Chapter-4

Rites and Rituals of Sanamahism

The Meeteis worshipped a number of Gods and Goddesses under their ancient system of religion. Of all these Gods and Goddesses, the most prominent God who was directly connected with the happiness and unhappiness in the life of man was God Sanamahi who was regarded as the king of all deities. Sanamahism does not mean only the worship of God Sanamahi. In this religion a number of other deities who are connected with the Meetei Cosmogony, namely 1) Tengbanba Mapu 2) Ima Leimarel Sidabi 3) Atiya Sidaba 4) Konjil Tengthokpa Pakhangba 5) Nongthang Leima 6) Laikhurembi and a number of deities who are regarded as Laion Laichats of the deities in the cosmogony were also worshipped.¹

Each dwelling house of the Meeteis has a place for the God Sanamahi in the south-western corner and people worship their deity daily at the sunset as a normal routine affair and this deity is worshipped by the Meeteis with full confidence and belief at any critical hours of their life and also on every religious occasion. The life of a Meetei following the Sanamahi religion is full of rites and rituals from birth to death. The necessity felt in the minds of the Meeteis for their observance speaks of the immense importance given by them to their religion. Though many rites and rituals as observed now are influenced by

Hinduism at several points, yet they have not lost their specifically Meetei character.²

It is evident that from the primitive period sacrifice and prayer formed the main element of most of the religions. The religion of the Meeteis embraces all shades of thought and belief from the wandering fancies of primitive superstitions to the highest insight. We come across strange utterances of incantations and spells, charms and witchcrafts often sorcery and magic prevail over the genuine religious spirit. Devotion to the deity is lost in a soulless mechanism of rites and pedantries of formalism.³

A very important prayer of Lord Sanamahi which has been used by most Meeteis in the time of prayer goes as follows:

“Hay Khoimom Lainingthou Sanathong Khaicheng Ahanba Numu taibang maranyai yumgee ningthou taibang meeyoibabu Kaoren San sanbagumna, ayukki konthokpiba numidanggee konsinbiba ayuk chara Nongdambiba numidang chara nongkhaiba, malem Leishemba korou Nongsemba namu taibang mee samba, sembi sabibaggee mapu amairensu nangne, konde khurai tangba songbu cherai tangba maibasu Ibungo nahakna oibenee, kurumacha ahan khoiyum Laigee ahanba ahan taibangpangee mapham khuding sinba thungleba heloi ningthou sanamahirel nadairem cwakmana chingngu natik achouba khoimom ahakpabu tengtha ngamdabagee langjaba

³ Ibid., p. 128.
pumnamak ngakpiyu. Haye Sana khuya thambal leingang mambada nadairem mukmu leiton kol malabi khutapna chanajou chapna nonna khuramjabane pushi nungshangba panabiyu.”

(O, Khoiyum Lainingthou Sanathong Khaicheng Ahanba! Like a cowherd tending cows please tend us, human beings in the daytime and keep us under protection in the night. You are the creator of the earth and the sky and the human beings. You are the architect of everything. You are the physician and the healer. You are the all pervaship spirit. Forgive me for failing to give suitable offerings to you. We pay obeisance to your lotus feet to give us long life.)

The above prayer of the Lord Sanamahi is performed by offering vegetables and rice (athenpot and chengba) at the time of worship. The separate prayer of Lainingthou or Lord Sanamahi at the time of going to bed at night is given below:

“Chingngu ebungo Lainingthou Sanamahi sanathong apanba koloi mingkhei thangamdaba nateekpu ngamkhei naidba, chayee mapan thana korou leibu houbiba nangthoug ma-u lingna namu pongbu thetamlakpa thawai panba khibikpu ayuk konthok numidang konsinbiduna apok ashi nongdambiriba lainingthou ebungo nahakti ha- koubasu nahakne, Ra-koubasu

nahakne, sa-koubasu nahakne shor Sanamahi koubasu nahakne. Ha-mahi, Ra-mahi, Sa-mahi mahirel kou-e, ebungo nahkna nacha nashu nadu nahi roi leiriba pumnamak ayuk konthok numidang konsinbiduna chetna langolbiu lainingthou.”

(O! Chingngu ebungo Lainingthou Sanamahi who is all-powerful and the preserver of all living beings freeing them in the day time and protecting in the night. You are the one who is calle ‘Ha’, ‘Ra’, ‘Sa’ and shor Sanamahi. You are also called Ha-mahi, Ra-mahi, Sa-mahi mahirel. Protect us who are your children in the night after freeing us in the daytime.)

The above hymn is to be recited at the time of prayer in the evening by offering Thaomei Meira and Mekrup (lamp and incense sticks). But according to the different programmes of the worshipping of Lord Sanamahi there are different hymns or prayers and materials for offering. According to the type of worship the prayer or hymn is also slightly added or removed and changed or inchanged. When someone is ill, the worship of Lord Sanamahi is done by offering materials like, fruit, pan, lamp and Sendai Khoiru (wax). It is believed that the recovery of the illness of the patient can be seen by carefully observing the flame of the lamp burning in front of Lord Sanamahi. The worship performed depends upon the time, place, situation, for example, sickness or illness, laiok-tinok (an illness caused when confronted with some evil spirits),

war or battle, burnt, etc. ‘Thou toubá’ (immolation), Chaban thaba (a kind of worship of the Meetei by offering need material), Khayom lakpa (a kind of worship) are performed as different forms of worship. When there was a serious illness in a family an Amaiba was specially engaged to worship God Sanamahi for His blessing by offering candle light and some other particular articles. The following hymn is given for those who are ill to worship Lord Sanamahi by the Amaiba at the time of worship:


(O! Laiyingthou Sanamahi Sanathong Apanba, Lamda leire lamab Tumaba, Nganba, Leipung leppa, Charei lengjao enba. You are the one who is called Korou Awangba Leiranga Korou Anganba. O! Physician of the state and the king and who is known as Khurai Tangba and Cherai Tangba. Please relieve and cure the humble patient from his disease and ailments.)

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After chanting the above prayer and worshipping the Lord, Amaiba again worships Lord Sanamahi with hymn and finishes the prayer with the following chant:

“Hey Laiyingthou! Nanaina Chingngu nangi napaokhol chatcharure anaba asi awa pothaba oihanbiyu, ana hithangbiyu, ana pari handokpiyu.”

(O! Laiyingthou, I have obeyed all your commands. Please give relief to the patient and make him restful and cured.)

The worship of Lord Sanamahi is performed according to the time and situation hitherto followed. The worship of Lord Sanamahi is performed daily in the time of dusk by offering pine wood light. But at present it is substituted by candle light. In the early morning, at the time of prayer it was prayed in the name of Lord Sanamahi to give the grace for the longevity, happy and prosperous life. Whenever someone has to go far for an important work or business it was customary for a Meetei to bow down before Lainingthou Sanamahi at Sanamahi Kachin (South Western corner of the house) before going for His blessings. It was prayed that Lord Sanamahi may go in front of the worshipper as guide and guard to protect from any accident. Sometimes when the king marched in the battle field he carried God Sanamahi at the head of the marching column of soldiers. So, God Sanamahi was called Waira Samang Leppa, Yekna Leikhong Chaikhaiba. On such a belief, Yumburen (the male head of the house) or

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7. Ibid., p. 75.
Yumburenbi (the female head of the house) worships the Lord Sanamahi for the safety and well being of their sons and daughters in every house of Meeteis.

On other hand, such a ritual is performed in fixed or exact date and time related with Lord Sanamahi. This festival is included in the Sanamahi religion. The details of such a ritual are as follows:

1. **Sanamahi Chenghongba**

   The Sanamahi Chenghongba is an inseparable festival of the king and the people who worship Lord Sanamahi. Lord Sanamahi, an important God takes a great role among the Umang Lai (Forest God), Yum Lai (Household deity) of the earth or universe. Lord Sanamahi is closely and deeply worshipped with the firm belief that He is the one who gives our satisfaction, desire and prosperity. It is believed that Lord Sanamahi lessens the suffering and distress whenever there is a death in a family He is worshipped with deep faith and belief. It is also believed that the worship of Lord Sanamahi by the people in the ancient times gave long life of the king of the nation, and showered wealth, prosperity, happiness and goodness. For this reason Sanamahi Chenghongba festival was performed with a tradition from the ancient times. Sanamahi Chenghongba festival is held on the 15\textsuperscript{th} of Enga (May-June) of every year.\(^9\) But in another book entitled ‘The Enatki Harao Kumei’ by Khulem Chandrasekhar, it is mentioned that in the ancient times Sanamahi Chenghongba festival was celebrated in the month of ‘Langban’ (February-March).\(^{10}\)

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This festival is celebrated as a state ritual festival. It was also performed by the people in their own houses by offering rice, cloths, fruits, flowers, etc. Although the programme is performed for the unity of the nation as a whole, it has many exact terms and conditions, rules and regulations and indispensable materials.

The essential materials for the performance of Sanamahi Chenghongba for the Meeteis were–banana leaf, cheng chengkok (rice) 5/6, Laphoi Laphang (minimum Banana) 52, La laton Khara (some Banana sprout leaves), Paya Paral Khara (some wicker, the thin pieces of bamboo), Langthrei Maton Khara (some Eupatorium birmanicum or a kind of flower plant), some duck eggs, sana lupa konyai (some jewelleries), hymn, leihoura khara (A kind of plant), yot khunet 2, shel khunet (coin) 2, some clothes of the God Sanamahi and Goddess Leimarel, thakan (Canopy) and Satra, Yangkok (a kind of flat basket particularly used for winnowing) 10 pieces, a conopy having three stories.\(^\text{11}\)

The exact rules and regulations for the offering of rice or the preparation of Luthaba (dishes) in front of the Lainingthou Sanamahi which is seated in the phambal (throne) are as follows:

1. Mangda Lukilen Ama thagane (A dish of rice is offered in front of God)

2. Pambom yet oi Anida Luk Amamam thagane (rice dishes are offered one in the right and one in the left side of the arm).

3. Phankong Mareegee luk Amamam thagane (Four rice dishes are

\(^\text{11}\) Ibid., p. 61.
offered in the four legs of the throne).

4. Phankhong Makhada Chaning thagane (The chaning i.e, Abrus precatoprius Linn is to be placed under the throne).

Laphoi Laphang Changthokpa (a bunch of bananas having odd number) is to be offered in the 8 sides. A banana is to be kept under the throne and placed with the chaning to lie on the face. A banana has to lie on the back with the face upwards and offered to the chamang (front side). The two iron thrones of the God or Lainingthou are made to lie on the face. The bananas are offered to the nine Laibung thous (divine youths) to lie on the face. On the left side two thrones have to lie on the back. Seven bananas have to lie on the face offered to the seven Lainurahs (divine girls). The offering is also done to the God of the locality or colony (this god protects the area of the colony) and God of locality which lives in the neighbouring colony or locality. With the material of bamboo tubes filled with cheng utong (rice)-1, Mekrup (incense powder)-1 and banana have to be offered there. It is impossible to offer in very large quantity, so a little amount of rice is offered (cheng mute ama) and banana is also to be separated as pieces. The four side-guarding Gods of the nation namely, Thangjing, Marjing, Wangbren and Koubru also offered the rice. The nine khongs (canals) also are offered rice for each. The nine khongs (canals) are (1) Kha khong (2) Laikhong (3) Marong Khong (4) Charoi khong (5) Yambi khong (6) Phisee khong (7) Lilha khong (8) Manung khong and (9) Naongdam khong. And some valuable Gods of the nation are also offered their share; the names of the Gods are
Laiwangba, Wangkhei Ningthou, Yaiskul Thonglen Chaichamba, Thonglen Lakpa, Chakhaba, Mongba Hanba, Konthoujam Yumpham and Hune Narot.\textsuperscript{12}

Flowers are also offered as Leihun hunba to Lainingthou Sanamahi first, secondly, to Shanglen, thirdly, to Nongmai, and lastly to Phura. The essential servers for this programme are- six numbers of Amaiba (Priest), one number of Maichou Pandit (the great priest), one number of Pena Khongba (Pena- a stringed musical instrument of Meeteis made of a sort of fiddle with string of horse hair, the body of which is made of a shell of coconut, khongba mean harper), five numbers of Maibi (Priestess) In this programme three numbers of Amaiba (Priest) sing the song of Ahonglon (kind of hymn song as a song for the abundance of rice in the worship to Lainingthou Sanamahi) followed by the remaining three priests. The Maibis perform the offering to God such as offering of Luktha (rice), Heitha (fruits), and Leitha (flowers). The Maichou Pandit looks after the programme to avoid any mistake. The Amaiba performs the Khayom Lakpa of the nine khongs (canals). (Khayom means a cultic packet for offering to the deities consisting of rice, Langthrei flower and egg within layers of banana leaves). In the chenghonba, the Khayom consisting of rice, one duck egg, Sana Lupa Konyai (gold and silver pieces), three pieces of Langthrei, Lai houla bind the Khayom (Laihoula means a kind of leaves using in the sacred service of God) and bind by the utang wa (utang mean a kind of bamboo plant, wa mean thin bamboo wicker, one coin as Laisen is to be placed in the foot of the phankhong i.e. throne).

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., pp. 61-62.
In this programme the three Maibas or priests sing the hymn of Ahonglen in the following way:

He hou hehou hehou
Hongnemlo Hongnemlo
Hongnemse Hongnemse
Lamlen mada hongnemba
Madaimada hongnemba
Kangleiyonda hongnemba
Pungmayonda hongnemba
Khoiyumthouba hongnemba
Laiyingthoubu hongnemba
Lairenyaina nanong yaina hongnemba
Liklaiirenna Ningthourenna hongnemba
Loidamgidi Thakaoda
Langheigidi Kumkaoda
Khoiyumpuga hongnemba
Sanglengidi Tengmaitheenba Ahummakna
Khabigidi Yomloi houma
Asheigidi khongpham lengna
Kouba kana Lakthong kana
Chingu Waina hongnemba
Thongban Waina hongnemba
Thangyeegidi khongromba Masumakhong
Sora Wairou penba manasum
Wanamanbi Temkha Sum
Tengnamanbi Kouthasum
Hayum Tonba Seihousum
Tonba liklai Seikhumsum
Huyengidi lanigidi
Pamba Keiyekladi Khada tha
Saom Tharcitangdi Thakkathong
Haonu Tonsan longmeinudi Yaidachan
Sumlengidi Maipakpado
Nurahouna Pakhang Houna
Selloigidi langmainingthou chanu
Leimakonsangnu saphabibu
Thawangidi nureisangbu chumbi mapari
Chegai makaraba lalsingmuk
Langbangidi uyungsuk
Sayeegidi Kuhi suk
Sukmegidi Tontangbada
Sarikthangna Khingkhing thangna
Suktongidi Langmai thangna
Pamel Waina khangtap waina
Sukningkangna moining kangna
Loimon hun kurol hun
Chengchatanna maingoutanna
Pamelgidi Thoidinglada
Upalgidi Theingalada
Umulada Tangmalada
Heitougidi mangkhanglada
Huiyengidi Lannigididi
Haonunubu Pantoinubu
Saphabibu Phanlada
Yangkoklada Kanamlada
Loimon phoudi tungda enn
Yambi tanna maingou tanna
Khoiyumthoubu hongnemba
Laiyingthoubu hongnemba
Sanglengidi Tengmaithemba a hum makna
Khabigidi Yombihouna
Khoiyumgidi Laithong hangna
Lairenyaina nanongyaina
Poirei houna khunja houna
Tayum houna naicha houna
Khoiyum thoubu nongnemba
Laiyingthoubu hongnemba
Tara lemla Chengban lemla
Loimom lemla phoubanlemna
Khoiyumthoubu hongnemba
Laiyingthoubu hongnemba
Chingugidi narakubu
Khoiyumgidi nathoujanbu
Poirenbabu khumjaonaba
Wangmanbabu khulhongnababu
Lairenyaidi nanongyaidi
Liklairendi ningthourendi
Khoiyumkhada nakhongkhada
Lairenyaina nanongyaina
Liklaiренna ningthourenna
Khoiyumthouda Laiyingthouda
Nanongyaiga yoиbuaiga
Tambubiga meetreimagaga
Chingu Waina Thongbanwaina
Korou lemma Lansa lemma
Wangban Lemna Paogalemna
Noina Toklabada Ngamdam toklabada
Chingu Channa Nathoujanna
Laienyaina Nanongyaina
Liklaiренna Ningthourenna
Nayuleibu Hongnemleibu
Leipunsibu ewanleibu
Konsillamge

Makon thokki kollo

Hongnemlo Hongnemlo.\textsuperscript{13}

The song of hymn lamentation to the Laiyingthou Sanamahi in Chenghongba programme is given below:

Hayahe Khoiyum Laiyingthou

Awang fatlour Laimakhomba

Chingu yaibi matummagi

Atinga ungleiting athuppada

Taibang apakma punnam

Kajeng thangkok tukumbabu

Chachan hourakpa Laiyingthou-o

Korou thaksi Khaitharakpa

Nungnang Sagangthakta

Laija eroinana

Tarang eepakthakta

Sekmom Kaibi Leebu

Paring leptam humba.

Amam Makhei Leitaba

Atinga Chunglou mithong thingbadagi

Malang Yaibi Kaokum Lamhourakpa.

Korou phanda phamdengba

\textsuperscript{13} Sairem Nilabir, \textit{Laiyingthou Sanamahi Amasung Sanamahi Laining Hingga Eehou}, n. 6, pp. 64-65.
Chingu Yaibe humjaoba
Thawai tilli yaibe Sidaba-o
Khoiyum Sana makhongkhada
Manbi Khudapna
Mukmu Leiton kon
Kaobi Chingaruk.
Khubak Changjou
Chepna Lonna Khurumjarakke.
Hey Khoiyum Laiyingthou
Taibang Namu sangsang Litennaba.
Chingu Yaibi Khonjenlen
Korou awangba Taikhatpa.
Wangbal Afanba Taichinba.
Nongpok Sana Chingtonpal
Yai Maruda Famphamba.
Pamel upunshida Kaidongba
Natik Makhei Khangdaba
Khoira Lechou Naidaba.
Korou Chumitang Kumbabu Napayeng
Wangbal Nongmitangkumbabu
Natam khanna Teranlakke.
Hey Khoiyum Laiyingthou
Sangthong Ningthou Apanba
Nachubu Meigee Machu oiba.

Namingde taret thonbadagee

Ani louthoktuna Manga Thonba

Mangadagee yamalle haiduna Ahum thonba

Mangadagee yamalle haiduna Ahum thonba

Madusu yamalle haiduna ani thonba.

Madusu yamalle haiduna ama thonba

Namingde Sanna (hung?) Kouba hey layingthou

Nangbu Nanaina punemjariye.

Kubi-o.  

At the time of the offering of rice to Lord Sanamahi in the Sanamahi Chenghongba a hymn is chanted. The hymn is given below:-

Chingu Ibungo Khoiyum Laiyingthou

Korou nongshemba malen Leishemba

Naka phamlen Chamma humfunipal

Phampham Wayel Toudok

Tinnadaba Laiyingthou-o

Nangna semba nangna Karigi Chade

Uhei Wahei taojing heipung thon

Chengba phaheinarakpadi

Noinu thumpak kagupna

Sana khongnetna lupa khudanna

Charei phikhum pham.

Taojing manam naibane
Singel leisanglen
Marong Cheigatam asina
Taojing heirang Katlabasu
Chingu aria laibigano
Khoiyum athi thibigano
Tara luklen hou
Yellang mangmatam
Khoiyum nakhong khada
Loidam achit Langban thada
Thaja mapung Leppagum
Tara luklen Katchabasina
Nasanou Leingakpagee
Poirei Pumnahou
Tayum naicha hup
Ashei khongphanglen
Sarik chomjao khing.
Amai nklou tonna
Marong Cheigatam
Atai Eratle.
Napoirei Loimon Chenghongle
Tara luklen tamna
Sana meetyeng ningthibana
Meetyeng sangkheibiro.
Tillang Khoiyotnabiro.
Poirei pumna hou
Tayum naicha hup
Nasu Ibungo Laren nanongyai
Meetlu tongna phampham wayelliba
Khoiyum Laimeita
Chingu Laimei huirababu
Punshi Chahei nungshangba
Wangam Khongdol lomba
Poirei henba wangam thoibabu
Charei figao shana nijariye.
Chingu narankubu Kubiram-o
Khoiyum Nathoujalbu
Lepna tanphanlangeine.
Chingu narambu Khoiyum namaibana
Tintha Laitha watpasu
Chingu nangakthokki
Ngakthokpiram-o
Khoiyum Nakanthokki
Konthokpiram-o.  

15. Ibid., pp. 67-68.
The above hymn is chanted and the Sanamahi Chenghongba programme is concluded. The Laiyingthou Sanamahi having satisfied, gives his people happiness, prosperity, fruitful long life. It is believed by the Meeteis for this reason that the Sanamahi Chenghonba programme was performed from the ancient time.

2. Cheiraoba

Cheiraoba is the New Year’s festival, which takes place in Manipur on the first day of the month of Sajibu (March-April). The name Cheiraoba means literally “to announce by means of a stick”. In earlier times it was the custom for the year to be proclaimed by the heads of the four panas, who wore the distinctive colours of their own pana. They rode on horseback and carried bells attached to the top of sticks. The festival hence received the name Cheiraoba, “announcing by the stick.”

The word Cheiraoba is considered to be derived from Chahi (year) and Laoba (declare) or Chei (stick) and Laoba (declare). Traditionally Cheiraoba means the declaration of the commencement of the New Year by holding a stick with a bell fixed on its top. The holding of this festival shows the significance of time which is represented by Chahi (year). As this festival is held on the first day of the first month of Meetei thapalon (Calender), the festival is now popularly known as Sajibu Cheiraoba. It is also called Kurak-Lang-Taiba (Kumgi Lakyel Taiba).

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Thus, the beautiful tradition changed into “Cheithaba” during the reign of king Kyamba in the second half of the fifteenth century. One man substituted the four panas head.\textsuperscript{18}

The installation of the Cheithaba takes place on the eve of the New Year (the last day of the month ‘Lamda’(February-March) before the king. The Cheithaba for the previous year sits on the king’s right and incoming Cheithaba on his left. During the ceremony both use the old Meitei language. The two Cheithabas change places and then the outgoing Cheithaba addresses the king as follows:

“King Lainingthou, the coming year is my friend’s year (name). Let the king and queen lives long, let it be more prosperous than the past year in the production of rice, fish, other foods, and salt, and let it be richer in everything”. The New Cheithaba then kneels before the king with folded hands and says:

“Lainingthou; from today I bear on my head all thy sins, diseases and misfortunes, shame, mischief, all that is aimed in battle against thee, all that threatens thee, all that is bad and hurtful for thee and thy kingdom.”\textsuperscript{19}

A point deserves a mention here -

“In Cheithaba a person was selected for the purpose by a process of comparing his individual horoscope with that of the

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 93.
\textsuperscript{19} Saroj Nalini Parratt, The Religion of Manipur, n. 16, p. 48.
king. He was held responsible for any calamity that might befall the king, the state and the people. His function was to save the king and the nation from disaster. The year was named after this Cheithaba person as a mark of honour to him………………. The year is represented by the stick and counting of the year is done in terms of the stick. The Cheithaba person is usually selected from among the close associates of the king born under the same star with the king.”

The symbolism of the sticks presented by Higgins regarding the Cheithaba for the year 1926 is as follows-

“Let all the evils such as war and battle, enmity and struggles, fall down at the advent of the new year in which the seasons of the ancient god Pakhangba, who is the head of Gods, fallen from the sky at a happy place, and the God chingshomba the white, who reigns in the north east are invested with the ceremony of heithaba, in which the Cheithaba man performs it with a stick on his shoulder- the stick which exempts the Cheithaba man from the burden of public work when he is seen to carry it on his shoulder on the public road- the stick which can make one conquer great and small kingdoms in battle, the stick which is attached to the bamboo tube in the time of

coronation at Kangla, the stick which is used by warlike young men in fight, the stick which was the hilt of the sword of the God Thangjing, the stick of which the head is known at the first touch, the stick that opens the door of the earth and fills up the underground pit in the month of Sajibu, in the reigns of all kings according to ancient custom.”

Thus, the conception of the Cheithaba is the Cheithaba man take the responsibility of the people and king for the coming New Year from suffering and distress. Now at present in each and every house of the Meeteis the New Year is performed as “Sajibu Cheiraoba”. The exact rule and regulation and obligations for the ritual have been followed by the Meetei as a tradition.

The Sajibu Cheiraoba festival is not a separable programme with the Lainingthou Sanamahi and it is one of the important festivals of the Meetei ethnic group. The Lord Sanamahi has been worshipped by the pibas (head of the male in a clan) of the each clan. The peoples in their clan think that they worship Lord Sanamahi for the whole of the people of their clan. The clan piba worships Lord Sanamahi with the peoples of their clan and worship once in a year in Sajibu Cheiraoba day by offering with essential material, fruit, flower and bread. On the eve of Cheiraoba, before we worship the household deity, houses are thoroughly cleaned and also the rooms of Lainingthou Sanamahi and Ima Leimaren Shidabi are cleaned. For Ima Leimaren Shidabi, Esaifu, the pitcher (we take the pitcher as the symbol of Ima Leimaren Shidabi) is cleaned and

refilled with water again and change the new thakan (conopy), and the clothes of
Lainingthou Sanamahi and Ima Leimaren Shidabi. There is a tradition that bread
will be offered on the day of Cheiraoba preferably or within five days. In the
said day of Cheiraoba we offer bread not only to the Lainingthou Sanamahi and
Ima Leimaren Shidabi but also to the God which exists, in other places of the
home. Offering the bread to the ancestor means not to be giving or eating in the
house of another person (not to be the member of clan and family). To offer the
bread to Lainingthou Sanamahi a hymn is sung, which goes as follows.

Hey Khoiyum Lainingthou
Awang phatlou Laimakhomba.
Santhong pungmai Leppa
Santhong Ningthou apanba
Chingngu Khoiyum Sanamahi Mahiren.
Poirei Maikei marimak
Kumshi Chahi Kumja Asigee
Tinmu Laimu fataba Pumnamak
Tindaibi-o Laitaibi-o
Afa nungai Khibikpu
Charei figao Shana Yajariye.
Ashithong thinbiram-o
Achangthong hangbiram-o
Ayuk nganna konthokpi-o
Numidang Nganna konsinbi-o
Kunja Lakyen taibagee
Likewise, after the hymn is chanted, the Lainingthou Sanamahi is worshipped by the head of the clan or head of the family like Yumburem (the head of the male of a house) and Yumburembi (the female head of of a house). The homage is performed for the satisfaction of Lainingthou Sanamahi. In the day of Cheiraoba, the worship of Lord Sanamahi is performed by the pibas of the clan and also performed by every house of the Meeteis which have worshipped daily Lainingthou Sanamahi and Ima Leimaren Shidabi by offering fruits, vegetables, rice and flowers for homage.

Special worship of the domestic deities Sanamahi and Leimaren is carried out during Cheiraoba. Seasonal fruits and flowers are offered to these lais and the earthen pots which are placed at their sacred spots in the house are cleaned.23

On the day of the Cheiraoba as a tradition the household daily utensils used by the family members are replaced by the new utensils. But now it is used by washing the old utensils. On this day the offering of the fruits and vegetables as athenpot (display of foodstuff for presentation or offering) to the Lainingthou Sanamahi and Ima Leimaren Shidabi and praying for the long life, prosperity, happiness and wealthy life is observed. Then the vegetables are cooked neat and clean in different items. These cooked items are arranged in three dishes and to left out over the gate of the house. The following lines substantiate this point:

On the eve of Cheiraoba houses are thoroughly cleaned and old utensils are replaced by new ones. During the festival special worship of Sanamahi and

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22. Sairem Nilabir, Laiyingthou Sanamahi Amasung Sanamahi Laining Hinggat Eehou, n. 6, p. 69.
Leimarel is performed. Further a rite is performed at the gate of the house for long life and prosperity of the members of the family. Three portions of rice are offered for the Cheithaba of the past year, the Cheithaba of the present year and that of the coming year.\textsuperscript{24}

On the day of the Cheiraoba, the cooked and prepared food items are to be offered at the gate of the house in the area neat and clean in three portions (almost all the people have to offer one portion of rice). The three portions of the offered rice, the left side portion of the offered rice is for the last year day of Cheiraoba, the middle portion of the offered rice is for the next year and right side portion is for the present year of Cheiraoba. The gods who have taken a little portion of offering of rice are (1) Hannu Kokchao, (2) Hannu Laikham and (3) Khundahanba and the major portion is to be taken by the gods (1) Lammaba Tumaba (2) Lamsenba Tusenba (3) Kumsana Kumliklai. This type of offering rice to the god is known as Konthong Chaktha (Konthong- gate, chaktha-offering of rice) or Lamlai Chaktha (Lam-land or area, Lai-God).\textsuperscript{25}

The deities who are said to partake of these offerings are Lammaba Tumaba (Lord of my land), Kumsana Kumliklai (the golden year) and Iram Shemba Tushemba (guardian of my land). This ceremony is really a prayer to the Supreme Lord who is the all encompassing time.\textsuperscript{26}

There is an important aspect to be noted in respect of the offering of rice. In the area of the offering of rice over the gate, the area is made neat and clean.
by washing and made ready for the offer. After the preparation of food items, the cooked food is offered in the mentioned area. Almost all the people have to offer one portion of rice. Some people have, however, offered three portions of rice. The offering at the gate is not to be eaten by anyone, and was meant for the gods only. This is the tradition of the nation. The Cheiraoba observance is forbidden in particular house where some death or birth of a close relative happen for some specified days. Only after sanctification ‘cheiraoba’ can be observed there.\footnote{Khulem Chandrasekhar Singh, \textit{Enatki Harao Kummei}, n. 10, pp. 28-29.}

But, there is little difference about the offering of rice in the second or middle portion of rice in Sairem Nilabilir’s and Khulen Chandrasekhar Singh’s writings.

Each and every household in the Meetei family performs the Cheiraoba programme and pray to Lainingthou Sanamahi to give the family long life, wealth, food health and prosperity in the following year. In short, in the day of Cheiraoba it is prayed to give the grace by worshipping Lainingthou Sanamahi.

There are some rites and rituals related with Cheiraoba festival as included in the Sanamahi religion, for example- (a) Saroi Khangba (b) Usil and Shingshatpa.

a. **Saroi Khangba:**

The Saroi Khangba is performed on the first Saturday of the month ‘Lamta’ (February-March). It is performed in the border of an area according to the size of the colony big or small by the elderly females of the locality (Saroi-
the evil spirits, Khangba-propitiation). This is the rite of propitiation and appeasement of the Sarois, the evil spirits. From each home edible item such as rice, vegetables, sweets and others are collected and offered. The elderly females assemble in a house before going for Saroi Khangba. They worship the Lainingthou Sanamahi and Ima Leimarel Shidabi residing in the home of which they assembled with the materials and pray “not to face or come across the bad evil spirits on the road”. After the end of Saroi khangba they don’t go to their homes. Again they return to that house they assembled before and worship Lainingthou Sanamahi and Ima Leimarel Shidabi reciting by the words that ‘they have returned without any obstacles and that they keep away all the diseases, sickness, bad evil spirits, rubbish, and laithung- tinthung (a kind of disease given to someone by God for doing sins). They further worship to give the grace to perform the awe of Saroi Khangba in the next first Saturday of Lamta and so to give the wealth and prosperity to the locality.

b. Ushil and Shingshatpa:

In the dusk of the ‘first Saturday’ in the month of ‘Lamta’ (February-March), the number of family members of a family represented by the same number of Ngamu (mudfish) ushil (representing the each member of the family) is performed in the pond. The ushil is performed not to be present in the shingthekpa (accounting of stick) but to be present in the shingshatpa and thus pray the Lainingthou Sanamahi for the new coming year by offering rice, new vegetables, sweets and flowers by reciting the words- “Your servants or

29. Sairem Nilabir, Laiyingthou Sanamahi Amasung Sanamahi Laining Hinggat Eeho, n. 6, p. 70.
attendants, we are offering Ngamus and representing the members of the family to the give the grace to worship Lainingthou Sanamahi and to live in, prosperity, long life and excellence. On this day we worship Lainingthou Sanamahi by doing ushil in the day of Shingtek Shingthaba. Shingtek Shingthaba is the counting of stick as representing the bodies who would die in this year. Shingtek Shingthaba is taken to be a great important ceremony by the Meeteis since this is connected with the life of Meeteis to live or to die in the year. It is the traditional belief of the Meeteis that there is Lai-Khundin (assemble of the deities) on every Saturday of the month of Lamta, the last month of the Meetei calendar). In this assembly, the number of sticks have been counted for those persons who would die during the coming year. On the eve of Cheiraoba there is the ceremony called Shingshatpa. (Shing-stick, Shatpa-take out or withdraw), which mean withdrawal of lives from the divine counting. The Shingtek shingtha is performed in the Heibok hill, front of the Hiyangthang Lairembi at midnight, when the people are all asleep and perfectly silent. In this day, at midnight Lainingthou Sanamahi also goes to present the shingtek shingtha to the Lai-Khundin (assembly of gods) by wearing iron Sandal and handling a walking stick. The place Heibok hill is also known as Khoiyum Ching (hill of gods) because in this hill almost all the Khoiyums (almighties or gods) have assembled as Lai-Khundin. Those who do not want to die have to be represented by the Ngamu (mudfish) as ushil. For this reason we worship Lord Lainingthou Sanamahi to give the grace not to be included in the count of the stick on the first

30. Ibid., pp. 70-71.
Saturday of Lamta. The materials for the shingshatpa are one cloth for Lainingthou (male deity), one cloth for Lairemma (female deity), one canopy, some gold and iron, fifteen bamboo tubes filled with kabok akhingba (puffed rice), fruits and flowers, an earthen pot of molasses and ten candles made of beeswax. After the performance of appeasement rites the maibas (priests) remove from the sticks those representing people whose lives have been reprieved.

c. Ancestral Rites:

The worship of Ancestor or Apokpa rites also belongs to the Sanamahi Religion. This is the worship of the ancestor by the Meeties. Ancestor is to be known as the person who has produced human beings. The people who have died like father, grandfather and great forefather have been remembered and worshipped. The Meeteis worship ancestor as God. Each clan has a different ancestor to worship. For example- The Mangang or Ningthouja clan have worshipped their ancestor in the month of Enga (May-June). Other clans too have also different time and place for their ancestor worship. The Luwang clan have worshipped their ancestor in Wakching (December-January), Khuman clans worship their ancestors in the Sajibu (March-April), Angom have Engen (June-July), Moirang have Lamta (February-March), Kha-Nganba have Kalen (April-May) and Sarang Leishangthem have Fairen (January-February). And also each clan or Salai has different hymn and material to be used in the time of worship.

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32. Sairem Nilabar, Laiyingthou Sanamahi Amasung Sanamahi Laining Hinggat Eehou, n. 6, p. 71.
The ancestor worship or Apokpa Khurumba (bowing down to the Apokpa) is an important ritual to be observed in a proper manner by each household. The Apokpas are the deceased makers of the previous three generations (the father, grandfather and great grandfather). A ceremony is held at night during the full moon in which they are invited to attend the ‘khurumba’ on the new moon day after sunset. Various offerings are kept on banana leaves which are arranged in a special way. These include cloths, fruits, betel leaves and betel nut, vegetable and fish. The raw food is offered to Sanamahi by the maiba. Then the food is cooked with water drawn from an area sacred to the particular sagei to which the family belongs. The three ancestors are believed to take food when all lights are extinguished and everybody leaves the place. Later the food is consumed only by the household. It must not be taken by anybody outside the sagei even the maiba is not allowed to eat this food.\footnote{L. Bhagyachandra Singh, \textit{A Critical Study of Religious Philosophy of the Meeteis before the Advent of Vaishnavism in Manipur}, n. 2, p. 126.}

The above point is deeply believed by the Meeteis ethnic group about the worshipping of ancestor.

\textbf{d. Mera Mengtongba:}

The Mera Mentongba also belongs to the Sanamahi religion. It is performed on the full moon of Mera (September-October). The Mera mentongba is a very valuable form of worship and is a festival of the nation of Meeteis. This said programme would be performed to bring prosperity and peace to the nation.

Mera Mentongba is a festival held for five days commencing on the full moon day of Mera. It is a festival in which people worship Lord Sanamahi and
Pakhangba along with the seven Lainurahs (divine girls), nine Laipungthous (divine youths) and the Umang Lais (gods of forests). Sanamahi as the presiding deity represents the essence of the life of the universe and dwells in everything and being, Pakhangba as the outward ruling deity of the created universe. Sanamahi is the Thawaien-the thawai of the thawai (the supreme life of all lives) and Pakhangba is the milel, the show or image of the Lord. Since the thawai and the mi always go together, Sanamahi and Pakhangba are worshipped together in order to bring about a sense of completeness in the mind of the worshipper. This festival is celebrated to realize the ultimate significance of the two main aspects of the ultimate reality, the potential essence all things and beings on the one hand, and the manifest universe on the other.\(^{36}\)

Thus the ‘Mera Mentongba’ is performed by the Meeteis as a valuable festival belonging to the Sanamahi religion. Sanamahi religion is not only the worship of Lord Lainingthou Sanamahi. In this religion many gods and goddesses like, Apokpa (Ancestor), Umang Lai (God of forest) and Lainingthou and Lairrembi are also worshipped. However, Lord Lainingthou Sanamahi is the supreme God.

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\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 99.