaibee, the second queen of Meitei-monarch Khagemba was about to complete she requested her lord to test the gender of the child to be born as her offspring through the trance of royal priest-doctor.\textsuperscript{76} So king Khagemba called upon the priest-doctors named Akong Thiyathou and Thenkra (Kanak Thenggra) to carry out the matter successfully.\textsuperscript{77} The two priest-doctors after they had entered into the medium of trance had predicted for a son. Thus the first prince-son of Meitei-king Khagemba was given birth to Meitei queen Korou Nongthil-Chaibee in the Meitei luni-solar month of (June-July) at the residence of Meitei-lord Khagemba.\textsuperscript{78} The newly born child was given the name of “Meidingngu (Meitei-lord) Macha Ahanba” at the first instant\textsuperscript{79} but he was also renamed “Sana Wapihan” as the second nomenclature of the first instant of naming the prince.\textsuperscript{80} The actual date of birth of Sana Wapihan is

\textsuperscript{75} O. Bogheswar, op.cit., 1978, Pp. 96-98.
\textsuperscript{76} Konthoujam Nonggarol (manuscript).
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, Pp.27-30.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, p.31.
provided in different days of the same date i.e. the first day of the same month i.e. Eenga but the date of year is not cited nowhere in any book. Sanamahi Laikan pleads for Friday\textsuperscript{81} while Sanamahi Laihui,\textsuperscript{82} Khagemba Langjei, Pakhangba Nongkarol favours for Saturday.\textsuperscript{83} The most auspicious day for the veneration of divine Sanamahi is afforded as the Thursday in the month of Eenga by the Meitei scripture Sanamahi Nauyom while Friday and Saturday are also prescribed for the same matter by the scriptures named Sanamahi Phankhong and Santhong Laigee Thounee. All these days are set as the birth day of the divinity.

Disappearance of Sana Wapeehan

Prince Sana Wapeehan, the first prince-son of Meitei-lord Khagemba and who was born by the second queen Nongthin-chaibee was warmly received by the parents, their relatives and associates. The new comer’s birth ceremony was performed in the traditional ritualistic norm and the naming celabration was also carried out in the customary trait and trend. He was given the name of Meidingngu Macha Ahanba (the first son of the Mitei-lord) as cited above and rendered to join the worldly life as a member of household which was an unit of the Meitei society with the performances of making offerings to divinities and consecration of the house (Yumshengba) and the child himself with the worth of the sun-god after the 6days and eleven days of his birth respectively according to the traditional rites and rituals of the Meitei childbirth. Thus

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, p.34.
\textsuperscript{82} O. Bogheswar, op.cit., 1978, p.41.
\textsuperscript{83} Nongthombamcha Angou, Pakhangba Nongkarol, Imphal 1983, p.72.
prince Sana Wapeehan began his life as a member of human inmate of the world.

Finding the Relics

When the parents of the divine child searched for him they found him nowhere. So the household members of His royal Highness were thrown into the ocean of sorrow and melancholy. Weeping and weepy sentiment and emotion run in every heart of all the persons presented then and there. But an old woman imagined to be the goddess Yumjao Leima, one of the three guardian deities of the Meitei king, told that she had seen the prince as if he was entering in a room to the backdoor of the house building of the king. So all the household members including the parents – Khagemba and Nongthin Chaibee rushed to the rear room of the house to see whether the prince was there.

When all the household members arrived inside the rear room they saw none but their eyes were keeping to every corner of the room to satisfy the thirstiness of their eyes. By the time they saw the dressing cloth used as the hip gear and the small toy-hockey-stick of the prince lying on the floor of the south-western corner of the room. The records do not reveal that the physical body of the prince was there but the said relics of him were there and the parents took those up with tears in their eyes in the pang of separation of the beloved prince. All persons presented then and there had understood that the

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84 K. Manikchand, op. cit. p.35.
85 Dr. Konsam Manikchand Singh, op.cit.p.38.
prince had departed from the human world and entered the sphere of death. The other household and family members and male and female staffs and servants consoled the expiry of the prince and shared the sorrow and suffering of the parents. As the prince was deified in the personification of the incarnation of one of the greatest god in the Meitei polytheistic realm, the corpse of the deceased prince was not mentioned as if it was not found and to give the general notion of having no graveyard of disposal of dead of the prince. The idea of the person who had no tomb on the surface of the earth even though it is an illusion in the modern sense was an allusion of the possession and holding the divine powers and forces.86

Divine Sanamahi in Worldly Vision

The untimely and immature expiry of the eldest son as if the flower nipped in bud had a great effect to the parents and this sorrow and suffering touched the core of Khagemba and Nongthil-chaibee, the parent of the deceased prince. The most liked and beloved appearance of the child is appeared to linger and frequented in the mind and mental vision of Meitei-lord Khagemba and queen Nongthil-chaibee. Again the post scene of playing of the boy, running to and fro inside the house which was marked by the sound of the small bells attached to his anklets and his sweet voices are appeared to haunt the minds and sleepy mental faculties of the father and mother during the night hours. They endured the suffering of the sorrow and sadness of the separation of their first child as if they had no life or were lively beings.

When king Khagemba who had much shocks more than the others could bear the pang of separation no more over and above his endurable limit expressed wanton attitude of sorrow and suffering to his priest doctor to treat him to recover from his melancholic attitude. His family priest-doctor was Kanak Thonggra. He not only consulted the matter with his private priest-doctor, Kanak Thonggra but also sought the advice from the great exorcist, Akong, the private priest doctor of his honourable father. As they could not in the matter as they were not the concerned to the divinity, Meitei-lord Khagemba sought the help of Yumnam Tomba, the then great exorcizing priest as being the concerned priest of divine Nongshaba. By then, as imagined by the Meitei scholars, divine Lai or Lai-wa-haiba being aspired to have a concerned priest of himself had bestowed the powers of expressing his words to Leisangkhong Khema or Longjam Khema and possessed the human Khema by the divine being. Leishangkhong Longjam Khema felt as if he was in association with the supernatural being. The divinity as the Meitei believed, managed Longjam Khema to go to the palace of Meitei-lord Khagemba and expressed what he had felt the unseen empowerment of divine Sana Wapeehan. It is also reported that the divinity told to the Meitei King what he had to do for him as a father. The given expression of his desire to have executed by Khagemba as the father goes as:

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87 Lm. Ibungohal, and N. Khelchandra, op.cit., p.3.
88 O. Bhogeswar, op.cit., 2001, p.27.
89 Ibid, p. 37.
90 Ibid, p. 35.
Meitei-lord Khagemba as the record proceeds had taken up the action as instructed to him by his divine Son. Thus he had seen the appearance of his deceased son in the image of the mirror and the vision of the departed prince as said to have seen by the human eyes\textsuperscript{91} in the worldly life.

Evolution and Establishment of Sanamahi cult

Meitei-king Khagemba lost his first and most beloved son during the first decade of his tenure of kingship. This lost and pang of separation of the eldest prince rendered to shock the mental faculties much. This shocking effected severely in the political life and duties of the Meitei monarch. His sorrows and sufferings inflicted from the untimely dead of most darling son are seemed to linger always in his mind. Therefore, Meitei-lord Khagemba intended to establish some thing in the memory of his expired son so as to endure his remembrance in future and to enliven the memory and monumental work forever. After seeking advice from the then scholars he approached

\textsuperscript{91}Ibid, p.36.
towards the deification of the virtuous prince under the name and style of Lai\textsuperscript{92} (god).

The Lai, the name given to the eldest son’s soul after the deitification of the departed prince was rendered to pay homage by the general people of his kingdom. An account of transforming the terrestrial life of the eldest prince in human form and figure into an incarnation of the Lord creator, Cheengngu Kanglei Ashibas\textsuperscript{93} was established on the hypothetical basis so as to attract the faiths and beliefs of general people. The theory of the polytheistic sphere on universe of the Meitei religious thought and philosophy also appeared to have been evoked along with the introduction of the personification of Sana Wapeehan as the incarnation of divine Lord Creator. The divine Lord creator was attained to be the eldest son of the Almighty One and he was attributed as no woman born son\textsuperscript{94} of the Supreme Godhead in the Meitei-pantheon. Divine “Lai” who was bestowed and adorned various names of “Laiyingthou Taibang-Khaiba (the gods’ and divinities’ emperor who demarcates the boundaries of terrestrial human world and celestial divine world) in C. 1685 A.D., Lai-wahaiba (the god who speak in human language) in C. 1700A.D., Laiyingthou Phallou-Khomba (deities’ monarch who conquered the domain of Phallou) in C. 1743 A.D. and finally Sanamahi (the melted or liquidized/fluid of gold) in C. 1778 A.D.\textsuperscript{95} was managed to maintain and retain as a worshipping god by installing on an altar erected in a shrine under the roof of a temple.

\textsuperscript{92} (i) Ibid, p.37, (ii) Dr. Konsam Manikchand, op.cit., Pp. 43-44.
\textsuperscript{93} Lm. Ibungohal, and N. Khelchandra, op.cit., Pp.38-39.
\textsuperscript{94} O. Bhogeswar, op.cit. 2001, p.23.
\textsuperscript{95} Bhagya Singh Yengkhoiba, Leithak Leikharol,Imphal, 1988, p.76.
The temple of Lai or divine Sanamahi was set with the domestic area inside the palace yard of the then capital complex. This temple of wood and bamboo was converted into a brick temple in 1629 A.D. The information recorded in the royal chronicle in this regard goes: ⁹⁶

…Chanaba Kharoigee Kumdi shak || Chongtham Wanggonda phura Laiyim shai || Thiyam Khommagee /kum Shaka 1551…phura Laiyum Shanggaie |

Elevation other Shrines

Divine Sanamahi became a Kingdom’s and royal god with the best and highest patronage of the head of the kingdom. The virtues, abilities, qualities, powers and functions are appeared to have been growing up with passing of time from one decade to another. Divine Sanamahi, being attributed as the incarnation of Cheenggu (Lord of gods and goddesses) Kanglei Ashiba became the centre and core of the Meitei polytheism. He was bestowed and conferred to be the emperor of all the supernatural being including the evil spirits over and above his empowerment for being the king of gods in the Meitei cultic pantheon. He is the most benevolent deity who creates, sustains and preserves all the lively inmates and their needs and necessities as well as the worst malevolent spirit (Saitan) who harms and destroys anything which will support the goodwill of lively beings. But the benevolence of divine Sanamahi is never ruled over by his malevolence.

Divine Sanamahi was also destined to be the king of all the household units which have their own house building. Thus he became the household and domestic god over and above his lordship over all the celestial and terrestrial supernatural beings. Hence, his shrine for daily worship was set up in every house and every Meitei who is in household life used to adore him daily as his personal domestic god. Even though the worship of divine Sanamahi as a household god is not found to mark for the cultic evolution and origination distinctly in date it is presumed that the cultic nature and its affairs was started by the tenure of Kingship of Meitei-lord Khagemba.

As the Meitei religious thought prescribes the gods and goddesses in its realm in the likeness and equality of the human beings in the matters of socio-cultural life divine Sanamahi has also friends, associates and companions. He has his spouse with the name of Langmai-Cheengcharoibee. The shrine of the divine spouses (Sanamahi and Cheengcharoibee) was established on the hillock of Wakha a small range in the Langmai/Nongmai hills or Nongmaijeeng Cheeng. This shrine has no temple but a sylvan or arboreal sanctuary where the divine consorts reside. This shrine was introduced by Meitei-lord Garibanawaza in 1733A.D. with holding the marriage ceremony of the divine consorts on the top of the hill.

As the most beloved god of the Meitei kingdom the shrine with a temple of wood and bamboo roofed over with thatch was also erected at

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97 i) Ibid, Pp.36-38.
Leishangkhong where the first devoted priest of the divine Sanamahi\textsuperscript{101} inhabited. The shrine Sanamahi at Leishangkhong (present “Wanggoi”) is said to have been elevated during the regime of Meitei-lord Khagemba.\textsuperscript{102} But the factual account of the existence of the shrine temple of divine Sanamahi is found to have been transected during the reign of Meitei-lord Garibanawaza in 1731A.D. in the royal chronicle.\textsuperscript{103} No information in this regard is recorded during the tenures of kingship of Meitei Kings Khagemba (1597-1659A.D.), Khunjaoba (1652-1666A.D.), Paikhomba (1666-97A.D.) and Tubee Charairongba (1697-1709A.D.) in the said royal chronicle.

The elevation of shrine temple constructed with wood and bamboo at Tellong-Lammahan at Upong Yumpham (present temple-complex inside the cantonment of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, Manipur Rifles) is also recorded as to have been effected by the regime of Meitei lord Khagemba.\textsuperscript{104} But the actual taking up of action for the erection of temple at Uphong-Yumpham is also reported as to have been effected during regime of Meitei-lord Garibanawaza (1709-48A.D.).\textsuperscript{105} Hence, even though Meitei King Khagemba introduced the cult of divine Sanamahi and initiated policies to preach and spread the cultic thought and philosophy of Sanamahism, the period of Meitei-lord Garibanawaza is appeared to be the golden period of Sanamahism.

\textsuperscript{101} O. Bhogeswar, op.cit. 1974, p.107 and O. Bhogeswar, op.cit. 2001, Pp.61,64.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, p.35.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, p.37.
\textsuperscript{104} Lm. (L) Ibunghohal & N. Khelchandra, op.cit., p.92.
\textsuperscript{105} O. Bhogeswar, op.cit. 2001, p.37.
Divine Sanamahi’s Favour with Khagemba in War & Peace

The Meitei are warlike nationals by birth and are born fighters. Their history is of wars and battles. So the divinity being he is omnipresent one of the future events of wars to be casted on the life of Meitei-lord Khagemba, the father of the humanly supernatural one had advised him to shower success in war and peace. As the record favours as the revelation of the deity in the human speech, it is said as below:106

Lairen ipa Meitingngu-o ! Napari eidi taibang nongshapandadi chengtai shak-unaphaoiye □□ ...Waira shakuba huyen lankuba, punsi mathoi tongbabu lankubeege □

After attainment of such favour and blessing Meitei-lord Khagemba took up the burden of the administrative work in full attention. By then the Mughals were trying to extend their boundaries of the north-east area as far as possible. The then ruling emperor was Nur-ud-din Muhammad Jahangir (1605-27A.D.) and under his governor of Bengal Islam Khan almost all the north eastern native kingdoms and principalities such as Kamapurpa, Assam, Kachar, Tripura, etc, were against the Mughal power or were in struggle with the Mughals for their independence. Some Mughals set a trap to captivate Meitei-lord Khagemba through an envoy under the name of Asam of Kabui tribe. The event of Kabui Asam as recorded in the royal chronicle goes as:107

… Haobam Marambagee Kumdi Saka 1537.. Ghatti hithenta Meiteingngu Khagempana Mangkan Khutshamanggeito

Mongphicham Yara phakhiye || Kabui Asamna Mayang lak-e
hairei-e || Kabui Asambu louonbane haina hatnare ||

This matter is described in detail in the Meitei scriptures named “Khagemba Langjei” and Sanamahi Laihui (Achouba). The narration goes as under:\(^{108}\)

As the Mughal intended to captivate Meitei lord Khagemba for annexation of the then Manipur they sent Kabui Asam with presentations to propose the Meitei king to come at the ferry on the river Barak on the west to establish friendly alliance between the Mughal and the Meitei. The Mughal plan to capture Khagemba when he was in the boat along with his body-guard for crossing iron chain which was set under the water and when the Meitei king mounted/ascended on the boat they were to draw the chain towards them with firing guns toward their opposite side to frighten the Meiteis. But the timing of their firing and drawing the chain were mistaken by themselves. When Meitei-lord Khagemba was raising his right leg, the sound of firing rang from the Mughal side and Khagemba, replacing his leg in position, had held three Muslim personnels of the Mughal. He drew them towards him with the dragging away of the Mughal boat. Two of the captivated muslims were named Anankhan and Mangkan Khan. On the other hand the Mughal boat had carried away Mongbijamba Yara, the body-guard of Meitei-lord Khagemba as he had mounted the boat before Khagemba’s try to side on the boat. Thus Khagemba

\(^{108}\) Ibid, Pp. 2-5.
escaped from the deceptive plan of the Mughals with grace and bless of divine Sanamahi.

There was another event also in which Khagemba had gotten rid of the joint-plan to kill him on the east of Manipur. This is also assumed as the blessing of divine Sanamahi. The narration goes as: 109

When Meitei-lord Khagemba was swaying peace, the chiefs of Kharicha/Kalicha tribe and Mongsha village of Shan states entered into intrigue to kill Khagemba. So the chief of Mangsha village came to the capital and told that the chief of Oksu village denied to pay annual tribute to the Meitei king. He further told as if a request to come Khagemba himself with his army to punish the disdainfully disobeyed chief of Oksu village. So Meitei-lord Khagemba set out to invade Oksu village in C.1625A.D. when Khagemba accompanied by the officer-in-charge of the affairs of the eastern tribes, the said officer being understood the dialects of the hill-people had a suspicion of being organized a conspiracy of intrigue against his king. So he requested the king to follow what he said and to do what he told for that day only as there was a threatening of ominous occurrence. The king agreed to the proposal. When the Meitei-troops arrived at Mangsha the wife of the chief of Mangsha was engaged to be the paramour of Meitei-lord Khagemba and she gave positive reply and the Meitei-lord was invited by the chief of Khalicha village to be his guest for that night. The king also agreed leaving his army at a place.

The chief of Khalicha arranged many pots of wine so as to render drunkenness to the Meitei king and his guards so that he might be enabled to kill Khagemba, while they were sleeping in drunkenness. When the drinking and eating were going on khagemba met the wife of the chief of the Mangsha village. They had a nice love-making and Khagemba presented her a gold ring which made her so much love, satisfaction and likeness of him that she would save the life of Khagemba in the near future.

On the next morning Khagemba raided the village of Oksu and conquered the same. When he was about to return after the conquest the chief of Mangsha village invited Khagemba to have a dinner at that night as the commemoration of his success in the Oksu invasion. Khagemba accepted the invitation. The chief of Mangsha too arranged many pots of wine in the aspiration of what the chief of Khalicha had borne in the previous night. All the guards of the Meitei King were kept under the drunkenness and Meitei-lord Khagemba was also fell asleep with the intoxication of the hard liquor. At the dead of night the chief of Mangsha village holding his spear in his hand out from his room to kill Khagemba. But the Mangsha chief’s wife who was the illicit lover of Khagemba followed the chief and when he attempted to thrust sleeping Khagemba with his spear she caught hold of him and restricted him for killing the king in that condition. She also told him that if he want to kill the king he had to dao it in the morning while he was in the awaken condition. The chief, being thought that Khagemba had no means to escape agreed to the proposal of his wife and had gone to his own room.
All those happenings were witnessing by the said officer of Khagemba as he had expected so as he had planned the same. He then got up from his bed and render to wake the king. When the king woke up he requested the king to leave the place and to go to the camp of his army. Meitei-lord Khagemba followed the direction of his officer and soon left the home of the chief of Mangsha village. He then joined his army and returned safely to the capital. Thus Meitei-lord Khagemba escaped from the conspiratory intrigue of the eastern inhabitants with the divine blessing of Lord Sanamahi.

Divine Waa-Haiba’s Companion of Garibanawaza in Wars

Meitei-lord Garibanawaza was one of the true and best aspirants of divine Lai-Waa-Haiba or Lord Sanamahi prior to his various change and alteration of religious sects.  During the period the relics of divine Sanamahi is appeared to accompany Meitei-lord Garibanawaza in many war field. One of such example as recorded in the royal chronicle is:

Haisnam Laibagee Kum Saka 1639….Poinu tha thaohannong Shagolsenda Laiyingthou Wahaiababu matu-manai yaona Leima yaoba oina dolaibu phi lei Shangbana Koiduna changkhi-e

The above describing event was not actually escorting the Meitei princess whose hand was sought by the Burmese emperor in 1716 A.D. There was no bride or female in the bridal party mentioned above but the warriors to attack the Burmese who were coming to receive the bride to be the queen of

111 Lm. Ibunghohal and N.Khelchandra, op.cit., p.78.
112 Ibid, p.77.
Burmese emperor with regard to the attack and captivation of the Burmese the royal chronicle states.\textsuperscript{113}

\begin{quote}
\ldots Haisnam Laibagee kum Saka 1639\ldots Poinu tha\ldots 14ni Yumshakeisada\ldots Unungta Khul lakpanaching Awa Leima Okpa Eepanda Nipa achangba 90 nupee 11 pharake. \|
\end{quote}

On another event of war fought between the Burmese and the Meitei in 1724 A.D. at Wangjing, the presence of divine Sanamahi is reported.\textsuperscript{114} Thus divine Lai-Waa-Haiba (Sanamahi) accompanied in wars and showered the blessing of success in those battles.

**Divine Right of Kingship**

The social contract theory of divine right of kingship in political science was introduced in Manipur by embracing the same by Meitei-lord Khagemba in 1608 A.D. The information in this concern is recorded in the royal chronicle as: \textsuperscript{115}

\begin{quote}
\ldots Thongbam Mangshagee Kum Saka 1530\ldots Meidingngu Khagembabu Laiyingthou Koubasung adunegi hou-e \|
\end{quote}

This entitlement of the title and virtues of the Meitei kings for being the part and parcel of God under the theory of the divine right of kingship, claimed and embraced by Meitei King Khagemba in 1608 A.D. had been obtained the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, p.78.
\textsuperscript{114} Shanjenbam Nadiyachand Singh, Mayamba Garibaniwaza, Imphal, 1971, p.76.
\textsuperscript{115} Lm. Ibungohal and N. Khelchandra op.cit., p. 34.
\end{flushright}
public approval by the said Meitei monarch in 1622 A.D. The information in this regard is as the following:116

…Loitongbam Kyanggee Kum saka 1544…Laiyingthou haina thonbasu adungeigeene ǁ

The claim and embrace of the title Laiyingthou (the king of gods) by Meitei monarch Khagemba under the divine right of kingship as per social contract theory in political science was found out by Meitei-lord in relation to the introduction of divine Sanamahi cult and deification of the eldest prince “Meidingngu Macha Ahanba” or “Sana Wapeehan” into divine “Lai” Lai-Wa-Waa-Haiba, Phallou-Khomba, Taibang Khaiba or Sanamahi. As divine Lai, being the son-prince of king Khagemba born by his second and most darling queen Nongthin-Chaibi and a child of supernatural powers as assumedly attributed to be the incarnation of divine creator Cheengngu Kanglei Ashiba, the Meitei-monarch made the claim as the father of the supernatural being. This claim of King Khagemba and public approval of the claim, by his subjects is appeared to be an inferred virtue of divine Sanamahi cult.

Sanamahi Temple of Kangla

Sanamahi Temple of Wangoi

Front gate of Wangoi Sanamahi Temple

Prayer being offered at Lainingthou Sanamahi Temple

Prayer offered along with Pena

Function of Mera Chaoren Houba at Sanamahi Temple