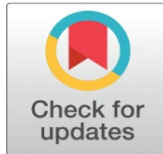
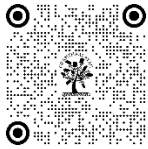


RITUAL PRACTICES OF THE MEETEIS

Waikhom Renuka Devi¹✉

¹Assistant Professor, Pravabati College, Mayang Imphal, Manipur



Corresponding Author

Waikhom Renuka Devi,
journalpublication24@gmail.com

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.2445](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.2445)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

The paper tries to give a brief analysis the critical, calendrical and cyclical rituals practice by the Meetei. Here the performance of the rituals has discussed who perform the rituals in the Meetei society and what the ingredients required for the performance of the rituals by taking some representative rituals for further elaboration. These rituals have been handed down from generations. Many of them are still practice today. The rituals like the rites which are performed during draught or birth or death of an individual are still practice forms of rituals among the Meeteis. All these rituals have their cultural significance and importance to the society and individuals in the society and they demonstrate the general belief system and practice system among the Meeteis.

Keywords: Ritual, Meitei, Ceremony, Practice, Worship

INTRODUCTION

Every community has their own rituals associated with their cultures and belief systems and they have been observing since the early days of human history. Rituals are the religious events in successive order that have been handed down from generation to generation. The *Meeteis* have also been performing many ritualistic activities since time early period. They have the practice of performing different ritualistic activities by worshipping different gods in a year. The ritualistic performance of the Meeteis can be analyzed in three forms- critical ritual, calendrical ritual and cyclical ritual as mentioned by John J. Collins in his book **Anthropology: Culture, Society and Evolution**. In short, critical ritual is an immediate ritual; calendrical rituals are those which are performed on particular date or month of a year and cyclic rituals are those which are performed occasionally marking significant biological and sociological events in life. A brief discussion on the types of rituals with reference to the prevalent practices among the Meeteis is attempted here.

1. CRITICAL RITUAL

Critical ritual refers to the ritual that occurs suddenly. This ritual is performed when an unavoidable or unwanted situation arises and its occurrence is completely unpredictable. It is not tied down to a particular date and time. It includes the rituals which are performed at the time of war, body posses by the evil spirits, unwanted entry of wild

animals and birds inside the house, building of beehive inside or near a house, famine and drought etc. The Meetei society consider such incidents as inauspicious and bring bad luck. So since time immemorial, our forefathers performed critical rituals to protect themselves from the unwanted happenings that would befall to their lives. Details about the such ritualistic performances to ward off from the ill and unwanted happenings are clearly mentioned *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the royal chronicle of Manipur and in the old texts like *Thirel Laayaat*, *Nunglon* and *Khunung Lichat Shajat* etc. In the old text *Thirel Laayaat*, it is mentioned that such critical rituals were performed at the time of draught in the land as:

Nonglumbana langmaiching kadana eeroi machi khubom phaba ama tuduna maikei chithek nipanda sadum ngatum hunna latkadabane. Latlabaga chingtonta pukhri ama leibane. Eesing leitana kangna leiba adubu nonglumbuna konyai thaduna langmaichingda akangba leipak adudgi pukhri thalna soukhatlakpane. (N.Ibochouba, 1981, p.41)

[The free translation of the above lines goes like this - the priest (Nonglumba) conducts a ritual on Nongmaiching hill by offering buffalo flesh at eight different sides. There is a pond at the hilltop. The priest conducts the ritual of konyai thaba at a dry pond and water emerges from the dry sand until the pond is full.]

The Meetei society believes that draught can be stopped by performing such a ritual at the Nongmaiching hill. Likewise, *Cheitharol Kumbaba* also records the rituals to be performed at the time of war. Even today, performance of many critical rituals can be seen among the Meetei community.

2. CALENDRIAL RITUAL

Calendrical ritual refers to the ritual which occurs on monthly or on a yearly basis. Such a type of ritual is completely predictable and is tied down on a particular date and time. There are various types of calendrical ritual in Meetei. Some of them are *Kongba Leithong Phatpa*, *Sajibu Leikhun Phunba*, *Kurak Lamdaiba*, *Shing Shatpa*, *Sanamahi Cheng Hongba*, *Pakhangba Cheng Hongba*, *Lamta Thangja Saroi Khangba*, *Mera Men Tongba*, *Ayang Eeruppa* etc. Among these rituals, *Lamta Thangja Sharoi Khangba* ritual is discussed below.

Lamta Thangja Sharoi Khangba

Lamta Thangja Sharoi Khangba is a kind of ritual that is held on the first and second Saturday of the month of *Lamta* (February-March). Meetei people believe that this ritual has been practicing since time immemorial. In the first and second Saturday of the month of *Lamta*, *sharoi ngaroi* (evil spirits) of the current year would meet the evil spirits of the succeeding year at the diversion road which is the confluence of three different roads. It is commonly known the Meeteis as *lamlong ahum phangba*. At this spot, current year's *sharoi ngaroi* will take retirement and handover their duties to coming year's *sharoi ngaroi* and count the number of people which would die in the coming year. Counting and making a list of those that would die is called *shingthek shingthaba* in Manipuri. Actually, the ritual *sharoi khangba* is performed to exclude those people who are bound to die in the coming year from the impending danger in their lives. In this ritual, people offer rice and vegetables to satisfy the evil spirits called *sharoi ngaroi* and are prayed to be saved by excluding those people from the list of deaths by appeasing the evil spirits through this ritualistic performance. This ritual was introduced by *Lairembi Taret* [Seven Angels]

Sharoi khanba houdokkhiba laidi Heipokleima Monshabi, Lalambung Leima Hemoibi, Nongmeibung Leima Emoinu, Langjingleima Piyanu, Liwaleima Tengolchaibi, Chingaleima lanheibi, Pishumleima Shaphabi, makhoi taret asina kum adu pugadaba sharoiga chatkhigadaba sharoiga lallup sinnaba numitsida kum aduda ana-ayek ngakpiduna eengna nungaina panba yannaba pija-pithak touduna pelhankhiba adugi matou tamduna leikaigi nupi ahansingna sharoi khang-i. (Waikhom Romesh, 2003, p:98)

[A free translation of the above quotation can be given like this- the seven angels namely Hipokleima Monshabi, Lalambungleima Hemoibi, Nongmeibung Leima Emoinu, Langjingleima Piyanu, Liwaleima Tengolchaibi, Chingaleima Lanheibi, Pishumleima Shaphabi conducted the sharoi khangba ritual. On this day, the sharoi ngaroi meet and exchange their duties (*lallupshinba*). They also offer foods to the sharoi ngaroi to satisfy them and pray for better life against the bad things that might happen to the people.]

Nowadays, seven aged women of every locality conducts sharoi khangba as an unavoidable ritual every year. This ritual of *sharoi khangba* is usually practice in the morning time of the day. *Sharoi khangba* can be divided into two types- one which is conducted by the members of a locality for betterment of their life and the other one which is conducted by the royal priestess of Manipur for the betterment of kingdom and safety of the king. As a part of the *Lamta Thangja sharoi khanba*, every household of the Meeteis prays to the supreme God *Lainingthou Sanamahi* which resides in every household of the Meeteis by candle, incense stick and as plate filled with vegetables, which is known as *athenpot* in Manipuri. There is an important reason behind this which is mentioned below:

Lamta Thangja ahanba numitta lai khundin lokta taibang kumei yaoroidaba meegi chei mashing thektuna thektuna thaba yaode, asumna shing thaba asi kana khang-ee ui haibada yumgi lainingthoudi khang-i ui haiduna Lainingthouda shing thaba yaobiganu haina athenpot kattuna thounijagani. (N.Mera, 2019, p. 143)

(The above passage can be translated as- the process of counting the number of people who would be death in the coming year and making list of them by the sharoi ngaroi can easily be seen by Lord Sanamahi, the supreme God. So, every family prays and asks the Lord for excluding their names from the list and pray to protect them from the danger.) For this reason, the Meeteis believe that the sharoi khangba ritual is one of the most important.

3. CYCLICAL RITUAL

Cyclical ritual refers to the ritual which is performed at the arrival of key periods in an individual's life. This type of ritual is predictable but it is not tied down to a specific date or time. Life cycle ritual includes the ceremonies that are related to birth, marriage and death of an individual's life. Actually, this ritual takes important role of a life which is embedded with religion. The *Meeteis* conduct life cycle ritual in every key period of an individual from birth to death. There are so many rite de passage activities need to be done by the *Meeteis*. Among them, Heiso i epan thaba ritual which is related to childbirth is briefly discussed as follows:

HEISOI EEPAN THABA

Heiso i epan thaba or epan thaba ritual is performed on the sixth day after the birth of a child. Its ceremonial procedures can be separated as those performed in the morning and those which are performed in the evening. This type of ritual is conducted by both the *amaiba* (priest) and *amaibi* (priestess). The first ritual of epan thaba starts from the early morning on the sixth day of the childbirth. The morning ritual is performed by the *amaibi*. As a part of the ritual, two basket full of paddy upon which a circular band of seven different types of fishes, a Meitei thum (salt in a flat round form) and ginger are offered to the sun god and prayer is made for the child's good life.

Next the *singju eenba ritual* (feeding traditional vegetable salad to the child) is performed by the *amaibi*. In this, the *amaibi* uses a *yangkok* (a kind of traditional basket particularly used for winnowing) for making *singju* (traditional vegetable salad). Rice, taro, *Meitei thum*, chilli, wild fig and *Meitei ngamu leirou* (dried snakehead murrel) etc are the ingredients of the salad. *Amaibi* makes the salad by mixing all the ingredients and places it on the banana leaves which then placed on the *yangkok* at six different positions. Then the *amaibi* acts like she is feeding the salad to the newly born child by chanting a few ritualistic words. As a part of this salad feeding ritual, the *amaibi* places the infant on the *yangkok* in opposite side of the infant's mother. Then she swings the *yangkok* and asks if you want to take the child or the *yangkok*. At this, the mother replies that she will take the child. Mother takes up the child from *yangkok* and place some money in exchange of the child. It is like buying the child and its process is recorded on in the book *Eeraat Thouram Thounirol as : Thouram asigi sharuk ama oina angang mamagi manakta leiriba yotshabi adugi makhada mei hou-i*. Maibina nakal amada phammi. Maibina angangu yangkokta haplaga yotshabi mapada wangkhatna pairaga nacha lougera, yangkok lougera haina yangkoktu koihai hai. Mama aduna yangkok louroi, eecha louge haina khummi. Asumna ahumlak touraba matungda maibiduna amauk- nacha pambara, lupa pambara? Nacha pambara, Sana pambara?-Haina amuk hang-i. Mamaduna lupasu pamde sanasu pamde, echa pami- haina khummi. Maibiduda mamaduna sel mayek ama pi aduga maibi adudagi machadu loushilli. Machadu matambakta pamlaga chejet konshilli. (Sairem Nilbir, 2015, p. 8).

[A free translation of the above quotation can given as follows- as a part of this ritual, a fire is set under the tripod which is near the child and mother. The priestess and the mother sit in opposite sides. The priestess puts the child in the *yangkok* and lifting high above the tripod and by swing the *yangkok*, she asks the mother if she wants to take the child or the *yangkok*. At this the mother replies that she won't take the *yangkok* but will take her child. After repeating this for three times, the priestess again asks the mother if she wants her child or silver?; or if she wants her child or gold? The mother then replies that she neither wants silver nor gold but she wants her child. The mother gives a coin to the priestess and takes back her child. The mother takes her child to her lap and embraces her child.]

The other is one is the evening session. This session is performed mainly for a healthy and longlasting life with good fortune for the child. It is conducted by a priest. According to the old text *Khunung Lichat Sajat*, on epan thaba day, the Meiteis worship Laibak Khellai Yekpa or Nongdamba Lai (god of fate). This worship is performed next to the bed of the child by offering the essential traditional ingredients to the god of fate. After this, maternal uncle shoots arrows at different directions. Bow and arrow are also important items in this worship of epan thaba. The maternal uncle shoots the arrow in the *Chingkhei* (east), *Thangjing* (west), *Wangbren* (south) and *Koubu* (north) respectively as an offering to protect the child from evils. The fifth and last arrows are not shot. But they are used to take aim at the sky and the earth

respectively. The last and bow are kept in the house. The bow and arrow are considered strength of the child amongst the *Meeteis*. From the Meetei belief system, these bow and arrow can be used in medicinal purposes when the child is down with unknown illness. *Heisoï eepan thaba* ritual is, thus, a ritual performed for the child's better future with a healthy and longlasting life.

CONCLUSION

Last but not the least the above discussion shows that John J. Collins three types of rituals are found in Meetei Rituals. There are so many rituals have been continuing from the time immemorial of Meetei. Meetei people has the great belief systems as well as the sense of fearing unknown superpowers of Gods and demigods and worship them to protect the lives. Besides, culture and traditions of Meetei can be defined as an opulent from the study of current performing festivals, ritual ceremonies and so on.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Collins, J. John. (1975), *Anthropolgy: Culture, Society and Evolution*. Prentice Hall.
- Ibochouba, N. (Ed). (1981). *Thiren Laayat*. Imphal.
- Khagemba phaoba), (unpublished thesis), Manipur University, Canchipur.
- Madhav, Thongam, & Khelchandra, Ningthoujam (1970). *Khunung Lichat Shajat*. Imphal.
- Mangang. N. Mera. (2019). *Eikhoigi Thouramlon* (5 th ed.). Imphal
- Nilbir, Sairem. (2015). *Eerat Thouran Thounirol* (2 nd ed.). Imphal.
- Romesh, Waikhom. (2003). *Anganba Manipur Culturegi Mashak* (Meidingu Kiyambadagi