CHAPTER - IV

The Ethics of the Moieties

Concept of Value

Man is fully conscious of what he acts and sees that his actions meet the desired destiny. In his thoughtful moments, he aspired after the mental, moral and spiritual destiny. In this regard, the earliest forms of religions were connected with the elements out of which the ethical life subsequently developed. Social customs stood for the common good of the people and acted as rules binding on the will of the members. Over these customs religion cast its protecting shadow and investigated them with religious sanction and value. Values are relevant to man’s life. Of all the animals, man alone is concerned with ideals, moral principles and norms. It may be said that man is a valuing and value-seeking being. Man is not satisfied with the fulfilment of mere biological needs such as food, drinks, etc. After meeting his basic physical needs, man craws for the satisfaction of intellectual, affective and volitional ends. Thinking, feeling and willing are the three dimensions of the human mind.

The greatness of man depends upon the strength of his mind. This is general knowledge that the elephant is superior to mankind in terms of physical strength. But the more intelligent man can easily control or tame the strong
animal and put of a rose are soft, but tenderer is the human heart. So the natural forces are strong, but human will can move mountains. This unique quality of man is that he has enormous potentiality in terms of physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual energies. If he cultured and tapped these energies properly, he can attain the highest order of excellence in thought and deeds. In short, if all these energies are harnessed, man may not only becomes superman but attains the stature of the Divine also.

The term ‘Value’ is used in various ways and senses. It is the diverse modalities of selective human behaviour. It serves as the criterion of judgement and choice. So value plays a great role in decision making and in following, a course of action on the life of an individual. The concept of a man’s values influences him in judging conduct of others in society. In the ordinary sense, the term ‘Value’ means what is good, desirable or worth while. In the wider sense, it means rightness, obligatin, duty, virtue, truth, goodness, beauty and holiness, But in the widest sense, value means all critical and appreciative kinds predicated as opposed to the descriptive ones, etc. Social values are closely related with the social aims concerning the simple and complex social ends. Generally values are treated as standards of desirability.

The Meitei society is not an exception, to change. The present day Meitei society has under gone rapid changes owing to the processes of
modernization. But in spite of the changes, some elements of tradition refuse in respect of beliefs, customs, institutions, etc.

Socio-cultural Values of the Meiteis

Some of the social values are fixed firmly in kinship relation. Value may be regarded as variable in the kinship-relation among members of the family. Thus respect for the husband by the wife and for the parents by the children is a value relating to kinship in the Meitei society as in the case of the other Indian society.\textsuperscript{1} Women are generally very loyal to their husband. They carefully avoid calling their husbands by names even at the cost of extreme disadvantages. They are regarded as one of the good qualities of a devoted wife. Women of Manipur are very hard-working. They are engaged in both household works and other social activities. Solidarity and cohesion of the family is a highly desirable value. The father as the head of the family unifies the family. Obedience to the parents and elders is a value for the children. Everybody respects a cohesive and harmonious family. The social position of a woman who is blessed with her children is high. Everyone is expected to lead the life of a householder. Aged bachelors and spinsters are not respected much in the Meitei society. In the case of them, if either man or woman dies unmarried, which is mentioned early, a

The Ethics of the Meiteis

ritual called ‘Chupsaba’ is performed so that the spirit of the deceased may not come back to the family and so that the peson may not have rebirth in the family.

Among the members of the society, co-operation is highly desirable. This spirit is considered as a social value. A sociable person is appreciated, but an unsociable person is – universally condemned. The later one is sometimes the target of an institutionalised form of social condemnation called “Nong-Laoba” which is a mode of denouncing a man’s behaviour calling him by bad names. It is commonly practised at the night of ‘Yaoshang’ (Holi-festival). Everyone takes part in social works. Every ‘Leikai’ or locality of the Meiteis has an organisation known as ‘Singlup’ which is for looking after the sick, the old, and also performing the last ritual ceremonies of the deceased. McCulloch described thus: “Whether civilization in its advance proportionately increased the happiness of individuals may be questioned. It certainly tends to their isolation. A person in London might die all alone of sickness without its being known to, or even much cared for, by his next door neighbour. This could not well happen in Manipur. Each district divides itself into neighbourhood who again divide into ‘Singlups’ or ‘Wood - clubs’. The elders of the neighbourhood settle all minor disputes occurring in it, and in case of illness of a member they tell of individuals to attend on the sick person, whilst should he die, the wood club to which he belongs brings the wood for his funeral pyre. The sympathy of his neighbour an their attentions must have a soothing and beneficial effect upon the sick persons,
and the depression of spirit to which, more especially in epidemics weighs down a people, must be considerably alleviated”. Sir James Johnstone also describes his experience relating to the fellow feeling of the Meitei communities during calamity. He remarks thus: “There were many deaths in the palace, and public business was at a standstill. I was unable to lay any question before the Durbar, as half the officials were performing the funeral ceremonies of their relations….. Amid this trouble, the attitude of all classes was such as to excite admiration, there were no cases of sick being deserted and everyone appeared calm and collected.”

The Meiteis are very polite and ceremonious in their dealings with the elders and the superiors. Ceremonious behaviour is one of values of a cultured gentleman and lady. The Meiteirol (the Meitei language) has a rich vocabulary of polite and humble words. The Meiteirol used in the Sana Konung (royal palace) is highly fine. McCulloch remarks thus: “In their intercourse the Manipuries are ceremonious. They address one another by the name of the office they may hold, or may have held, or as younger or elder brother”.

To nurse to a guest is another social value. The Meiteis are eager to fulfill the guests to their heart’s contention. It is evident from the social and religious feasts, which hasitate to spend whatever they have on such occasions, Such kind of grand feasts bring reputation to them. “In their social interaction

4. McCulloch, op.cit, p. 22
The Ethics of the Meiteis

the traditional Meiteis observed some norms of reciprocity, such as (1) one should not injure those who have helped them, (2) one should try to help those who helped them, (3) one should avoid fighting with the juniors and the inferiors as far as possible, (4) one should not be rude to the weak, the infirm and the invalid, etc.” These are the fairplay norms and also the norms of civilised society. Persons who are against these norms are generally condemned. Thus these norms should always be honoured highly.

Role, Status and Value

In respect of the traditional socio-political hierarchy, the king occupied the highest post. He was the protector of the lives and other properties of his subjects. He was also the custodian of law and supreme authority in external and internal affairs of the country or the state. In the true sense, an ideal king should be the guardian of his people and authority of all. He should always act in the interest of his people with the consultation of his councillors. If the king fails in his duty or acts against the will of the people, people will revolt against him and he will be dethroned. Under the king, there were many dignitaries and officials who were assigned different roles to administer the state and their social status that were determined by the importance of the position they held and the power they wielded for the welfare of the people. During the regime

5. Shyamkishore, S, Dr., op.cit., p. 139
The Ethics of the Meiteis

of King Loyumba, he made a decree which is known as 'Loyumba-Shinyen'. It is a well written constitution. According to this constitution, the administrative task was divided among a number of departments. The functions of each department and the duties of the officers who look after the department were clearly specified. The country was also classified into six Panas, sub-division. People who belong to the Panas were assigned different duties. Further, it says that people belonging to different family groups were also assigned various roles and position corresponding to their professions. The tradition and convention which were set by King Loyumba was followed by the kings who ruled Manipur afterwards with some modifications and amendments.

The Meitei communities were very particular about their status and position in society. In every important function of the state, the officers of the government occupied their respective seats according to a warrant of precedence. The prizes and awards given by the king were highly valued. So the people tried best to win the royal awards. As James Johnstone wrote, "The permission to wear a special kind of turban, coat or father, or to assume a certain title was more valued than any money reward, and men would exert themselves for years for the coveted distinction. It is charming to see such simple taste and to aspire no higher than to do one's duty and earn the approval of our fellow creatures". The acts of heroism in the service of the king and the people are always remarkable.

7. Johnstone, James, Sir, op.cit., p. 142
The Ethics of the Meiteis

Pena-Shakpa, the ballad singer sings the glory of the great heroes of the past. In a rate or country where people frequently fight-war for the protection and defence of their motherland, those heroes who sacrificed their lives are highly honoured. In the social hierarchy, the Amaiba and the Brahmans also held higher position and status. They performed the religious rituals of the traditional Meiteis and Meitei Vaishnavites. Through these, their services were regarded valuable as the people were deeply religious and ceremonial.

Some Values related with Personal Qualities

The Meiteis were sports loving people. One’s demonstration and activity in sports such as feats of strength, endurance and skill were also highly appreciated. The Meiteis exhibited superb skill in Mukna, wrestling, martial arts; equestrian performances and many other sports. A Mukna-Jatra, a champion of wrestling, receives public applause and highly appreciation. Similarly, Thang-Heiba, a skilled martial artist, who is a well-trained fighter in both armed and unarmed combats is also highly honoured. Such persons underwent regorous training were highly disciplined in their personal habits and conducts. Fortitude acts and calm courage even in the ordinary situations of life are also highly appreciated, because courage are known as Mikithi and usually treated as laughing stocks. Endurance, indifference to pain and calm courage in the face of danger are precious values in the personaility of an individual. Sir James Johnstone said
that the Meiteis "are always cheerful, even on a long and trying much, and are
good honoured under any difficulties and never apparently conscious of fratiq.8
He described again thus: "I remember been in connection with him (Dr. Cambell)
a striking incident showing the courage of Munipoories in suffering. A man who
had been wounded in an encounter had to have an operation performed on his
arm. Dr. Cambell wanted to give him a chloroform as it would be very painful.
But the man refused, saying, 'I will not take anything that intoxicates', and at once
held his arm and submitted to the knife without flinching."9

The traditional society of the Meiteis attached great importance to
cleanliness in personal habits. They took bathing daily before having meals,
usually wore clean white clothes and they were very particular about keeping
their surrounding neat and clean. Unclean or dirty people are laughed at and
looked down upon. They valued cleanliness very much and took great pains for
keeping themselves pure.

The Meitei community has also magnificent aesthetic sense. They
are lovers of natural beauty and creative as well as appreciative. The fine art of
Manipuri gives us ample evidence of their creative skill. Majority of the Meiteis
were experts in performing arts such as dance, music, drama, etc. E.W. Dun wrote
that according to 1881 census, there were 5,000 professional musicians in a
population of a little more than one lakh Meiteis in the valley of Manipur.10 In

9. Ibid., p. 166.
10. Dun, E.W., op.cit., p. 27
those days, learning dance and music were almost compulsory for the girls. In the traditional Meitei society the boys and the girls were given informal education for the all round development of their personality and also to enable them to face practical life fruitfully. Service to the state was compulsory for every male member of the country under the ‘Lallup’ system. Under this system, everybody was compelled to service sincerely for the welfare of the country. Thus every individual was fully aware of his duties and reponsibilities as a loyal subject and took special care to serve the role assigned to him, and also derived satisfaction from the execution of his duties, etc.

Some-Extracts from ‘Langol’ on the Moral and Spiritual Values.

‘Langol’ is an authentic and a learned treatise on moral and spiritual doctrines of Wahengbam Madhav Ram, a well known scholar of Manipur who lived in the 18th century. This work throws light on the moral and spiritual values, approved by the Meitei tradition, the ideals and precepts enunciated in this systematic subject are highly edifying. Some passages from ‘Langol’ with English translation are as follows:

“Namu-pong oibana khongkap chatpham udabana samu khongkap thangbadi laphut phamjing langna mithuneiye;
= Persons who blindly walk along a way fall into the quagmire;

11. Shyamkishore Singh, S., Dr., op.cit., p. 142
The Ethics of the Meiteis

Meenam pongbao watarambabu nakongwapei haibadi lirel tongma lagma sithineiye;
= Deceitful person who till lies and mislead persons are beaten up with case;
Lounam huranbagi pukning phamhong toibadi taibang ayarangna veithuneiye;
= Persons with thievish mentality are usually punished;
Chirol paoral toyambagi yathangwapei haibadi mongba ukairangna kaphatneiye;
= The acts of a man who always tell lies and cheat person will be brought to light one day;
Chenglou tembal yambagi mityeng choida yambadi nawa kongairanga ngakta sineiye;
= A man who is in the habit of flirting will be put to shame and disgraced;
Unbi puning longba thouram mana yambadi matam panganlangna foithuneiye;
= A man whose mind vacilates and who picks up diverse tasks will surely be swept away by the turbulent waves of time.

The author Madhavaham of Langol also highlights a list of undesirable
‘Lang’ (traps) from which mankind should try to escape. They are given below:
The Ethics of the Meiteis

"Love for someone who should be hated, and aversion for someone who should loved; To be credulous, and to follow the evil instigations of some people;
To be unthoughtful of what other people will thinks;
To possess extreme likes and dislikes;
To be over enthusiastic or over joyed;
To culture the habit of exaggeration or under estimation;
To try to convince the people by taking oaths;
To look down other people by abusing;
To be quarrelsome and to antagonise unnecessarily with one's kinsmen';
To do things that would bring about ill -fame to one's family;
Lack of foresight;
To cause damage to others;
To cheat, betray, and to be able to go to any extent in-causing harm to others. etc."

The author Madhav Ram warns us against doing acts of meanness which enshare in different journeys of our lives. According to him all men are equal, and should be treated equally. However, all men are not equally presented by god. People are placed in various stations in life as the fruits of their acts in the previous birth. The author continues'.
The Ethics of the Meiteis

"Korou nongja khudinghu touja matik singtha rouye. Waram asi khangba khovom laibu ningba chingu laibak phaba, handak amam khanglabla, laibak khelai mutlaba, yaibi thawai senglaba, haona sunglouchamphut charaba, sennga charei phadi setlabla, pamingnaba mirel hook, mirel taibung yoithumchak, thaba korou naparamdi hullalaba, pamel una khangba pandamgum kolloi mingthibasung-khangaraba, yaipa mathoi tongsyigi- sung naidaraba, chenglou mityeng apanbadi kurang sawum mitne.

Apam chenglou mithitlabadi yaibisithi mitne, Thamo laimit araba unbi liyet nungenmit, korou marol phaona mitne. Maigei marima, chithek nipal ma, sungdai taratarukma, singai humphu mathoima una mitne, malem leikha tuna maigei mathong sendana unmit chingu liyet nungen mitna likli tareinung goombada changna nungai narakchasinggidi korou nongja khuding maraopingosinggidi chingu laibakphaba mashelbu lamloi lengtinnana yaibi khonghou waithungpham korou nongja khuding chingu lairik heiba kourou nonglen nakhiye yaibi lanthoi chaokhatneiye haidabara."\(^{13}\)

---

13. Medhav Ram, op. cit., p. 8-9
The Ethics of the Meiteis

A free translation of the above passage into English:

Our daily actions are recorded by the Almighty God for assessment. The lucky man who has attained true knowledge and whose mind is always fixed on God knows this fact well. The wise and perfect person possesses true knowledge of the universe and pure heart. He can relish simple boiled food and puts on everything neat and clean, including the cheapest rags. He is not stimulated by praise, nor is he unsuffled by blame. He is not proud of prosperity, nor is he downcast with sorrows in the honour of misfortune. He is not tempted by lust and what pleases the eyes, because he knows that the physical eye is made of perishable flesh and blood. He has powerful inward eye which can penetrate through heaven and earth, that can see the nook and corner of the whole universe. Such a wise and perfect man can have direct vision of the supreme being as if he sees an object in a glass showcase. So, such an enlightened man takes pleasure in the company of learned, perfect and pious man.

Well known or pious man like Lourembam Khongnangthaba, Konok Thengra, Langol Lukhoi, to name just a few of the pre-Sanskritization Meitei civilization, who possessed deep knowledge of the ancient ‘Laoir’ (lore) were enlightened men in the above sense. Common people tried to follow the ideals of good life from the teachings of these pious men.
The Ethics of the Meiteis

It is evident from the above that everyone must control his mind. This will strengthen character, purify the mind and deepen insight. We should not mistake the potential for the actual. The ethics of the Meiteis is not life-negating. This affirms the meaningfulness of human existence. Most ideals are not private dreams. They are rooted in the cosmic scheme determined by God. Man is both soul and body.\textsuperscript{14}

The present day Meitei society is in the process of change. To change in the structure of the society and corresponding change in the comprehensive standards which are called ‘value’. Thus, morality consists in the continued attempt to resist the solicitations of our blind ephemeral impulses and shape our lives in accordance with the enduring ideals of the spiritual. The law of morility is an invitation to be perfect in every individual’s life.

\textsuperscript{14} Bhogeshhore, O, op.cit. p., 191