CHAPTER - IV

MEITEIS AND MEITEI PERSONAL LAWS

Meitei Mythology

(a) Formation of universe

According to Meiteis, there were two great time order viz. the Hangko and the Chak. The Hangko age is the age of God during which primal elements emanated from the ultimate substratum. It had four divisions: Koi, Thoi, Poi and Tayo. These involved countless number of years during which the stage was set up for the emergence of our world. After the Hangko comes the chak, the human age. It has also four divisions viz. hayi, haya, k hunung and langba (Konna), the earliest beginning of the hayi chak is treated as a transitional stage when God and men were living together. It was believed that at the end of the langba chak the universe was dissolved. All the manifested deities and the primal elements were consumed by the fire of langba. Nothing remains except Ati ngkok (formless and boundless expanse) and Amamba (darkness). From the state of nothingness the will of Tengbanba Marpu brought about new creation.¹

According to Leithak Leikharol puya, there was but one being, Tengbanba Mapu, raised high above all the conditions and limitation as of time and change. At the time of dissolution all the nine layers of earth, nine orders of heaven and all Gods disappeared into the original potential naught filled with darkness. This primeval dark ground is explained in terms of Ati ngkok and Amamba who

¹. Dr. Bheigya Singh Yengkhoiba, Leithak Leikharol, (1988)pp. 3-4
were the manifestations of the supreme Lords. From the great desire of Tengbanba Mapu to create the universe, came forth the primal sound ‘Hung’. There then appeared a halo all around like an encircling rainbow. This sound halo was the seed. The supreme Lord was the sheath covering all Atingkok was the germinating fibre of the root. The point of germination was called Sanaching (the divine mount). Beneath it lied Amamba (the darkness), beneath this Amamba, still Atingkok remained and within Atingkok lied the Lord. As Tengbanba Mapu was both high and below, He was said to be the all embracing infinite.2

The primal sound ‘Hung’ initiated the emanation of the primal deities of creation and also of the primal elements that would ultimately mature into the present universe of things and beings. Atingkok and Amamba, as the internal manifestations of Tengbanba Mapu served as the ultimate background of creation. Atiya Sidaba and Asiba were the main architects, Konjil Tingthokpa was the deity trying to disturb creation. Nongthangleima was the Goddess of light and thunder distracting Konjil from his disturbing activities. Tengbanba Mapu called Atiya Sidaba from within Atingkok and asked Atingkok to take Atiya sidaba down to create the universe. Then Atingkok asked Atiya Sidaba to create the universe. Atiya sitting on his own breath called forth Ashiba addressing him as ‘A’ and Asiba came forth as infinite water (Ishing Tarang). Konjil Tingthokpa also was called out, addressed ‘Ka’ and he appeared as fire. Atiya Sidaba went up to Atingkok to ask as to how the earth would be created. He bowed down to Atingkok and asked him to show his mouth. Atingkok opened his mouth and showed all lying within him. The sun, the moon, the pole star and other stars,

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2. ibid. pp.4-6.
galaxies, fire, water, air and all others were shown to Atiya who was simply afraid to see all these. Atiya requested Atingkok to close his mouth. Atiya wished to take out all and threw himself within Atingkok. He tried to drive out all the things by uttering HOIROU (the divine song): Ahei He Hoirou Nakese. Hearing this song Atingkok opened his mouth and all the elements came out as driven by Atiya. Atingkok sang “Ahei He Heiya Heiya Heiyenakese”. This song of the elements within was “Ha Hei Hei Ha Ha Ha. Hoi Hoi Ha Ha Ha Harin Linla Herinla Herinla, Hayute Khulaite. Heiyase Tahou Hou He Hou Haya Naketa”. This was the song to expressed happiness in coming out.3

(b) Creation of man

According to Leithak Leikharol puya after the creation of the earth and the heaven Atiya Sidaba (immortal sky) asked Ashiba to create human beings. Ashiba created the first man ‘Pongkhu’ on the pattern of the image of Atiya Sidaba. But to make alive was a problem. Only when five deities, Koubru, Apanba (Pakhangba), Thanging, Marjing and Wangbren entered into the body of Pongkhu with the Supreme deity Lainigthou and seated themselves in their proper place within the body as souls (life essences), Pongkhu became alive. The five souls were named Tinou, Neno, Tatan, Piyan and Yapi.4 Thereafter Pongnaoton was created by Ashiba on the pattern of the image of the Atiya Sidaba. But he also could not breathe. The deities Karin, Kara, Arangba, Okonglon and Nongtamba were placed by Atiya within the body of Pongnaoton as the five souls and then he breathed.5 In both the cases it is found that man was created by God and he

3 ibid pp. 3-30.
4 ibid. p.55.
5 ibid. p.39.
became alive only by the divine power which worked within him as the soul or the live essence.

The *Wakoklon Hilen Thilel Salai Amailol Puya* again says that the first human being was created by *Konsen Tulei Henba (Sanamahi)* who arose from the sacred water preserved by *Salailel Sidaba* and *Leimalel Sidabi* (the supreme father and mother) in a sacred pot. *Sanamahi* created different orders of living species, first those who could live in water, then those who could live in water and land both, then those who could live in hills and jungles. But all those different species of living creatures could not satisfy *Salailel Sidaba*. Man was created then ultimately on the pattern of the image of *Salailel*. The first created human being was named *Mee-Khalaoba* and *Salailel* made him alive. Seeing the majestic beauty of *Mee-Khalaoba*, *Leimalel* wished to have a divine child. The child so born was named *Konchin Tukthaba*. Acquiring perfect knowledge of God and his creation he won the title *Pakhangba*. *Pakhangba* married seven divine girls (*Lai Nurah Taret*) and by them had seven yeks of the *Meiteis*. According to this puya *Konchin Tukthaba* was the foremost ancestor of mankind. He was addressed as *Iputhou Pakhangba*, the grandpa of the mankind. He is known as *Meelati MakokLaikiti Mamei* (the beginning of the mankind and end of the divine).6

**Philosophy of Meiteis’ Original Religion, ‘Sanamahism’**

The *Meiteis*, a Mongoloid race, have original religion, called ‘*Sanamahism*’. *Sanamahi* is worshiped by both *Meitei Hindus* and *Meitei Sanamahis* (including *Apokpa Marup* and other *Meitei* sectarians). The Brahmins of Manipur, though they

originated from outside Manipur do worship Sanamahi and to all of them the Meiteis customary law is therefore applied. Sanamahi is a deity who is all-pervading, immanent and transcendental, in the whole universe, having similar description (even in minute details) as that of Brahmin adavite philosophy of the Hindus.

The most important of the household deities is Sanamahi. Literally, Sanamahi means “Liquid Gold” as such it represents fire. Like the vedic people the early Meiteis worshiped fire. The worship of the sun is the natural to the human mind. It is an essential part of Hindu religion. Sanamahi like the sun, is the author of all light and life in world. While Sanamahi is the indwelling spirit in every being, the unmanifested potential essence, Pakhangba is the manifest aspect of the supreme Lord, the ruling deity of living beings.\(^7\)

In two of the most important Meitei myths Sanamahi appears as the brother of Pakhangba and both as sons of high God Atiya Guru Sidaba.

Atiya Guru Sidaba wanted to find out which of his sons recognized him not only as his father but also as his guru. So to test their knowledge he took the form of a dead cow and floated down a big river. Sanamahi (Kuptreng) disliked the dead cow, but Pakhangba (Shentreng) realized that it might be the God in disguise. Sanamahi asked how they could find whether this was so. For an answer Pakhangba approached the dead cow and addressed it thus: ‘it is not fitting for a dead cow to move its tail’. On hearing Atiya Guru Sidaba thought that he had in fact moved his tail and had thus given his sons intimation of his identity wishing to reveal himself to the full he moved his tail. At this Sanamahi and Pakhangba,

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realizing him to be their guru, dragged the body out of the water. *Atiya Guru Sidaba* then took his proper form and said to *Pakhangba*: ‘You know your father the guru well and so let your name be *Pakhangba* (*Pa* = father, *khangba* = to know)’. Form this time onwards *Shentreng* was called *Pakhangba*. *Kupreng* came to be known from his time as *Sanamahi*.

The carcass of the dead cow was cut into seven pieces and divided among the founders of the seven *salais* (clans). According to some traditions there were seven sons who were the progenitors of the seven *salais* (clans), of whom the two mentioned above were the eldest. This appears to be a secondary addition to an original myth, which concerned *Pakhangba* and *Sanamahi* only. There appears to have been a conflation of two myths—the first giving the aetiology of the name *Pakhangba* as the one who recognized his father. To this was added a second myth, which shows some Hindu characteristics and connects the yajna of the cow that naming of *salais* (clans), their names being derived from the portions of the cow that each received. Most of the derivations appear to be fanciful but they have some significance nevertheless.

The list is as under:

- **Kuptreng** received the neck, which was white. Hence his *salai* was called *Angom* (from *angouba* = white)
- **Shentreng** received the beautiful eyes. So his *salai* was called *Ningthoujas* (from *ningthiba* = beautiful)
- **Pammaringba** had the top of the head and his *salai* was called *Luwang* (from *lu* = head)
Leishangtao  received the front legs and his salai was called *khuman*
(from *khumang* - front legs)

Konshouren  received the striped belly and his salai was called *Moirang*
(from *marangba* = stripe)

Ashangba  received the left side of the head so his salai was called *Khaba* (from *kha* = left)

Tumanganba  received the red heart and so his salai was called *Nganba*
(from *ngangba* = red)

The second myth is concerned with the kingship. *Atiya Guru Sidaba* announced that he would appoint as king the brother who returned first after circuiting the whole world. *Sanamahi* started off from the southern side of the royal compound called *Kangla.* Pakhangba on the advice of Leimalel, circumambulated his father's thorn seven times and after that bowed to him. When he was asked by *Atiya Guru Sidaba* if he had gone round the world, Pakhangba replied that he had gone round his father's thorn on his mother's advice. This the *Guru* regarded as equivalent to going round the world and accordingly gave the throne to him. No sooner had Pakhangba ascended the throne, then Sanamahi returned to the very spot from which he started. When he found Pakhangba on the throne, Sanamahi was angry and disputing his right to reign decided to fight against his brother. Pakhangba became frightened and took refuge among many Goddesses (*Lairembi*). In return they promised to save him and surrounded him; by joining hands and jumping about they warded off Sanamahi and Pakhangba could not be killed as he was surrounded and protected by the many Lairembi. At this the angry Sanamahi declared that if his brother's adviser was a man he would be killed,
and if a woman he would marry her. Thus the strange matter of Sanamahi marrying his mother Leimarel is explained.

The frustrated Sanmahi then began to dig his toes in the earth to destroy the whole world. At this Atiya Guru Sidaba appeared and pacified him. He promised that Sanamahi and Pakhangba would reign twelve years alternatively. Furthermore since Pakhangba had already been crowned, Sanamahi would reign in every household and Leimalel would stay with him.8

Sanamahi is a non-Indo-Mongoloid Meitei word. The Lainingthou Sanamahi is the "Khubhamnaiba Eepuroi Apokpa" which is a non-Sanskrit Meitei word for Sakaram Bhooma Brahma or the the formless Aseitas Absolute. That is to say, Sanamahi is the Eepuroi Apokpa in action is Lord and Creator. Sanamahi is worshiped as Yumlai (family god) in south western corner of every house of the Meiteis on earth. The Khubham Naidaba (or Mawongleitaba) Eepuroi Apokpa, which is a non-Sanskrit word for the formless Aseitas Absolute or Miraakaram Bhooma Brahma, is conceived by every Meitei on earth as Khubham Naiba or Mawong Naiba Eepuroi Apokpa, which is also a non-Sanskrit word for the formed Aseitas Absolute or the Sakara Bhooma Brahma. The Eepuroi Apokpa is conceived as formed or as symbolized for the purpose of worship. Lainingthou Sanamahi is the form or the very symbol in which alone the unfathomable mystery of the being called the formless Eepuroi Apokpa is pictured by the finite mind.

The concept of *Sanamahi* as a personal God of religion is the fusion of the highest logical truth with a deepest religious conviction. This personal God is an object of genuine worship and reverence, not non-ethical deity indifferent to men's needs and fears. So, *Lainingthou Sanamahi* is regarded as creator, governor and judge of the universe possessing the qualities of power and justice, righteousness and mercy, omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience.9

The duration of existence or manifestation of this universe or the living entities is controlled by *Sanamahi*, the Supreme Lord of the cosmic and earthly manifestation. Behind these manifestations there is one controller called Lord *Sanamahi*. All physical energy of the earth, the sun, the moon, the solar system and galaxy are separated energy of lord *Sanamahi*. Without the blessings of *Sanamahi*, no one can be happy. By this blessing and mercy, one can achieve peace and prosperity and be able to bring success in missionary work. The existence of *Sanamahi* is that of the Supreme consciousness in man. The universe is the cosmic from of supreme Lord *Sanamahi Sidaba Mapu* or *Taibang Panbagi Mapu* or *Tengbanaba Mapu* or *Mapu* is the so called sacred name or *Mingkhei* of *Sanamahi*. He who sees every thing in relating to the Supreme Lord "*Mapu*" and who sees all entities as His part and parcel and who sees the "*Mapu*" within everything will be graced by him.10

**Origin of Meitei Personal Law**

*Meitei* personal law is predominantly based on the sociological jurisprudence of the *Meiteis*. The ancient character of law was based purely on

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the Puyas (the accepted law or the command of the ancestors or of all the citizens). In most cases the puyas were recorded for the purpose of assisting the memory of the scholastic law givers and were maintained as manuals in their royal functions. The western scholars also believed that the usages of certain original tribes or races residing in the North-East of India have certain peculiar characteristics in the field of law as they have originated from the patriarchal family. The phenomenon accrued due to the presence of Indian and Chinese civilizations. The racial and historical background of the Meiteis is an essential factor in the process of establishing a separate personal law of their own. The religious beliefs of Meitei community may be said to be another basis of Meitei law. Their religion is called Sanamahism. So a comprehensive view of the personal law of the Meiteis is not possible without understanding the philosophy of Sanamahism. The principles of Sanamahism today are so blended with the personal law of the Meiteis that it is impossible to separate the two. However, in all systems in jurisprudence, early history of law is rich with the mixture of law and religion. The Meitei nationality is rich in its religious culture which is a living culture of the community. In fact, they do practise in their daily life the rituals of the religion which constitute the activities of their social life.

As regards the origin of the Meitei personal law, there is no established source as yet. Because the primitive communities in the sense of the term, had neither law nor law givers. In this sense, their tribal customs may be said as the origin of their law. Moreover, the philosophy of Sanamahism is based on the principles of equality, as the Meiteis live under a communistic system where
the violation of religious tenets are abhorred and serious misdemeanours are punished by excommunication, with the consequence that the wrongdoer is deprived of the protection of his kinsmen. It is the living law of the Meitei social system which is enforced in letter and spirit. The man who is wronged must take the first opportunity in gaining redress. The “wrong”, mainly consists in violation of the accepted practices-essentially religious in nature.11

**Nature of Meitei Personal Law**

Meitei personal law comprises their customs, usages and practices based on Meitei culture and tradition. Law is linked with tradition and without it all sections of people would not be touched effectively by the living laws. Meitei law of marriage may be of:

(i) Extra judicial

(ii) Judicial

Extra-judicial means the customary rites and ceremonies which are supposed to have force of law but still not tested judicially. Judicial means the customary rites and ceremonies on which the judicial approval has been given.

(1) Extra-judicial

Preliminaries to the Hainaba (engagement) marriage, the purest form of Meitei marriage, consists of four distinct stages. They are first, Hainaba (begging the bride) which is the initiation of the bridegroom’s parents to the bride’s

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parents or family; secondly *Yathang Thanaba* (exchange of consent) which is the exchange of their consent to the marriage; thirdly *Waroipot Puba* (giving of final consent) in which both the parties to the marriage give their final consent to the marriage and fourthly *Heijingpot puba* (giving of presents) by which the marriage is made known to all with the performance of a rite of *Apok Asha Thaba* (devotion to Gods). *Apok Asha Thaba* rite is the obligatory offering of fruits to the first ancestor of the bride’s and bridegroom’s family (*Sagei*). Fruits and sweets are also offered to the local gods (*Lamlai*) and clan God (*Sagei Lai*).

Then follows the marriage invitation of the bridegroom in which the bridegroom is specially invited one day ahead of the marriage ceremony. This is the simple rite performed by a younger brother or nearest relative of the bride under the instruction of the priest at the residence of bridegroom. He garlands the bridegroom and offers fruits and nominal amount of presentation by cash to the bridegroom. The bridegroom again responds by raising the flowers of the garland to his forehead as a symbol of surety to the marriage. On the next day of the invitation, there is the marriage ceremony at the bride’s residence. The *Iruknungshang* basket containing rice, salt, cotton, fruit and ginger brought from the bridegroom’s residence is left at the *Phungga Lairu* (fire-place of a house) of the bride’s house. On the fifth day of the marriage, it is opened by bridegroom’s party. The rice is at that time poured on to a *Yangkok* (winnowing fan) and the fortunes of the couple are read according to the position of the rice. It is also considered good omen if ants’ or spiders’ webs are discovered in the rice. During the ceremony of marriage, the rite of *Meetam Nga Thaba* is performed in which two *Ngamu* fishes (Lata fishes), one representing the bridegroom and another representing the bride are set free in the water and their
movements are observed. The future prospects of the couple are read. Then on the sixth day of the marriage the Mapam Chakkouba (a grand feast) is performed in which both the couple along with their local relatives, friends and family members are invited to a grand feast by the bride’s parents at their residence.\textsuperscript{12}

(ii) Judicial

Custom in order that it may constitute a rule, in particular family or in a particular community has to become usage and also has to obtain the force of law. It must be ancient, certain and reasonable and not in derogation of the general principles of law.\textsuperscript{13} It has also been held that marriage by capture and widow marriage are recognized as valid marriage under Meitei personal law. The form of recognition is Loukhatpa ceremonial function. The ceremony is very important because it is social recognition of the marriage of a woman of any status. The general principles of law is that by Loukhatpa only any type of marriage becomes legal and valid.\textsuperscript{14}

Several judicial pronouncements on the validity of Ceremonies of Meitei marriage are cited and discussed in Chapter VIII of this work.

Scope of Meitei Personal Law

Law regulates human conduct, and reconciles and harmonizes individual will with the social interest by curtailing unregulated systems and irrational principles for an effective governance of the human persons as well as the


\textsuperscript{14} Puyam Liklai Singh v. Moirangthem Maipak, A.I R 1956 Man. 18.
community wherein he lives.\footnote{15} Meitei personal law relates to the whole community of Manipur in the first instance and applies subsequently to Meitei of the globe whereas he or she goes or resides provided all of them profess Sanamhism. Every Meitei shall be governed by personal law, wherever necessary, but subject to the recognition of local custom and usage by the authorities of law.

The Meitei law applies to the following persons:

(i) A Manipuri who is a Meitei of Manipur, but to the exclusion of foreign nationals:

(ii) A Meitei who is a Sanamahi worshiper or Pakhangba faith;

(iii) A Sanamahi worshiper or Pakhangba faith who is a plain or hill resident;

(iv) A tribe or community of either hill or plain having Yek-salais;

(v) A Yek-salai who has the immediate conversion to another religion by virtue of faith, but to the exclusion of those having their own personal laws.\footnote{16}

\textbf{Explanation (1)}

Any person who resides permanently in Manipur would be a Manipuri. The term Meitei is just a synonym of the word "Manipuri" as recorded in the Government documents such as Census Reports and Linguistic Survey of India.\footnote{17} A Meitei may be a Manipuri, but all Manipuris are not Meiteis, because there are the Hindus of Indian origin (or non-Meitei Hindus originated from outside Manipur like Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Christians and Mohammedans are all Manipuris if they had settled down in Manipur (or otherwise a Manipuri citizen).
Explanation (2)

Any person who worships Sanamahi is a Meitei irrespective of his caste, creed, sex, race, religion or nationality. Sanamahi worship includes a merely keeping of Sanamahi shrine in the proper place of the house. The South-Western corner of every house is the only place sanctioned by Sanamahi law such a shrine. Normally all Brahmins (or Bamons in the local words of the Meiteis) in Manipur used to keep a shrine of Sanamahi and they are therefore recognized by the Meitei society as Meitei Bamons, who are however, have acquired a Meitei surname. All of the Meitei Bamons once migrated from different parts of India to Manipur and were married to Meitei women afterwards. Their mother tongue is Meitei language, but none has a particular yek except gotra. They are the priests of Radha-Krishna temple and are respected by Manipuri community with the reverend name “Aigya”. Against this background, Meitei law is also applied to Meitei Brahmins.

Explanation (3)

Any Naga, Mizo or Kuki who is a resident of hill or plain area and who keeps or has shrine of Kaching Karai is a Sanamahi worshiper. Kaching Karai is derived from the words Kachin Lai, which means “God of the corner” or “God of the South-Western corner of the house”, it must be Sanamahi deity. The term is the loosening expression of Sanamahi deity used by the Tangkhul Nagas or certain sections of the hill community since the time immemorial. Kachi is used geographically to the original place of the Kukis (at present the Mizos).

Historically, the hill tribes of Manipur have the same origin with the Meiteis and they are also Meiteis.\textsuperscript{22} The Kuki tribes are also a sub-clan of the Meiteis.\textsuperscript{23} Thus, the tribes in Meitei community makes a race and their religious law goes about 2,000 years back. There may be such type of Sanamahi worshipper, who fulfils two obligations viz. preservation of Sanamahi cult and performance of Sanamahi rites. A Pakhangba worshipper of Tripura State, Bangladesh or Burma is also a sanamahism. The Meiteis includes Nagas and Kukis, all belong to one community called Kanglei Khunai,\textsuperscript{24} though some Kuki, Naga or Meitei tribes are of recent comers.\textsuperscript{25}

**Explanation (4)**

There are nine important plain or hill communities who have seven yek-salais and they are namely Meitei (Tammee), Koireng, Kabui, Anal, Tangkhul, Kharam, Maring, Chothe-Kom and Mayon Mongshang.\textsuperscript{26} The yek-salai of Meitei (Tammee) are Mangnang, Luwang, Khuman, Angom, Moirang, Kha-Nganba and Sarang Leishangthem. The yek salais of Koireng are Yeite, Songthu, Leisen, Tumteen, Tente, Walhe and Mikal. The yek-salais of Kabui are Kammei, Gonmei, Gangte, Longmei, Marrengmei, Palmei and Phaomei. The yek-salais ofAnal are Murchal, Masum, Pasen, Chantung, Runlal, Hrangpung and Yasa. That of Tangkhul are Duidang, Sadang, Khodang, Khadungdang, Choudang, Sithudang and Kindang.

\textsuperscript{24} Ngariyanbam Kangzia, Kanglei Eyekki Waree (History of Kanglei Eeyeks), (1978) pp.1-2.
\textsuperscript{25} Kunjabihan Singh. op.cit.p17.
\textsuperscript{26} Keisampat Meetei Thougal Marup, Meetei Yek-Salai, (1982) pp.66-68.
That of Kharam are Saiphu, Saichal, Rangla, Rakhou, Seilon, Mareeyan and Kailam. That of Muring are Datta, Raja, Dingthoi, Chongdur, Thoitak, Sampur and Thangnga. That of Chothe-Kom are Yehrung, Thao, Mari, Parpa, Rangsai, Makul and Rokhung. That of Mayon-Monsang are Ruyin Wanggran, Chinir Nungchim, Sesong Hungam, Songseer Khartu, Ngaru Langrom, Sirbum Tureep and Bungjeer Charu. Excluding the Meiteis, the total number of communities recognized as Scheduled tribes by the Government of the Manipur are twenty-nine. They are namely Aimol, Anal, Angami, Chothe, Chiru, Gangte, Hmar, Kabui, Kacha Naga, Koireng, Koirao, Kom, Lamkang, Any Mizo (Lushai), Maram, Moyon, Maring, Mao, Monsang, Paite, Purum, Ralte, Salte, Sema, Simte, Tangkhul, Thadou, Vaiphei and Zou. All these tribes or sub-tribes irrespective of their residential location have seven yek-salais.

Explanation (5).

In Meitei society there are persons who have an immediate conversion to another religion, more commonly to the Christianity, or in a lesser degree to Budhism, who however still retain their custom and usage. Though he or she may be Christian, Bhudhist, or Hindu by faith, such person being a Meitei by blood is allowed to stay in the same house where the shrine of Sanamahi is revered. So long as they live under the same roof of Meitei Khunai, they are treated by the society as Meiteis and subsequently Meitei law applies. The only exception is that

27. K.B.Singh, An Introduction to Tribal Language and Culture of Manipur, Editor’s note (1976)p.111.
(Now four other communities viz. Poumai Naga, Tarao, Kharam and Any Kuki Tribes have been recognized as Scheduled tribes by the Government of Manipur. Thus, the total number of Scheduled tribes in Manipur becomes thirty three). Ref. The Gazette of India (Extraordinary, Part ll), No 10, Jan 2003, p.6

law ceases to apply if they have joined to Meitei community immediately after their conversion to Islamic religion, or if they have joined to Hindus, Sikhs or Buddhists community, for whom codified Hindu law applies.

**Exception**

There are 716 Meitei surnames who all have a distinct yek-salais. There are two more Meitei surnames who do not have a Yek-Salai of their own, they are the Kshetrimayum and the Lairikyengbam.

**Introduction of Hinduism to Meiteis**

With the accession of Charai Rongba, Hinduism, in one or other of its forms, became the dominant religion of Manipur, largely through the support and patronage of the reigning monarchs. This was not, however, a smooth process. In the time of Charai Rongba (1697 A.D. - 1709 A.D) there was little attempt to impose Hinduism upon the people as a whole. During his reign some Vaishnava saints came to Manipur. The king and his family were initiated into the new faith. The king and some of nobles took the sacred thread after a day’s fasting.

Hinduism became the dominant religion of the land during the reign of Pamheiba (1709 A.D. - 1748 A.D.). There is, however, evidence of early Hindu influence on the people of the land. Some Brahmins came from the west and settled here during the reign of Kyamba (1467 A.D. - 1508 A.D) but they had no significant impact on the life of the Meiteis in absence of any support from the

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30. Moirangthem Kirti, op. cit. p.35
king. Brahmin migration continued presumably with permission of the king. These settlers were allotted clan (sagei) name and through intermarriage with Meitei woman were absorbed into the Meitei community.\footnote{33. Supra note 7 at p. 148.}'

The process of forcible Hinduization was carried out by Pamheiba (Garib Niwaz), son of Charai Rongba. He was initiated into Vaishnavism by Guru Gopal Das. He punished those who violated Hindu laws. Consumer of cow meat and of any other meat were beaten and it was forbidden to keep pigs and hens in the housing areas. Cremation was made the customary method of disposal of the dead. A temple of Lord Krishna was built. A large tank was excavated and images of Krishna and Kali were placed on the bank as part of the consecration ceremonials. Pamheiba displaced the traditional God. He destroyed several temples of Umanglais (sacred grove).\footnote{34 Supra note 32 at pp 71-75} In the latter part of Pamheiba's reign, a Brahmin, one Santidas, came to Manipur from Sylhet and began to preach Vaishnavism of the school of Ramanandi. The king was initiated by Santidas into Ramanandi sect. After the initiation he severely persecuted not only the followers of the traditional religion but also those who belonged to other sect of Vaishnavism .\footnote{35. There Vaishnavite schools influenced Meitei religion They were Nimbarka school (worshiping Krishna and Radha), Ramanandi school (worshiping Ram and Sita) and Chaitanyan school (worshiping Chaitanya) : Ref. Saroi Nalini parratt, op.cit. pp. 136-139.} Through the instigation of Santidas the king collected all the Puyas and ancestral records and burnt them at Kangla. By a royal decree the books and records in Meitei script were banned. Maichous who were in possession of the ancient texts went to remote areas of the hills and the valley to keep their treasure concealed.\footnote{36. Gangmumei Kabui, History of Manipur (pre-colonial period), Vol.1(1991)pp 253-154.} Under his rule Vaishnavism was eastablised as the
state religion. Each yek was identified with a particular Hindu gotra. Old Hindu rituals were adapted to Hindu usage. It was during the reign of Chingthang Khombe (known as Bhagyachandra, 1763 A.D. - 1798 A.D. )that Hinduism was consolidated. Despite the ravages of successive Burmese invasions he confirmed Vaishnavism of the school of Chaitanya as the state religion neglecting indigenous Gods. Through his efforts Hindu festivals and rites were generally accepted.37

The coming of Hinduism produced intra-Meitei stratification when there was mass conversion of the Meiteis into the fold of Vaishnavism. Some sections of the Meitei population refrained from proselytism and remained satisfied with their traditional religion. These people are treated as “outcaste” by the new Meitei Hindus. Even their settlement areas remained as compact units as a safe distance from the locality of the Hindus converts. Another section of “outcaste” comprised those punished by the king for violation of Hindu social customs and marital regulations. The former category of “outcast” was named “Loi” and the latter as “Yaithibi” - both the categories have now been recognized as the Scheduled Castes of Manipur under the Indian constitution. Social intercourses between the Loi and Yaithibi on one hand and the Meitei Hindus on the other were very much negligible. The Loi and Yaithibi communities had their own separate custom and tradition less influenced by the Meitei Hindus for a pretty long time until the down of Gandhian philosophy in the later part of British rule here.38

37. Dr. Bhagyachandra. op. cit. pp.149-151.
No doubt, though the *Meiteis* have been forcibly converted to Hinduism, they never neglect their own religious customs based on *Sanamahism*. It is quite true that in every religious ceremony *Meiteis* follow the rites of both Hinduism and *Sanamahism* at large. In some places of Manipur particularly amongst the *Lois* (Scheduled Castes) they strictly follow only the rules of their indigenous *Sanamahisam*.