Chapter VII

THE ETHICS OF THE MEETEIS

The earliest forms of religion were associated with the elements out of which the ethical life subsequently developed. Social customs stood for the general good of the people and acted as rules binding on the will of the members. Over these customs religion cast its protecting shadow and invested them with religious sanction and value. The primitive loyalty to the custom protected by God developed into moral consciousness. The main feature of the social order of the early Meeteis was the institution of yek or salai. Seven yeks inhabiting different parts of the land became welded into one nation, but their distinct identities were never lost. Each yek was subdivided into sageis or clan groups which traced descent from a common ancestor and bore the same family name. The head of the sagei was called the piba. The configuration of social units is relatively enduring in a society. The relatively stable and continuing pattern of yeks and sageis and their interrelationships constituted the structure of the Meetei social system and determined its various functions.

Each sagei had its own deity. Each yek had a set of traditions and a deity peculiarly its own. When the Ningthouja yek subjugated the rest, a cross-fertilization of beliefs took place. There was a very great enlargement of outlook. The rise of a larger and more complex social order brought about a
significant deepening of the content of the religious consciousness. An order, in the first instance, super-imposed on the yeks, was by and by freely accepted and developed from within. Yek gods lost their tribal character and became the general property of the Meetei nation. The ancestors of the seven yeks were believed to be brothers. They descended from the same divine parents. Thus Konchin Tukthaba Pakhangba, son of Salailel and Leimalel was regarded as the common father of the seven ancestors. Pakhangba was thought of as the founding ancestor of the Ningthoujas. On the union of the yeks under the supremacy of the Ningthoujas the god of the conquering group would naturally claim allegiance from those who had been subdued. In the process of assimilation Pakhangba became the unifier of the Meeteis, though his worship was restricted to Ningthoujas alone.

The word 'meetei' as said earlier, means mankind. Man is created on the pattern of the image (mi) of God. He is other (tei) than God and other than the lower creatures. He is endowed with qualities of consciousness and intelligence so that he can realise God. The world is not for itself. It issues from God and must therefore seek its rest in God. The difference between man and all else is that man alone is conscious of God as the guide, ground and goal of the great scheme of the universe. The realisation of the affinity with God, the Ultimate Father, is the ideal of man. The ethics of the Meeteis is subsidiary to this goal. Morality is action to realise the
highest perfection. Well-doing is the promotion of well-being. This teleological ethics runs like a guiding thread through the social history of the Meeteis.

According to the Meeteis, human life is the most precious of all lives. An individual fails in his duty as man if he does not actualise his spiritual potentialities. He must break the shell of his own little being. He must live a life of reason and not of passion. The importance attached to the strict social and moral discipline is well asserted in the Leithak Leikhalon Puya when it prescribes the moral qualities of the man who should read the puya. The puya says that it should not be read by an evil man. An evil man is one who does not pay due respect to his parents and takes little care of other members of the family. He does not listen to the advice of his superiors and disregards the views of wise men of the society. He shows disrespect to the king, has a high opinion about himself and does not hesitate to betray his friends and relatives. He has no respect for women, He steals, tells lies and hurts others. A good man respects his parents, honours the king and listens to the advice of wise men. He is humble and never hurts the sentiment of others. He never owns properties belonging to others. He takes simple food that would not intoxicate him. He is devoted to duty and deity. The puya says that it should be read by good men only.

The Wakoklon puya describes an ideal man as one who knows himself and his parents. The high regard of the Meeteis
for their parents is expressed in the traditional saying 'Mother is heavier than the heavy Earth and Father is higher than the high Heaven'. Parents are looked upon as visible deities by whose grace an individual becomes devoted to the Supreme Father of the universe. Just as the parents protect the children, so also God comes down on the earth to save mankind from evil temptations and passions. The life of a man should be led under the very eye of god. This suggests that no wrongdoer can escape punishment. The belief in the divine care to maintain cosmic order is the foundation of the social behaviour of the Meeteis.

The Meeteis have great respect for their ancestors and worship them. This is not due to any fear of the ghost. It is the social feeling which has prompted the people to trace their security and well-being to the guardian spirits of their ancestors. The Meetei house is regarded as the abode of gods. The most important of the household deities is Sanamahi who occupies the south-west corner of the house. The goddess Leimaren has her place in the centre by the north wall. Further, the hearth (Phungga) is situated in the centre of the main room. It is evident that the Meetei life-style is determined by religious considerations. Prayers are to be offered to the deities. Rites are to be performed. Virtue is obedience to the law of God.

1. Wakoklon, pp. 40-44
The socio-economic ideal of the Meeteis is 'wattaba padaba'. The literal meaning of this expression is 'to have neither shortage, nor excess of the requirements of life. If anybody has excess over his actual requirement, he is tempted to acquire wealth further and looks upon his fellow beings to be inferior to him. Equally the one who suffers from shortage of his requirements is tempted to do immoral activities for their acquisition. Thus the Meetei advocates the middle way between luxury and poverty. Like Buddhism, the Meetei religion is pragmatic in its preference for the middle course. The Meetei avoids the extreme views about the way of life. He advocates neither the life of sensual indulgence nor that of rigorous asceticism. In every prayer he asks God to make him Watta Padaba - to have no excess and shortage in his life's possession. This has got great socio-economic and moral impact on the life of the Meeteis. They believe in a deity called Lai Chakhetpi. This deity defeats human pride. Chakhetpi means that which scales down. The scaling down of human pride is the moral and social norm for the people. Pride ruins the human individual and his society. Justice rules over the course of things. It maintains the order of the society. Kangbalon Puya states that Justice was restored in the human society by the divine action of blowing off the flag fixed by the wrongdoer and upholding the one fixed by the right man. There is again the legend of Wayel Kati. Wayel Kati means the Divine Scissor that works in the court of justice by cutting the one who is wrong. All these naturally suggest that social harmony is the
settled will of God. Cosmic order serves as the foundation for the moral law working in the human society.

Just as the Vedas speak of the Rta as having the utmost significance in the moral world, there is, in the Meetei Puyas, the firm belief in the Lainingshing Heiyi as the supreme moral guide in the life of the human beings in particular, and the whole course of the universe in general. For the Vedic Indians, "It is the law which pervades the whole world, which all gods and men must obey."¹ Dr. Radhakrishnan says, "Rta furnishes us with a standard of morality. It is the universal essence of things. It is the satya or the truth of things. Disorder or An-Rta is falsehood, the opposite of truth. The good are those who follow the path of Rta, the true and the ordered. Ordered conduct is called a true vrata. Vratāni are the ways of life of good men who follow the path of Rta. Consistency is the central feature of a good life. The good man of the Vedas does not alter his ways."² In the Khunai (society) of the Meeteis also as revealed in Nonglon Pathup Wachetlon and Amam Nonglon, there is Lainingshing Heiyi that regulates and controls all things and beings in the universe. Even the gods are His offshoots. They work in fulfilment of the ways of the Lainingshing Heiyi. That which conforms to the course of the Lainingshing Heiyi, the Nong, the only one Reality, is the

¹. Radhakrishnan, S., Indian Philosophy, vol. I, p. 109
². Ibid., pp. 109-110
truth—the standard. That which stands against it and violates the course is wrong. All are due to this Lainingshing Heiyi, and all are for Him also.\textsuperscript{1} It is very significant that at this early stage we should find such a unifying conception as that of law or order pervading all things, expressing itself in the natural order and in the religious life of man and tending to be associated with one Supreme God. Thus morality is an expression of divine law; sin is opposition to that law. The sinner is one who is out of harmony with the spiritual domain which encompasses the world.

Devotion to the deity and the firm belief in the law of morality as the ultimate ground of the cosmic order constitute the foundation of the systematic organization of individuals in the Meetei society. The main urge in a human being is to live the good life, the life of godliness, to live for and in God. And it was this primary urge which brought about the sense of social solidarity among the Meeteis. Strict social and moral discipline was observed by inflicting punishment on the wrongdoers. Punishments ranged from simple scolding and warning to beating, banishment and death according to the degree of crimes. Cases of assault and theft, cheating and cattle-lifting were punished by flogging in public places. Fining was, however, the commonest of all punishments. Adultery and seduction invited exemplary punishment. The hair of the

\textsuperscript{1} cf. Akoijam, I., Eeyek Salai
offender was cut and his head was coloured and then he was exhibited in the public places. Intermarriage between persons belonging to the same yek was treated as an offence and the offenders were banished from the kingdom. Revolution against the royal authority and murder invited capital punishment. In many cases of violation of social and moral rules imprisonment was carried out as a punishment. Specified terms of imprisonment varied from one week to twelve years.¹

In the Meetei society punishment was inflicted upon a criminal as a vindication of the authority of the moral law. The reformative character of punishment is noticed in some cases. Women were not beaten. They were not executed. The aim of shaving the head and exposure in the public places was to reform the criminal. The Meeteis believed that a criminal might escape punishment from the human authority but God's punishment would fall upon him.

The social organization of the Meeteis was based on certain cultural norms which gave orientation to the various activities of its members. The Yek system was introduced to meet the needs of the time when different groups of the people had to live together in amity. The myth of cow² shows that the Meeteis regarded their yeks as different limbs of God. Atiya Sidaba appeared in the form of a dead cow in order to test his...

¹ Brown, R., Statistical Account of Manipur, pp. 92-93
² See above p.
sons. The carcass of the dead cow was cut into seven pieces and divided among the founders of the seven yeks. Hodson gives two versions as to which part refers to each yek. In one version, "the Angoms spring from the brain of the sage, the Luangs from between his eyes, the Khabanan from his eye, the Moirangs from his nostril, the Chenglei from his nose, the Kumul from his liver, and the Ningthaja from his spleen." In other version, "the Ningthaja were born from his left eye, the Angom from his right eye, the Chenglei from his right ear, the Khabananba from his left ear, the Luang from his right nostril, the Kumul from his left nostril and the Moirang from his teeth." Dr. Parratt gives another version in which "the parts were divided as follows:

- Angom: the white neck
- Ningthouja: the eye
- Luwang: the head
- Khuman: the front legs
- Moirang: striped sections of the belly
- Kahba: the face
- Nganba: the breast.

According to S.K. Chatterji, the myth of the cow finds its parallel in the Rg-Vedic hymn according to which the

1. Hodson, T.C., The Meitheis, p. 100
2. Parratt, S.N., The Religion of Manipur, p. 35
Brahmin emanated from the mouth of the primeval Being, the Ksatriya from his arms, the Vaisya from his thighs and the Sudra from his feet. But while the Puruṣa Sūkta refers to the division of Hindu society into the four classes, the Meetei myth describes seven groups of people and their integration into one body and does not refer to any gradation. The myth shows the peaceful solution of the inter-group rivalry among the Meeteis.

Man would not have been different from other species of living creatures, big and small, had he not been endowed with adequate intelligence and spiritual qualities. He is aware of his place in the vast scheme of the universe and this makes him humble. He has obligation to each and everything and being around him. Social development consists in harmonious development of the constituent members of the society. Social good is an ethical end towards which all members of the society direct their activities. In the Meetei society the king had the power and the authority to enforce order through laws. He was looked upon as a Deity incarnate. The royal family claimed descent from Pakhangba and the king was addressed as 'O Great God Pakhangba'. Wisdom and courage were believed to be embodied in the king. The ideal for the king was to become perfect even as Pakhangba, son of God was perfect. As the Chronicles write,

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

The evolution of worship in the Meetei society brought about a class of persons specially qualified and charged with the care of the offices of religion. The priests and priestesses were called maibas and maibis. Hodson observes, "The heads of the clans are priests, and assume charge of the ritual of the tribal worship, while the Raja, the head of the Ningthaja clan and the head of the whole confederacy, is the high priest of the country." McCulloch mentions an earlier belief according to which the maibis "owe their institution to a princess who flourished hundreds of years ago ... . At present any woman who pretends to have had a 'call' from the deity or demon, may become a priestess. That she has had such call is evidenced by incoherent language and tremblings, as if possessed by the demon." The maibi played a more important role in religious ceremonies than the maiba. When a man was possessed by a lai,  

1. Ningthourol Lambuba, pp. 9-10  
2. Hodson, T.C., op.cit., p. 109  
he would wear the clothes of maibi. Traditional physicians and midwives were also called maibas and maibis but they did not dress in the distinctive white of the priestly class. A woman became a maibi either by being chosen at the Lai Haraoba festival\(^1\) or by being possessed by a lai. The maiba was always selected by the lai when he was possessed. Usually the maibi was possessed by a male lai and the maiba was possessed by a female lai, but exceptions were also noticed. Maibis acted as mediums, communicating with the dead. In cases of serious illness they called back the five souls and the shadow of the patient in order that he might recover. They performed various rites to appease evil spirits and acted as fortune tellers. Maibas and maibis were permitted to marry but they were subjected to ritual restrictions. The married life of a maibi was often complicated by her relationship with the lai who 'possessed' her.\(^2\)

The main task of maibas and maibis was to perform different ceremonial rites for individual people, the king and the state. They were considered to have divine dispositions and knowledge of the One ultimate Being.\(^3\) While the Brahmin priests of the Hindu religion have hereditary tradition, the

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1. See above p.
2. Parratt, S.N., op.cit., p. 96f
3. The word maiba or amaiba is derived from 'ama' which means 'One'.
Meetei priests were neither hereditary nor chosen by the king.
A Meetei interested in the secrets of creation received moral
and spiritual instructions from the Maichou (the great maiba)
for years together and on successful completion of the course
he was recognised as a maiba. Maibas became Maichous by virtue
of their service and knowledge. Some of the great Maichous of
the past were considered to belong to the order of the deities.
They assumed human forms to save people from calamities and
guide them at the critical hour of the national history. Even
the kings bowed their heads before them.

A woman became a maibi at any age, young or old. When
a woman suffered from abnormal disposition, she was sent to a
senior Maibi for determining whether she was under the
possession of a lai. If she was found to be possessed by a lai,
she became a maibi under the guidance of the senior. In cases
of refusal of the family to hand over the woman to the maibi,
prayers and offerings were made to the laic to set her free.
Even after conversion of the Meeteis to Hinduism, the traditional
religion is flourishing. Side by side with the Brahmins, there
exist the maibas and the maibis of the old faith.

The ideal of Meetei ethics is God-realisation. A
conduct is moral only as leading to this highest end. This
ideal can be attained only if a man transcends his narrow
individuality. All the Puyas emphatically assert that man is
dust as well as deity. Within his mortal frame there is the
presence of Lalningshing Heiyi, the Supreme Being. By His light man is conscious and has intelligence to realise the divine essence within him. But when he is dragged down by his bodily sensations and feelings to a life of temptations and desires, his life becomes one of moral evil, unworthy of man. Ideal life is a God-centred life, not a selfish adventure. In knowing his true nature man knows God. The Meeteis were convinced that death was not the end of all things. After night, the day; after death, life. No special doctrine about life after death is noted in the Puyas. They reveal human hope and faith rather than the deductions of logical thought. A belief in rebirth, however, prevailed among the Meeteis. The faith in the survival of the soul exercised tremendous influence on the ethical life of the people: in the world to come the soul was rewarded or punished for the deeds done in the body.

A socio-ethical code of conduct has been prepared by Y. Budhichandra from a study of the different traditional myths and legends of the land.

1. See above p.
2. See above p.
3. See Budhichandra, Y., Imoinu Ahongbigi Tungmefam
What a man should not do

(a) A man should not be sad, should not sit on broken stools, should not sleep immediately after sunset, should not have sexual relation with tender innocent girls by using his strength;

(b) he should not wear dirty cloths, should not do routine household duties at odd hours;

(c) he should not speak extravagant words, should not be tempted by passions like anger, pride, greed, envy etc., should not steal other's property, should not be unsatisfied with what he earns;

(d) he should not take impure and intoxicated food;

(e) he should not behave in a disorderly manner while dealing with others, should not be fickle in mind;

(f) he should not walk under creepers and behind the bars of cloth stand, should not slip away from home through unusual ways;

(g) he should not dishonour and abuse his wife without reasons, should not try to have illicit relation with other woman and act against the desire and wish of his honest and devoted wife.
What a woman should not do

(a) She should not speak sugar coated words concealing her own opinion, should not so exhibit her outward appearance as would tempt the passionate youths, should not be careless about making her inner mind pure;

(b) she should not use harsh words by showing red eyes, should not tell lies, should not deal with husband carelessly in high-handed manner;

(c) she should not be a victim of passion like anger, greed, envy, pride etc., should not pretend to be in agreement with her husband while concealing her own opinion;

(d) she should not roam about carelessly from house to house speaking ill of others;

(e) she should not try to develop illicit relation with other man;

(f) she should not do her household duties carelessly, e.g., brooming carelessly, taking meals without manners and scattering things over the premises without any proper care;

(g) she should not make her body unclean and should not use dirty cloths;

(h) she should not spend and eat up whatever she has without an eye to the future; she should not conceal eatable things for her alone;
(i) she should not forget that she is part and parcel of her husband, should not develop careless dealings with her in-laws, should not speak ill of her husband and the family to others in the neighbourhood, should not abuse her sons and daughters and kick them in anger;

(j) she should not produce unnatural sounds while taking grains from the barn and while husking;

(k) she should not do her daily works at home without cleaning her body in the morning, should not enter the house wearing wet cloths, and also should not leave her wet cloths at unusual places;

(l) she should not forget that the human body is a divine place, should not forget also the significance of the domestic deities and the daily prayers to be offered to the deities.

What a man should do

(a) A man should have a clean body, should take plain and simple food as would not intoxicate his life;

(b) he should have a tender heart for the poor and the weak, and a lion's heart against the cruel and the wicked;

(c) he should control his mind properly and subdue passions and desires;
(d) he should speak the truth, should have settled mind and determined habit;

(e) he should know his duty well and perform it without shirking his responsibility;

(f) he should respect the views of the elders and consider his parents to be deities incarnate;

(g) he should know his own place in the society and should endeavour to reach his destination of life through the light of right knowledge of things;

(h) he should aim at a peaceful domestic life with his wife, and plan the household affairs in consultation with his sincere and devoted wife;

(i) he should try to know the great order of Time - its divisions into year, month, week and the full course of a day with its divisions into three spans: Mangang, Luwang and Khuman. In all the three times of the day he should pray to the Supreme Ultimate God, Tengbanba Mapu;

(j) he should honour and respect people who are dedicated to the cause of mankind, and develop genuine love for his fellow beings;

(k) he should respect and honour authority - the king and the noblemen who are ruling over the people with abilities following the tradition of the ancient divine Pakhangba;
(1) he should make daily prayer to the deities in his residence with deep knowledge of their significance.

What a woman should do

An ideal woman thinks her husband to be the deity and serves him accordingly. She helps her husband in controlling his mind by sweet words and advice. She obeys her husband and gives up what he does not like. With her simple and pure mind she gives sound decision unalloyed by passions and temptations. She always thinks for the well being of her husband and her kids praying to God in all the three times of the day. She respects the elder and never crosses over the shadow of her husband and the respected elders. She has no ill will towards anybody, her relatives and friends in the neighbourhood. She never borrows fire from the neighbours at odd times. She is ready to face the hard situation of life with courage and determination enduring the abuses and orders of her husband. She has a clean mind and clean body with proper dresses. She never lends out household articles to other persons at odd times. She plans the domestic affairs economically with an eye to the future. She never allows anybody to take anything from the house by their own hands. Whatever thing she finds as the day's earning she places before Imoinu Ahong Achaobi, the 1. Corresponding to the goddess Lakshmi of the Hindus, this Meetei goddess dwells behind the domestic hearth in the centre of the house and offers life and prosperity to her devotees.
deity for good moral behaviour, wealth and prosperity. She goes out from home after due prayer and worship to the household deities. When she comes back, she prays to the deities. In the family she assumes the role of the supreme female deity Leimalel Sidabi. In the khunai of the Meiteis such women are regarded as ideal in character. Humbleness, modesty, nobility and amiableness are important qualities of a Meetei woman. The Meeteis believe that the deity Imoinu Ahong Achaobi rests in those homes of man and woman who strictly observe the above norms of social moral behaviour liked by her. She blessed them with Nungai Yaifaba (well-being and prosperity) Watta Padaba (having neither shortage nor excess), Tekta Kaidaba (unaffected by troubles of life) and Punshi Nungshangba (long life) which are the basic ends of life in the human world. The Meetei lives an ordinary simple life in the manner desired by Imoinu Ahongbi and prays to God daily and tries to realise the deep significance of life - its origin and destiny. He tries to realise his inner self - the indwelling spirit in him. In so trying to realise his own inner self he realises the Supreme Self - Yaibirel Sidaba. Thus the Highest Good or the Summum Bonum of life which is the realisation of the Supreme Self is achieved. This is the ideal life in the tradition of the Meeteis.

The Lai Haraoba festival is the mirror of the Meetei culture. Some of the lyrics sung traditionally in Hoi Laoba and Waken Laoba of the festival have deep moral significance.
Below we give some of the instances:

'Sapal Leiri Leikhongda
Leisu Ningthire, Kongyangsu Ningthire'.

(Sapal = Sa, the body and Pal, the wall - the fence; Leiri = the line of tongue - a limb of the body; Leikhongda = at the source of the tongue; Leisu = the tongue also; Ningthire = becomes beautiful; Konyangsu = the bamboo also, here bamboo means Wa which represents Wakhal, the thought; Ningthire = becomes beautiful).

The meaning of the lyric is that the immortal element, the Thawai, within its fence the human body, enjoys the utterance of divine names and glory by his tongue as prompted by thought. It is out of the unity of thought and language that one can realise the Supreme and appreciate His glory.

'Machin Ngeida Luthumba Lubal Segaire'.

(Machin Ngeida = at the earliest beginning; Luthumba = fixing of fishing traps made of bamboo; Lubal = the mouth of the fishing trap; Segaire = was torn).

The meaning of the lyric is that the human being is lured by passions, desires and temptations at the beginning, and is at the end spoiled by them.

'Wang Khudeng Maipakpi Laija Thanna Hapchille.
Chairei Pop Pop Sudeko'.

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The meaning of the lyric is that high thoughts should be preserved well in the head and they should wash away evil ones.

'Wakono-Wakono Chingdagi Wakonna Tamda Tage Mahaiba, Tamdagi Wakonn Chingda Tage Mahaiba, Wakon Fase Lifase Wakon Tanoi Noi'.

(Wakon = a meaningful imaginary bird. Here it represents the storehouse of thought; Chingdagi = from the hill; Tamda = in the plain; Tage Mahaiba = wish to go; Fase Lifase = let us catch hold of; Tanoi Noi = becomes well grown).

The lyric allegorically says that the human head is the storehouse of sublime thoughts and ideas whereas the human heart is the storehouse of passions and thoughts. The head is compared to the storehouse located in the hill while the heart is compared to the storehouse in the plain. Thought lies in the head, the hill, while the Pukning (mind) is in the heart. The thought that is in the high head is tempted by the lower ideas of love and passion. This is what has been compared to 'Chingdagi wakonna Tamda Tage Mahaiba'. But the higher thought that is in the head also makes the lower ideas purified. This has been referred to as 'Tamdagi Wakonna
Chingda Tage Mahaiba'. If the precious wealth, the high thought, dominates the lower ideas of the heart by eliminating the passions, desires and love, the higher thought becomes all the more brightened and greater. This has been referred to as 'Wakonna Fase Lifase, Wakon Tanoi Noi'.

'Ningthouyengbi Chaganu Numit Yunggani'

(Ningthouyengbi = normally a tasteful vegetable plant, but here it represents passions and desires; Chaganu = do not take; Numit = Sun; Yunggani = will not fall).

The meaning of this line is that the bright sun, i.e., the ideal man who does not become a victim of the evil temptations of passion and desire, never falls. As he has not been shrouded by evil clouds the bright light of his life will not lose its intensity.

'Sa Kompek Chagnu Namu Chomgani'

(Sa = the body; Kompek = normally a water plant, but here it represents the mind that is all the more tempted by evil designs of passions, desires and love etc.; Chaganu = do not take; Namu = the moral integrity of a man; Chomgani = will be high).

The lyric suggests that the moral integrity of an individual will remain high if he is not influenced by the bodily pleasures, passions and desires.

These are some of the instances of the high moral directives sung as lyrics ordinarily in Hoi Laoba at the
beginning and Wakon Laoba at the end of Laiharaoba festival of the day. These lines speak of high moral values. Lai Haraoba is thus an institution that imparts moral teachings to the people of the land.

It is evident from the above that every individual must control his senses. This will strengthen character, purify the mind and deepen insight. The divinity that is in man is in a potential or dormant state. We should not mistake the potential for the actual. What is potential must be developed; what is dormant must be awakened. And this needs man's endeavour to bring about an equanimity of thought (wakhal) and mind (pukning). The ideal of equanimity is the cornerstone on which the edifice of ethical life is built.

The songs sung in the Lai Haraoba festival advocate a harmonious relation between the lower sensuous feelings and the higher rational thought. This has to be attained not by surrendering reason to passion but by purification of passions. Desire enlightened by reflective thought culminates in right conduct.

The sensuous life is blind and unconscious of man's divine destiny. Our bodily existence is limited to the sense-bound universe. But according to the Meeteis, within the mortal frame of man there dwells the Supreme, Lainingshing Heiyi. By virtue of His presence man lives. By His light man is conscious. The microcosm and the macrocosm, the
individual and universal aspects of reality are built on the same basic pattern. Our knowledge of reality depends upon the extent of our knowledge of ourselves. Man has intelligence to realise God within him. But he goes astray when he is dragged down by the bodily sensations and desires. When he is led by noble thoughts, his passions are controlled and the presence of Lainingshing Heiyi is revealed to him.

There are three stages in the ethical development of man. First, there is the animal in man which prompts him to seek pleasure in the senses. Some men live in the senses only and are no better than animals. They are called by the names of Sarois. Then there is a higher class of men. They have the rational sense of discrimination between right and wrong and do not flow with current of desires. And then there are persons who have realised God in and through His manifestations. Their minds no longer go astray; they always follow the right path. These men have become divine, though they belong to the earth. They are revered as Pakhangba (the one who knows his father, i.e., the ultimate source). They are also called Ching-U which signifies the immediate feeling of consciousness - the intuitive knowledge of the Supreme Reality. In the Meetei society such lives are the ideals, the guiding lights of mankind.

The ethics of the Meeteis is not life-negating. It affirms the meaningfulness of human existence. Moral ideals
are not private dreams. They are rooted in the cosmic scheme determined by God. Man is both soul and body.¹ Morality consists in the continued attempt to resist the solicitations of our blind ephemeral impulses and shape our lives in accordance with the enduring ideals of the spirit. The law of morality is an invitation to become perfect, even as Pakhangba is perfect.

¹ Ningthourol Lambuba, p. 191