Religion is one of the deepest and most engrossing forms of human activity. It seeks to present a view of the world which satisfies the spiritual and emotional needs of man. Anthropologists are of opinion that religion, in the sense of a belief in spirits or higher powers of some kind, is a universal phenomenon. There is no race devoid of religion, but there are differences in the degree in which religious ideas are developed among diverse races. The Meetei puyas reveal to us a stage of polytheistic religion, but a native bent towards unification was steadily fostered by reflection. All gods gradually dissolved into various manifestations of the One Supreme God. A religious growth of many centuries cannot admit of easy classification. A great many gods were named and adored. But beneath the crowding of gods and goddesses there was a tendency at systematization, a craving for the One Ultimate Principle of Existence. What appears to be polytheistic anthropomorphism is found to be a step towards a spiritual monotheism. This ultimate principle was theistically conceived and was known by various names: Tengbamba Mapu (the Supreme Lord of the Universe), Yaibirel Sidaba (Immortal Self), Ipurei Sidaba (Immortal Ultimate

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Ancestor), so on. The One manifested into the many. The supreme unity is realised in the diversity.

In Leithak Leikhalen Puja it is emphatically asserted that Tengbanba Mapu is everywhere; he embraces all as a boundless envelop. He alone remains when all the created heavens and earths and all the deities disappear. While all things and beings are subject to decadence, death and disappearance, he is free from all these. He is transcendent of the world, but nevertheless he is immanent in all his manifestations. He is the principle of life and is seated within each being. He is represented by the supreme syllable 'Hum' or 'Hung'. The emanation of different deities from the Supreme Lord is the beginning of the creation.

Atingkok Maru Sidaba and Amamba are taken to be representing the One in the world of manifestations. The former is the infinite Expanse which embraces all within him. The latter is the supreme infinite darkness which pervades the former. Atingkok and Amamba are taken always together being the starting point for all manifestations. The honour and glory given to the One, the Supreme Lord of the Universe, are given to Atingkok and Amamba. In Leithak Leikhalen, Atingkok and Amamba are addressed as primal and eternal that could not be consumed by the devastating Fire of the chak-end (chak represents Time). Time appears to be real in the world of manifestations. When all disappeared into the supreme One,
there is no manifestation, no time, no space as all are within
him. The puyas place Atingkok Maru Sidaba at the top of all
ancestral genealogy, divine and human, of each yek of the
Meeteis.

Amamba is addressed as Nong, the Laimingshing Heiyi,
the Supreme Lord of the Universe. It is from this Amamba that
everything comes out and it is to this Amamba that everything
returns. The process of coming out and then returning to this
Amamba is the universal process of life and death and rebirth
of all things and beings, divine and human which the Meitei
Puyas call Tanna-Yai. Amamba is described as the very ground
of all things and beings, divine and human. He is the most
ancient and the different deities are his emanations. He is
seated within each being, controlling and regulating its life.
The moment he leaves the body of a being, the latter ceases to
live.

Viewed from the point of view of the world of
manifestations, Atingkok Maru Sidaba and Amamba are eternal and
supreme. But from the standpoint of the Tengbanba Mapu, they
are the most ancient manifestations of his infinite essence.
Atingkok and Amamba cannot be taken apart from each other. The

1. Leithak Leikhalen, p. 4
2. Piba, A., Eeyek/Salai, pp. 150-55
3. Ibid., pp. 174-75
vast expanse, formless and boundless, is the inexhaustible source of all things and beings, and this has been pervaded by the supreme infinite Darkness called Amamba. The saying of the Leithak Leikhalen Puya that when all have disappeared including the gods there remained two primal deities,¹ means that Atingkok and Amamba remained as the two expressions of the ultimate reality. There is the further saying of Leithak Leikhalen that 'Atingkok and Amamba are the primal and eternal deities with whom Tengbanba Mapu devised the creation anew'.²

According to the Meetei puyas, the primal beings emanated out of the Supreme following the primal sound Hun⁴ issued forth from Him. These are also revered as deities of importance. They are, Leipak (the earth), Nongthou (the heaven), Fire, Water, Air, Sachik (morning star), Thaba (evening star), Thawanmichak Nongthou Sidaba (pole star), the sun, the moon, Khengchemnupi (great bear), Apakma (the stars and planets). Though they are addressed as gods the puyas show them to be not of eternal order as they are subject to decadence and disappearance.³ They are however described as superior to those in the mortal scheme. The Leithak Leikhalon Puya further says that these primal manifestations were originally within the

¹. Leithak Leikhalon, p. 4
². Ibid.
³. Ibid.
⁴. Hun is a Meetei word meaning 'sound'.
Besides these primal manifestations, there are other deities of importance, like Atiya Sidaba (Immortal Infinite Sky), Ashiba (the deity to whom was entrusted the task of creating the Universe), Konchin Tingthokpa (the deity who would ultimately descend into the human world to guide and lead mankind), Nongthang Leima (the deity of lighting and enchantment) etc. People ordinarily leave them aside as these deities are not so directly connected with their immediate problems. Only on some occasions they remember and worship them.

In order to create the world of living beings, according to Wakoklon Hilel Thilel Salai Amailon Puya and Sakok Puya, Tengbanba Mapu manifested Himself as two deities: His right became Lainingthou, and his left became Lairamoi. Lainingthou is addressed as Salailel Sidaba, and Lairamoi as Leimalel Leishi Leipunbi. They are the supreme Pa and Pi (parents) for the whole world. Salailen and Leimalel had their male and female divine associates manifested from the Supreme. They lived on the peak of Koubru. Koubru is thus revered as the sacred place in a traditional song:

Awang koubru Ashuppa
Laiyam Khunda Ahanba
Sanalik Mapal Thadringei
Sanalik Mapal Thariba
Nongthrei Mawoo Lingdringei
Nongthrei Mawoo Lingliba.

Koubru peak to the north is the highest place where gods made their foremost habitation, and created different orders of living beings. Gods are the roots from which living beings bloom like flowers.

Salailei is referred to as the High God for the world of living beings. He is addressed as the Taipangpanba Mapu (Lord of the world of living beings). He is the Deity ruling over the world of his associate deities with his consort Leimalel Sidabi. When Salailei was musing over the means as to how the world of living beings would be made, Tengpanba Mapu sent a divine message that he would be descending himself into Salailei’s place as a three day old child in an earthen pot, filled with water and preserved at a sacred place by Salailei and Leimalel, to help create the different living species of the world. Salailei did as asked by the Lord and found the three day old child. Salailei adopted the divine child as his own. The child was named Konsen Tulei Henba, Phuhingsana Pibarel. When grown up Phuhingsana Pibarel made the different orders of living species. Of all the created beings man was the last to come.¹ There is the legend of Konsen TuleiHenba becoming Lainingthou Sanamahi, and Konchhib Tukthabha, son of Salailel by Leimalel, winning the title Pakhangba. Sanamahi and Pakhangba contested to win the throne.

¹ This Konsen Tulei Henba of Wakoklon is Mboyum Ashiba or Leithak Leikhalon Puya. He is later known as Sanamahi Lainingthou.
of Salailel by going round the universe seven times. While Sanamahi went round the world physically, Pakhangba went round the throne seven times according to the secret about his father's throne divulged by his mother, Leimalel Sidabi. Konchin Tukthaba was given the title Pakhangba as he knew the secret of his father (Pakhangba - he who knows his father - meaning the ultimate source of his being). Tuleihenba came late after going round the world and found himself deprived of the throne. His devastating resentment was appeased by Salailel and Leimalel ultimately making him realise that he himself is the author of the Universe. He was given the title of Sanamahi (the main essence of all living beings). He is the indwelling spirit of all living beings. Still today Sanamahi is the presiding deity in the Khunai of the Meeteis.

Regarding Salailel and Leimalel there is the traditional belief in their identification with Atiya Sidaba (the sky above) and Malem Leima (Mother earth). Atiya is Nongthou - the heaven taken to be the supreme father, and Leimalel is the earth below - the Malem, the supreme Mother. In between Nongthou - the sky up, the heaven, and Malem - the earth below, there are the three mighty forces (tarrungs) of Fire, Air and Water. The whole universe is but a product of the interplay of those primal elements according to a cosmic principle. Lainingthou Sanamahi (Khoyum Ashiba) who is the main agent for the divine creation is the cosmic energising principle that controls the three Tarrungs of Fire, Air and Water. Sanamahi is represented
as bestowing energy and life on the world of living beings. It is mainly for this reason that he is regarded as the supreme presiding deity in the later phase of Meetei Religion.

In Leithak Leikhalon Puya many deities are shown to have been manifested from the Supreme God for the purpose of creation of the universe. The Meetei tradition refers to the dynamic role of seven divine girls called Lai Nurah Taret and the nine divine youths called Laipungthou Mapal. They are revered in the traditional Maibi Dance depicting the ancient creation at the beginning of the day's play in the Lai haraoba festival. This is still a living custom. Not only these, there are many other ancient deities who are mentioned in the puyas, but who are almost in oblivion as they are not directly associated with the activities of the human beings in their everyday life. In their place there are other deities, tutelar, domestic, ancestral and also public. Whatever may be the situation, the religion of the Meeteis, carries with it a number of deities, high and low. These even include human beings who attained the order of the deities by virtue of their superior disposition, efficiency and antiquity. But all these deities are taken to be manifestations of the Supreme God to serve His own purpose. God realises Himself in and through His own manifestations.

The Meeteis use the term 'umanglai' to denote deities of different categories. However there are various interpretations of the term 'umanglai' as expressed by different
scholars. Hodson gives the meaning of the term Umanglai as deities of the Forest,¹ K.B. Singh regards the term as indicating tree deities.² Shakespear also subscribed to the view of Hodson.³ Dr. Saroj Nalini Parratt says that Umanglai were never regarded as limited to particular forest areas. While disagreeing with the interpretation of Umanglai as forest deities or tree deities, she thinks that the term "umanglai" is used generally to cover all categories of gods, although it has a narrower meaning when applied specifically to the first of these groups. As she observes,

"The umang lai may be classified broadly into four groups -

(a) Ancestors or deities which were believed to have had a human existence at some point in the past. Examples of these are Pakhangba, Nongpek - Ningthou, Poireiton.

(b) Important lai associated with one particular yek.

(c) The domestic deities which are the possession of particular clan or family groups. These are properly called yumjao lai.

(d) Tutelary deities, i.e., guardian spirits connected with particular places or areas. There are various places in

1. Hodson, The Meitheis, p. 96
2. Singh, K.B., Traces of Pre-Hinduism in Meitei Society, p. 201
Manipur which are regarded as sacred. These are often hills, which are associated with a particular deity. Examples of this are Thangjing hill in Moirang, and Nongmaiching, which was formerly associated with Nongpok Ningtheu and subsequently with Siva.  

Compared to others Parratt’s view is more in consonance with the traditional approach. Her only difficulty in the discussion of lais (deities) is her complete silence over the issue as to what significance the Umanglais have in the religious and philosophical life of the Meeteis. It seems that she has scattered the umanglais without any reference to a systematic unity.

The literal meaning of 'umanglai' is forest deities. But as the tradition of the Meeteis reveals, it has a different significance. Yumnaba Tamphajao, a researcher in this field writes thus, "The One, the Supreme Lord of the Universe, reveals Himself as Umanglais to shew mankind His different traces in the deep dark wood of worldly manifestations. The traces of the Lord of the Universe who is within each being, when set outside in the world of manifestations, are called Umanglais."  

There are two kinds of Umanglais being worshipped by the people. Some worship umanglai as Lainingthou (the Supreme male deity),

1. Parratt, S.N., The Religion of Manipur, p. 9  
2. Tamphajao Y. Meetei Lai Haraobagi Wangulel, p. 1
while some others worship Umanglai as Lairembi (the Supreme female deity). This only shows that the world of living beings is the world of two, the Pa and Pi. The Supreme Lord of the universe with his hairlock on the front is the Supreme Pa, Lainingthou, and with its hairlock at the back is the Supreme Pi, Lairembi. The One can be worshipped either as Lainingthou or as Lairembi according to the likes of the people. But that makes no difference as the worship refers to the Lord. The different places of the umanglais do not make any difference in offering prayer and worship to the Supreme Lord. The different Umanglais are the different traces of the same Lord.

Another writer, Shri H. Kullabidhu in his article 'Mera Mô-Tongba' brings out the implication of Umanglai thus:

"In course of the attempt to realise the true Self (the soul - the Thawai in Meitei language), it is found that it has 361/364 traces. These traces are worshipped as umanglais. The Umanglais are the main centres for tracing the Supreme. They are the different aspects of the Lord."¹ He further says that the religion and philosophy of the Meiteis have Self-realisation as the end of life.

The Umanglais are thus deities which are but traces and manifestations of the Tengbanba Mapu. Writers who take Umanglais as Forest deities following its literary meaning

¹. Meiteigi Harao Kummeigi Seminar, p. 33
cannot satisfactorily explain the religious and philosophical significance of the Umanglais as impressed upon the Meiteis who are worshipping them since times immemorial. In fact because of the traditional preservation of a grove or forest area, or a place decorated with trees and plants as the abode of a particular deity outside the residential campus of the people, these Meitei deities have been termed as Umanglais. But from this it would not be proper to reduce the Lord of the Universe (the Tengbanba Mapu) to the level of a forest spirit.

The number of Umanglais is said to be either 361 or 365. They include tutelary ancestral, domestic and yek deities. To the original umanglais have been added human personalities of the later age who attained the order of the divine by virtue of their superior disposition, nature and efficiency that placed them above the normal human beings. Khagewba, Khunjaoba, Khongnangthaba etc. are human personalities. But they are now worshipped as umanglais.

Following the puyas and the traditions of the Meiteis, it is evident that certain gods have been associated with particular places. They are treated as guardians of particular directions and areas (Maikei Ngakpa Lais). Leithak Leikhaloh speaks about the deities who took care of the places above the earth and below the heaven. The deities were Manchipa, Laisei, and Senkheiren. The book made reference to Leisatao for the west, Nongsatao for the south, Leikhomtao for the east and Nongkhomtao for the north.¹ Shri Khulem Chandrasekhore Singh

¹. Singh, Y.B., Leithak Leikhalol, pp. 23, 36
gives the name of eight tutelar deities for the eight directions as below: ¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the deities</th>
<th>Directions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nongpok Ningthou</td>
<td>Nongpok (East)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Nongchup Ariba</td>
<td>Nongchup (West)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Khana Chaoba</td>
<td>Makha (South)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Soraren</td>
<td>Awang (North)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Koubru</td>
<td>Liklam/Laiji (North-East)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Wangbren</td>
<td>Meiram (South-East)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Thangching</td>
<td>Santhong (South-West)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Chingkhei Ningthou</td>
<td>Nongpok/Laiji (North-East)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another writer, R.K. Sanahal Singh, again gives the view that there were eight deities assigned for tutelar duties. Their names and directions are given below: ²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nongpok Ningthou</td>
<td>Nongpok (East)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Irum Ningthou</td>
<td>Meiram (South-East)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Wangbren</td>
<td>Makha (South)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Thangjing</td>
<td>Moirang Santhong (South-West)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Khorifaba</td>
<td>Nongchup (West)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Leiyarakpa</td>
<td>Koubru Laiji (North-West)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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¹ Singh, K.C., Lai Haraoba Laison, p. 73
² Singh, R.K., Satjal, p. 31
With little variance from the above views, Dr. Parratt writes, "There are four of these lai each associated with a particular geographical direction. Thanjing, whom we have seen to be specially associated with the Moirangs, was the guardian of the south west, Marjing of the North-east, Wangbren (Wangpurel) of the south-east and Koubru of the North-west. The authors of the Census Report of 1961(4) regard the function of the tutelary deities as to protect the land against sickness and death entering the state from without."¹ She also refers to the view of K.B. Singh that there are three deities more. They are Nongpok Ningthou of the East, Yangoi Ningthou of the West, and Chingkhei, or Yaitu Ningthou of the North-east. K.B. Singh gives only seven tutelar deities making no mention of the South. The views of the above writers seem to be based on their different informations. But whatever their views are, the living tradition of the Meiteis still makes it clear that they worship Marjing of the north, Chingkhei Ningthou of the north-east, Nongpok Ningthou of the east, Irum Ningthou of the south-east, Wangbren (Wangpurel) of the south, Thanjing of the south-west, Leiyarakpa of the west, and Koubru of the north-west. In a particular area of his control and jurisdiction, the particular tutelary deity is worshipped with attention, care and reverence.

¹ Parratt, S.N., The Religion of Manipur, p. 27
Below we give a description of these deities.

According to Leithak leikhalol Puya, Marjing (originally Maraching) came out from the intestines of Atiya Sidaba drawn out to catch hold of the divine horse (Sakon) emanating from the foot of Ashiba.1 Marjing is regarded as one of the five deities that enter into the human body and is seated there as one of the souls.2 Later this deity was found associated with the main sport of the Meiteis called Sagol Kangjei. As Parratt says, "his main importance in Meitei mythology is that he is credited with the invention of pole, the national game."3 According to the traditional belief of the Meiteis, Sagol Kangjei (Pole) was played originally by gods, seven on each side. Still today the Meiteis play this game on horse back with a stick called Kangchei (Kangjei), having seven players on each side. They use a ball called Kangdrum made of bamboo root. It is believed traditionally that the first Sakol Kangjei was played by gods during Lai haroba festival expressing rejoicings at the rehabilitation of the people in the valley by the divine service of Nongpok Ningthou.

As a tutelary deity Marjing is associated with the North. There is the abode of this deity at a village named Heingang to the north of Imphal. Annually offerings are made

1. Singh, T.B., Leithak Leikhalol, p. 38f
2. Ibid., p. 55
to this deity, in which the main item is a Kangchei (Pole stick) and a ball (Kangdrum) made of bamboo root. As recorded in Cheitharol Kumbaba, during the reign of king Khagemba there was a public worship of the deity at his abode and also at every watery place on the river side. The offerings made included wild bear, dog, duck, cocks and hens, pigeons and other living things. This was in the year 1618 A.D.1

Chingkhei Ningthou is the tutelary deity of the north-east. Nothing is said about this deity in the Royal Chronicle. Chingkhei, however, has got specific religious and philosophical significance in the life of Meetei Khunai (society). To get good health and long life the Meeteis in the early dawn of the day worship the deity facing the North-east (Chingkhei). The deity Chingkhei represents the Supreme God to whom all prayer is offered. The man who knows the secrets of this Chingkhei Phithup Ahum (the three-fold secrets of Chingkhei) is considered to be knowing the three-fold secret of the Supreme Lord represented by the complete course of a day (from one sun rise to the next sun rise).

Though Nongpok Ningthou has a significant place for the whole of the Meetei community, he is regarded as a tutelary deity for the east. The Nongmaiching hill situated to the east of the Imphal valley is taken to be his abode. The water flowing down from this hill into a rivulet called Chingkoi is

1. Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 25
taken to be pure and sacred just like the water of the Ganges for the Hindus. After the conversion of the Meiteis into Hinduism, they identified the Meitei deity Nongpok Ningthou with Siva. Every year on the 28th day of the month of Lamta the deity is worshipped.

Nongpok Ningthou and his divine consort Panthoibi dominated the whole social, cultural and religious life of the Meiteis. It is believed traditionally that Nongpok made the valley fit for human habitation after the great flood. Still today the divine romantic legends of Nongpok and Panthoibi in their seven incarnated generations satisfy the romantic emotions of the people. It is believed that Nongpok is the Lord Sanamahi, the Supreme God of the Meiteis. The great socio-religious and cultural institution Laiharaoba makes the representation of Nongpok and Panthoibi an essential part of the festival. In a way Nongpok represents the Supreme Being in his male form as Lainingthou, while Panthoibi represents the Supreme female deity Lairembi (Leimarei). As his abode is at Nongmaiching hill (Nongmai Leihou Ching) which is to the east of the valley, he is made the tutelary deity of the east. However to worship Nongpok and Panthoibi is to worship Lainingthou and Lairembi which are the two aspects of the One.¹

Though there are many umanglais in the south-eastern direction of the valley, Irum Ningthou whose divine abode is

¹Luwng, K.A., Ningthou Kangbarol, pp. 8-9
at Kakching a village near the foot of the south-eastern hills
is the tutelary deity of the south-eastern direction (Meiram). This deity is worshipped with great reverence by the people of
that area. In times of sickness and disaster the deity is
considered to be the sole guardian who would protect the people
from these calamities. There is, however, no specific record of
this deity in the Cheitharol Kumbaba.

The southern part of the valley was called Tharei
Lemlei. This place is taken by the people to be the land of
death, illness and disease. Wangbren (Wangpurel) is believed
to be the dreadful deity of the south. While entering
Wangbren's abode for prayer and worship, people should not
speak unclean words, should not spoil the trees and plants
growing there. The women while entering the place should not
use luxurious ornaments. Members of the royal clan are not
allowed to go to him, for it is considered to be an attempt to
the throne. In the inner abode except the maibas and maibis
and the Hanjaba, the leader of the devotees, nobody is allowed
to enter. Even if they enter, they are not allowed to speak.
In the abode of this deity, there are trees for each king. This
is called Meetam U (the tree for that king). The growth, decay
and falling of the tree indicated the well-being and ill fate
of that king. There is the row of trees for the queens also.
The traditional belief is that all the dead would go to the
place of this deity and the virtues and vices in their past
lives would be assessed by him. In the past people used to
lay a long iron beam in the water of the river flowing at
Sugnu which used to take all the waters of the valley. This was considered to be the main gate on the border line between the dead and the living. There were many precious articles including gold and silver that lay scattered and uncared for as they were all things offered to the deity by people. Nobody could take them through fear of death. Those who were sentenced to death or who were excommunicated from the society were sent to this place. These people, if they could manage to survive, lived in this place under the shelter of this dreadful deity. Wangbren is taken to be a deity of water, who can cause instantaneous death and who assesses the virtues and vices of one who is dead, a powerful tutelar deity reigning over the dreadful Tharei Lamlei (the low land of the south). There are many legends about this deity. A traditional legend says that in the assembly of gods at Koubru peak where Lainingthou, the Supreme Lord was reigning, Wangbren was assigned for tutelar duties in the south, the Tharei Lemlei, a critical dangerous place. Wangbren came to the south. When he arrived at Tharei Lemlei another god who had not been in the assembly at Koubru challenged Wangbren. They fought for several days, but none could defeat the other. They disclosed their identities and became friends. They arrived at a decision that they together should perform the tutelar duty of the south. This deity is the Lokningthou of the south.

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1. Sharma, A., Manipur Itihas, pp. 221-223
Still today these two gods are in the same shrine. In addition to these two, there is the Lord Sanamahi also. There are other romantic legends of Wangbren. He used to have romantic relation with an Anal lady named Sangkuleima. He took her for his wife and entered in his abode in the water hurting the relatives of the lady including her father and the brothers as they resisted. On the request of the lady Wangbren gave them life back with the word that they should not further claim Sangkuleima. With the Mahous also, he has many legends. The Mahous, a hill tribe in the adjoining areas of Sugnu, did not recognise Wangbren who was then in human form. Wangbren had a series of sportive competitions with the Mahou youths thereby showing his divine superiority over men. Still now there are stone boulders believed to have been thrown by the Mahou youths and Wangbren in the Mahou village. There are only two references to the worship of this deity in the Cheitharol Kumbaba. One was in the reign of Nara Singh in 1848 A.D. in which the king offered a female servant to the deity, and the other in the reign of Churachand Singh in 1903 A.D. in which the king offered 1 bull and 1 servant.  

Shri Atombapu Sharma attempts to interpret Wangbren as an Aryan God 'Varun' who has his abode in the water, and who stands for strict rule and justice. He holds that the Aryan immigrants who came through the east had taken the

1. Cheitharol Kumbaba, pp. 275, 533
prefix 'wang', a Burmese word which means the Supreme Lord of the Universe. According to him Wangbren is a combination of wang and varun.¹ But as has been explained above Wangbren (Wangpurel) is believed to be the native tutelar deity traditionally by the people of this land. This deity is more associated with the king of Moirang than with the Kanglei king. For the Meiteis Wangbren is the tutelar deity of the south who is but a manifestation of the Supreme God. In Wakoklong Hilel Thilel Salai Amailom Pukok puya Wangbren known as Khana Chaopa Wangpulen is one of the seven Laipungthous manifested from the Supreme, Ipung Leinapa Apakpa.²

As one of the main constituent units of the Meetei community the Moirangs live in the area where Lord Thangjing reigns supreme as a tutelary deity. He is taken by some writers to be the tribal deity of the Moirangs. Moirang is to the south-west of the valley of Manipur. The original abode of this deity is in the hills bearing the name of the deity. It is situated to the west of Moirang. The Moirang Ningthourol Lambuba Puya edited in modern script by O. Bhogeshwar Singh describes in details the people of Moirang and their main God Thangjing Koiljal Lai. Here Thangjing is addressed as the God king from whom have descended the people of Moirang. He is addressed as the creator and preserver of the lives in Moirang

1. Sharma, A., Manipur Itihas, p. 220
2. Wakoklon, p. 4
Kanglei. In Leithak Leikhalol Puya in meesemlon (the creation of mankind) Thangching (Thangjing) is referred to as one of the great deities who entered into the body of mankind as the souls of the human being.¹ In Wakoklon Hilel Thilel Salai Amaillol Pukok Puya he is addressed as Thangching Koilel Lai Sitapa, one of the Laipungthous who are different aspects of the Supreme Lord, Ipung Loinapa Apakpa.² In the famous Khamba Thoibi legend of Moirang Kangleilol, Thangjing is believed to be the supreme deity. In the said legend the uncontrollable bull caught by Khamba was offered to the deity. This shows that the animal sacrifice to the deity was performed in the early days. About 45 kilometres from Imphal, at a place called Moirang there is the temple of this Lord Thangjing. From very early time the Laiharaoba festival is held at the premises of this deity annually.

The name of the western hill bordering the broad valley of Manipur is Leiching (the hill of the Lois). Sekmai, Khurkhol, Koutruk, Phayeng, Leimram, Thongjao are all chakpa Lois. They had their earliest settlements near the foot-hills of the western ranges which were called Loiching chingsang. On the north there is the Koubru and on the south there is the Thangjing. The place between is the area believed traditionally to be governed by Loiya Lakpa. Though in this area there are many

¹ Leithak Leikhalol, p. 55
² Wakoklon, p. 4
shrines of this deity, the main shrines are at Leimram and other Chakpa villages of the west. This deity is known more popularly as Leiya Lakpa Pangganba (Loiya Lakpa, the powerful). There is a legend behind this. In the battle between the gods and the evil sarois (spirits) Leiyrakpa showed great courage and destroyed the evil spirits. Tradition has it that the rain of the year is believed to be sponsored by a deity. It may be by Koubru or by Wangbren or by Thangjing, or by Kounu, or by Leiya Lakpa. Thus this deity, like other deities of importance, is also one which determines the fortune of the people in a particular year. The Lai Haraoba festival is held annually in the Laipung (courtyard) of this deity.

Koubru peak is the abode of Lainingthou Koubru. The abode of the deity bears the name of the deity. Similar is the case for Thangjing also. Thangjing has his original abode on the Thangjing hill. There is a confusion as to whether the deity Koubru at the Koubru peak is the Supreme Divine Pa, Salailel Sidaba who lived on the Koubru peak with his other divine associates. According to the tradition of the Meeteis Koubru is considered to be the place of supreme eminence which is very much connected with the life and growth of the Meeteis. This Koubru is so much connected with the Meitei life that it has been taken as the very Linfu (the uppermost soft portion of the brain) of the Meiteis wherefrom all went down towards the peripheral parts. In the villages lying at the outskirt of the Koubru peak there are shrines or Khubhams (places
preserved for the deity) for the deity Koubru with his consort.

The Leithak Leikhalol Puya says that Koubru (called in the book Pengthanglen Kouparen) is one of the main deities who entered into the body as one of the five souls of the human being. In Wakoklon Hilel Thilel Salai Amailon Pukok Puya also there is the reference to this deity as one of the Laipungthous manifested from the Supreme Ipung Loinapa Apakpa. All these things clearly show that Koubru is one of the most important deities of the Mefteis. It is the traditional belief of the Mefteis that on the Koubru peak there are many places believed to be the abodes of different deities. Still today there is the tradition of pilgrimage on the mountain peak of Koubru during the five days after the celebration of Cheiraoba festival.

As to the worship of this deity Koubru there are many references in Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Royal Chronicle. In one place it is written, "All the deities including Koubru are worshipped at Kuchu beneath a sacred canopy by offering 100 each of buffaloes, goats, sheep, cattle, geese, pigs, fowls, pigeons, dogs, fruits and ginger. The worship was for long life." This took place in the reign of king Khagemba on the occasion of the inauguration of Kangla' in the month of Lamta.

1. Leithak Leikhalol, p. 55
2. Wakoklol, p. 4
3. Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 27
in 1553 Saka era. Seeing the items of the offerings in which animals formed the major bulk of the sacrifices one can easily judge how little hold Hindu ideas had on the king at this time. The long life begged by the king in his prayer might be for the king himself and also for the whole people.

In another place the chronicle mentions, "On Sunday the first day of the month of Sajibu, 1740 Saka era the deity Koubru fired a gun. The deity Koubru rejoiced in Lai-haraoba festival. All the courtiers and noblemen of the king witnessed the festival."¹ This firing of gun by Koubru is a very usual reference. Perhaps this meant thunderbolt. Another obscure reference is found. "On Tuesday the tenth day of the month of Vakching 1765 Saka era there was the spreading of white cloth at Koubru peak." This white cloth is taken to be the seat of the deity. It may be just an incident of snow fall at the Koubru peak in the winter or it may mean a canopy beneath which offerings were made.

Thus the tutelary deities are worshipped by the people with great reverence. It is believed that they would save them from diseases, death and disasters. They are considered to be the controlling gods of particular geographical directions.

¹. Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 209
If the tradition of the Meiteis is strictly followed, there are no deities which cannot be brought under the term Ancestral Deities. The Meiteis used to believe the deities, high and low, including the Supreme Atingkok, to be their ancestors. This is clearly evidenced by the writings in the Yek ancestral genealogy as shown in puyas like Leithak Leikhalon.¹ Umanglais are also treated as ancestors. Thangjing is considered to be the Ancestor of the Moirang yek. This is evidenced from the address given to Thangjing as Ibudhou Thangjing Koilel Lai (which means the deity Thangjing, the Great Grandpa). In the festivals, Lai chaklon katpa and Lai haraoba, the Maiba and Maibi attending the Lai (deity) address the related worshippers as the grandsons and granddaughters of the deity. It is particularly for this reason that the outstanding feature of the Meitei Religion is taken to be ancestral worship. Right from the direct parents the tracing starts till it reaches the only One Supreme Being, the One Supreme Ancestor from Whom all have come out, the ancestor of ancestors.

But Dr. S.N. Parratt holds that the ancestral deities are believed to have had a human existence at some point of time in the past, e.g., Pakhangba, Nongpok-Ningthou, Poireiton.² She thus limits ancestral deities to human personalities alone.

¹ Leithak Leikhalon, pp. 77-79
² Parratt, S.N., Religion of Manipur, p. 9
This is however against the general spirit of the tradition of the Meiteis. The attribution of the term deities to Pakhangba, Nongpok Ningthou and Poireiton is justified if we look into the tradition of the Meiteis as it is a normal feature among the Meiteis to regard even one's own parents as Lais. Here we can make a reference to Dr. Radhakrishman who writes that father and mother and spiritual guides are also devas. As Parratt says, the above mentioned personalities had their human existence at some point of time. But because of their divine dispositions and qualities they were regarded as gods by people. Historically they were the founding fathers of some of the important yek of the Meiteis: Pakhangba of the Ningthouja or Mangang, Nongpok Ningthou of the earlier Angoms, and Poireiton of the Luwangs. Pakhangba as referred to here is Nongtalai Pakhangba, the historic figure, the unifier of the Meiteis, the first ruling king in the historic age. Cheitharol Kumbaba writes, Nongtalai reigned 45 years before the Saka era. Nongpok Ningthou, according to the traditional legend, is the divine personality who drained away the flood water in an age much earlier than the era of Nongtalai Pakhangba.

1. Radhakrishnan, S., Indian Philosophy, vol. i, p. 72
2. Singh, R.K.S., Satjal, p. 35. Pakhangba as referred to in this page is not Konjil Tuthokpa Pakhangba, son of Salailel or Guru Sidaba who is traditionally taken to be the original Pakhangba — a title meaning the one who knows his father, i.e., the one who has the knowledge of the beginning and end of all the Universe.
3. Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 1
He is addressed as belonging to the Angom yek (Old). In Kangbalon there is reference to Nongpok Ningthou as a divine being who is but the Supreme God, Saree, Lainingthou Sanamahi, in a different time order. Poireiton also is the founding ancestor of the Luwang and a contemporary of Nongtalai. Legends say that Nongtalai and Poireiton fought for the throne of Kanglei. In the free open combat Nongtalai defeated Poireiton and got the throne. Nongtalai subsequently married a woman of Poireiton's group, according to some accounts Poireiton's sister, Laisma (=lai sama : golden precious goddess), thus cementing the relationship between himself and his rival. This Poireiton is known as Poireiton of the foot hill (Chingkhong Poireiton). In many puyas he is described as an immigrant. Poireiton who thus became the brother-in-law of Nongtalai, the ruling king of Kangleipung (the present Imphal valley) became the ancestor of the Luwang yek. Apart from this the contribution of Poireiton to the growth and development of the Meitei nation is very great. He has been revered as Ibudhou Poireiton (grandpa Poireiton). It is said that he came to this land in search of a place free from diseases and death. He came with fire of his own and it is preserved still at Andro. This fire of Poireiton is still reckoned by the Meiteis as the

1. Kangbalon, pp. 8-9
3. Leithak Leikhalon, p. 79
Migration Fire of Poireiton (Poireitongi Khunthok Mei). In the later days many legends have grown up about the sacred fire and Poireiton. But besides these old personalities who had attained the order of the divine and were revered as important deities, there are other younger human personalities in the later age who also have been deified. Instances of these are Mungyamba, Khagemba, Khunjaoba, Apoinana Macha Maichou, Yiu Khongnangthaba, Khaidem Temba etc. Mungyamba is the father of king Khagemba. He reigned in the land in the year 1562-1597 A.D. In the year 1576 A.D. Piyangu, the king of China sent a giant man named Maydana to king Mungyamba. This Maydana was killed by Mungyamba with the help of the divine weapon Thang Khabomba (big sword with broad edge) and Ta Kangsunaha (the divine spear).\footnote{Singh, R.K.S., op.cit., p. 64} Wakoklon Hilel Thilel Salai Amailon Pukok Puya again says that Mungyamba got the weapons after deep meditation at Paotak Hithen (the place where one can get divine message) on the advice of the celestial forefathers.\footnote{Wakoklon, pp. i, 58} The book, it appears, emphasises the moral significance of the divine weapons in the sense that Mungyamba a normal human being who ordinarily would not be able to defeat a giant had been strengthened morally and spiritually to defeat an evil initiated from the lower portion of the body (which is represented here by Maydana, the giant man from China which the Manipuris call...}
Khagl). Now this Mungyamba who was king of this land had been deified. Not only Mungyamba, his son Khagemaba (1597-1652) and also his grand son Whunjaoba (1652-1666) have been deified. Yiu Khongnangthaba, Apoinana Macha, Khaidem Temba etc. are all great Maichous who are considered by the Meiteis to be divine in character. They are also revered as deities. Thus according to the tradition of the Meiteis human personalities having divine dispositions are revered as Umanglais. Among the females also Konthoujam Lairedbi, Langjing Lairedbi, Pitanga and Phou-Oibi were all human beings, but had been deified and revered as important deities of the Meiteis. As stated earlier the Meitei Umang Lais are not necessarily forest deities. Most of them are ancestors of the people in this land having human existence at some point of time.

In a way the Meitei house is a temple of so many important deities. Of them the important ones include Lainingthou Sanamahi, Leimakel Sidabi, Phunga (the Fire place), Imoinu Ahong Achaobi, Salailel, Thongalel etc. Of them the most revered are Sanamahi and Leimakel. They have been regarded as household deities in view of their having a definite place in a Meitei house which has either seven or nine chambers. (The chamber plan of a Meitei house is shown in the Appendix).

Lainingthou Sanamahi is the most revered deity. Each dwelling house of the Meiteis has a place for this deity in the south-western corner. While worship of this deity daily by the housewives at the sun-set is a normal routine affair, this
Lainingthou Sanamahi is worshipped by the Mefteis at critical hours of their life, and also on the commencement of the new year, i.e., on the day of Cheiraoba.

'Sanamahi' literally means 'liquid gold'. This has led some writers to identify Sanamahi with the Sun god. He symbolises the essence of life. Though he is regarded as a household deity now, he was in earlier times worshipped in public. There are references to ritual drinking and feasting before Sanamahi in the royal chronicles. When Salailel declared that he would appoint as King the brother who returned first after circuiting the world, Sanamahi started off from the royal compound but his brother Pakhangba, on the advice of his mother Leimalel, circumambulated his father's throne seven times and bowed to him. When Sanamahi returned he found Pakhangba on the throne and decided to fight his brother. But Pakhangba was frightened and took refuge among seven goddesses (Lai nurah) who surrounded him and protected him from the wrath of Sanamahi. The frustrated Sanamahi then began to destroy the world. At this Salailel appeared and revealed to Sanamahi that he was not his son but the Supreme God. With this revelation Sanamahi was pacified. Salailel told him that he would remain in every being as the indwelling spirit, that he would remain in every house as the sole guardian deity of

2. Cheitharol Kumbaba, pp. 102, 118, 144
all the living beings in the house. His place was preserved at the South-Western chamber of the house. Leimael was asked to be with Sanamahi on the left side of the house. It is believed that Salailel occupied the chamber directly facing the chamber of Leimael.

The main offerings to Sanamahi as a household deity include articles which are completely raw. Nothing cooked or burnt in the fire is offered to this deity still today. As has been said earlier, people pray to this deity daily after sunset. Over and above this, at critical hours of their life, and also annually on the first day of the year, i.e., on the day of Cheiraoba all the items of the day's meal, before they are cooked, were offered to this deity. The divine seat, and the clothes and articles are arranged for the coming year by replacing the old ones. This is normally done by the eldest male member in the family after taking bath and wearing clean cloths.

As to Sanamahi and his significance in the Meitei life S.N. Parratt observes: 'it is most significant that the name does not occur in the Cheitharol Kumbaba until the time of Garib Niwaz, by which time Vaishnavism had already a strong hold in the land.' She further observes that 'it is strange that so important a deity as Sanamahi is not mentioned frequently in the earlier part of the Cheitharol Kumbaba. It is hardly

1. Parratt, S.N., Religion of Manipur, p. 18
likely that he was introduced only in the reign of Garib Niwaz as a new god; Sanamahi is such an important deity to the Mefteis that it is impossible that he could be of only comparatively recent origin - he must have been connected with the Mefteis from the beginning. Moreover if Sanamahi had been newly introduced at the time of Garib Niwas the chronicles would surely contain some mention of his introduction.1 About this silence in the chronicles Parratt observes: 'The most likely is that since Sanamahi was explicitly a household god he did not play any important part in the state affairs which Cheitharol Kumbaba largely describes.'2 She also gives another explanation of the silence of the records about Sanamahi. According to her, as suggested by the editors of the Cheitharol Kumbaba, Sanamahi was formerly known under different names as Taibang Khaiba, Laiwa Haiba etc.3 The stand of Parratt regarding Sanamahi as a deity of no comparatively recent origin and as associated with this community from the earliest beginning, is correct in view of the old tradition and religious practice of the Mefteis. According to Kangbarol, the worship of Lord Sanamahi had been introduced by king Kangba at the very beginning of human habitation in this land. Thus worship of Sanamahi is very ancient. This view is supported

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p. 19
3. Ibid.
from the present chronicle itself, as in the chronicle Cheitharol Kumbaba on page 9 there is the mention of the loss of the original chronicle and its being rewritten at the time of king Bhagyachandra who was a devout Hindu king, and who consolidated the Hindu hold in this state. The sequence of mentioning the loss of the original Kumbaba is more doubtful. Page 9 normally deals with the events that took place in the reign of king Punshiba (1404-1432 A.D.). But it is this page that contains the statement that loss of the original chronicle was reported by Bhagyachandra to his uncle Anantasai and arrangement for its rewriting was made. This loss of the original chronicle and its being rewritten in the time of king Bhagyachandra in 1780 A.D., and the reporting of the same in page 9 of the said rewritten chronicle leaves a wide room for doubt regarding manipulation of the chronicle for the period before the conversion of the Megteis into Hinduism.¹

The worship of Sanamahi is found among the Lois. They offered sacrifices of various items including pigs, dogs, ducks and fowls, besides rice and fruits, to the deity and made good meals from the offerings. Sanamahi also had a place in the Luira festival of the Tangkhuls which takes place just before the sowing season. He is worshipped by the Purums to obtain health and prosperity. "Fowls are sacrificed to him by being strangled by the householder while the Maipa utters prayers

¹. Cheitharol Kumbaba, pp. 9, 121-122
and formulae. The bird is cooked and placed together with boiled rice before the god. The position of the leg of the bird at death is used to foretell the future of the sacrifice."  

Among the Kabuis also there is the worship of this deity in the name of Kachinkalai (the God at the corner of the house).

Another important household deity is Leimaľel who is taken to be the supreme divine mother. According to some, Leimaľel is the divine consort of Salailel, the supreme divine father, while according to some others she is described as the spouse of Atiya Guru Sidaba. In this connection Salailel is identified by some with Atiya Guru Sidaba. There is again another version of the identification of Salailel or Atiya Sidaba with the infinite heaven above, and of Leimaľel with Malem (Mother Earth) who nurses and nourishes every living being. She is also regarded as an associate of Lainingthou Sanamahi. Leimaľel has a place in the Meetei house near the northern wall in the middle chamber. There at her place is kept a sacred pot of water always filled. It is wrapped in a sacred thin cloth, with a lid at the top. She is also worshipped at critical hours of life and also compulsorily every year on the day of Cheiraoba. Besides her being a household deity, she has a deeper role in the Meetei Khunai as manifesting herself as divine ladies working for the benefit of mankind. Every female deity is considered to be

1. Parratt, S.N., op.cit., p. 24
her manifestation in a way or other. For this reason she is addressed as Langon Yambi Ima (the divine mother who manifests herself in many deities). She is Lal Leima (the goddess of wealth); She is Phou-Oibi (the goddess of granary) while in the barn; She is Ngareima (the goddess of fish) while in the fish yard; She is Ireima (goddess of Water); She is Lan Leima (the goddess of war) in the battle field; in the salt mine she is Thumleima (the goddess of salt); in industries and crafts she is Shil Leima (the goddess of industries and crafts); She is Heepokpi, Yaipokpi, Heeleima, Yaileima, Heekubi, Yaikubi, Yaisma – the seven divine ladies.  

The Meeteis considered her stay in the house to be due to the advice of Salailel, the Lord of the living beings. Dr. Parratt says, "This was a punishment to her for her partiality to Pakhangba in advising him to walk around the Guru's throne and bow down in order to obtain the succession." (The word Guru here means Salailel Sidaba or Atiya Sidaba). In the Meetei house She is the Leimal-el Sidabi who is venerated by all in the family.

The third place of religious significance in the Meetei house is the Phunga-Lairu. Phunga means 'fire place' which is in the heart of every Meetei house in the centre of the middle chamber. This is an indication of the worship of

1. Budhichandra, Y., Imoinu Ahongbigi Tungnafam, p. 25
2. Parratt, S.N., op.cit., p. 25
Fire by the Meeteis. Fire worship is not uncommon elsewhere. The Hindus, the ancient Greeks, the Persians, the Romans, all of them worshipped and preserved Fire at their homes. When the fire is worshipped and preserved at their respective homes, the Meeteis call it Phunga Mei. In the Fire place there are three stones, one in the right west, the other two in a triangular form - in the north-east and south-east. These three stones are considered to be representing the three great times of the day (which again represents the Nong, the Supreme Lord). The stone on the north-east is considered to be representing Mangang, that on the south-east, Luwang and that on the west, Khuman. Mangang here represents sun rise; Luwang, noon, and Khuman, the Sun set and the night.\(^1\) The Fire in the Phunga is addressed by the Meeteis as 'Meitreng Arabana Yoimayai Mahut Sinna Mei.'\(^2\) Meitreng Araba means the burning fire unimpeded by smokes; Yoimayai is a word by which the Meeteis know the Sun; Mahut Sinba means 'to substitute'. Thus the words collectively mean that the burning fire in the Phunga (fire place) substitutes the Sun. The sun which is taken to be representing the Supreme God for the world of the living beings is thus worshipped in the Meitei Phunga. The fire place is thus taken to be of supreme importance to the Meeteis, and hence called Phunga Lairu - the fire place where the

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1. Sharma, A., Meitei Kirtan, p. 98
2. Ibid., pp. 99, 101
important deities are worshipped. No Meeteis allow anybody to
take out fire from their home phunga at odd times of the day.
This practice is still in use in the Meetei community. The
traditional belief is that the Supreme Lord Tengbanba Mapu is
worshipped in the main Phunga, and mainly for this reason the
place is called Phunga Lairu. Dr. Parratt gives a misleading
explanation of Phunga Lairu. She is right in so far as she
holds that Phunga Lairu is a place, rather than a person. But
she says, "It consisted of a small hole situated to the west
of the fire hearth in which there was an earthen pot. The
hollow was covered with a clay roof, in the centre of which was
a small hole. Through this offerings were dropped into the
pot."¹ Dr. Parratt suffers from some confusion here for she
is describing another deity Imoinu Ahong Achaebi who is taken
to be another form of Leimarel Sidabi, the Supreme Pi (mother).
Just like Laxmi of the Hindus, this Imoinu is taken to be ever
resourceful giving wealth and prosperity to mankind. The
Meeteis have many traditional legends about this deity Imoinu
in which she was shown as having human appearance and residing
in the place near the fire hearth. Offerings are made to her
everyday. But the 12th day of the month of Wakching is the
day for her worship. Imoinu is taken by the Meeteis to be the
controller and regulator of the good conduct and behaviour of
human being.² Parratt confused the worship of Imoinu with the

¹ Parratt, S.N., op.cit., p. 27
² Budhichandra, Y., Imonu Ahongbigi Tungnafam, p. 26
worship of Fire. Imoinu finds a place near Phungga. To identify the two would be wrong.

From what is said above it is evident that the importance of Sanamahi and Pakhangba in the religious life of the Meeteis is very great. The true nature of the Supreme God Tengbanba Mapu is revealed in and through them. Apart from his being a household deity Sanamahi as Khoyum Ashiba is also regarded as the efficient cause of the universe. He is the inner essence of everything. His cosmic body is described in a passage thus:

"Ashiba says, 'The earth is created by me. None can snatch it from me. All the four corners are borne by me. I wear the feather of the peacock. The upper portion of my abdomen is the heaven, my back is the earth, my bones are the iron, my intestines are the great rivers, Irin and Thoubal. My muscles become the great mountain, Sannaching; my eyes are the sun and the moon ... . While creating the earth in the infinite space I am Leiranglen Takhatpa and also Nongnanglen Apongba ... . My colour is fiery. My teeth are golden. My odour is that of Lotus. My right hand holds gold, the left silver. The heavenly gods form my canopy while the earthly deities constitute my golden seat. I am alone in the infinite darkness." 1

1. Leithak Leikhalon, p. 36
The passage reminds one of the Viswarupa of the Supreme Lord in the Bhagavad-Gītā. The whole universe of things and beings are in Ashiba (Lainingthou Sanamahi). He creates it and contains it. He maintains it and destroys it. While Sanamahi is the inner essence in all beings, Pakhangba means the one who knows his Father, i.e., the Supreme God and thus represents the highest order of wisdom. It is said that the Lord Tengbanba Mapu entered into the womb of the Mother as Sanamahi and came out from the womb as Pakhangba.¹ Thus the entire divine scheme is understood in terms of actualization of the potential. Sanamahi symbolises the potential essence and Pakhangba symbolises the manifest aspect of the Supreme Lord.

Dr. S.N. Farratt observes that Pakhangba may be regarded as the first king of the land, who has been later magnified into a god by later generations. She further observes that his connection with the snake is less certain and that it may be a vestige of totemistic beliefs. She points out that perhaps it may be a part of the widespread nāgā beliefs of North India. She observes that the snake beliefs have been incorporated into a tribal religion of the Ningthoujas, and thus have come to be associated with their tribal ancestral deity. She stresses that the worship of Pakhangba remains a prerogative of the Ningthoujas, often intimately associated

¹. Ibid., p. 107
with the throne. No member of another yek is allowed to
worship him, and for a prince doing so necessarily implies an
attempt on the throne.¹

The above views of Parratt on Pakhangba in line with
the opinion of Dr. Chatterji and Hodson throw light on different
aspects of the Meetei life.² However, it appears that she is
taking Nongtalai Pakhangba, the first ruling king of the land
in the historic age, to be the original ancient Konchin Tuna
Tingthokpa Pakhangba of the puyas and traditional beliefs. This
has created a serious trouble in the proper understanding of
Pakhangba. Nongtalai had been revered by the people of his
time as divine Pakhangba. The writings of Cheitharol Kumbaba
and Ningthourol Lambuba etc. try to show that he is divine.
Nongtalai himself said that he was god by day and human by
night.³ It is because of Nongtalai's divine ability to unify
the different small groups of people in this land, and
establish the proper foundation of the Meetei nation that
people of his time took him to be Pakhangba, the divine
ancestor of the traditional legends. As he was found possessing
the divine qualities of Konchin Tingthokpa Pakhangba, the Ruling
Deity, he was taken to be an incarnation of divine Pakhangba

¹ Parratt, S.N., op.cit., p. 13
² cf. Chatterjee, S.K., 'Kirata-jana-Kriti', Journal of the
Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal; Hodson, T., The Meitheis,
p. 99
³ Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 1
and venerated as such by the later generations. Dr. S. N. Parratt's characterisation of Pakhangba in three ways: (i) as a man, the unifier of the Meeteis; (ii) as a deity, brother of Sanamahi and son of Atiya Guru Sidaba; (iii) as a snake, makes a confusion as to whether Pakhangba is just a title won by a single personality or by many personalities at different times. In fact Pakhangba is not a person but a title. There were many personalities, divine and human who won the title Pakhangba and were venerated as the original Pakhangba himself, they being taken as his incarnations at different times. On the line of personalities who won the title Pakhangba, Nongtalai was the last. He reigned in 34 A.D. as the first king of the historic age. Following the tradition of Nongtalai the rulers of this land were taken to be in possession of divine qualities, and were often addressed as Lainingthou (Divine king). But this tradition has been lost since the time of Pamheiba (Garib-Newaz) who initiated the conversion of the people forcibly into Hinduism.

From the discussion made above it is clear that Pakhangba is not a person, divine or human, but a title - an attribute possessed by the one, divine or human, who knows the secrets of the Ultimate background of the Universe of things and beings. The Meeteis believe that Sanamahi is the potential

1. Parratt, S.N., op.cit., p. 10
2. Cheitharol Kumbaba, p. 1