

Rites And Rituals Of The Meitei From Birth To Marriage

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Abstract: *The Meitei of Manipur performed rites and rituals from birth to death. The Meitei performed birth ritual in a great honor. In the past after the birth baby, the umbilical cord was cut off by a sharp bamboo knife. Meitei performed birth rituals on the sixth day of the baby. In the ritual, baby is put in the winnowing fan and rock three times above the fire. After the birth of the baby the house is impure for eleven day. Sanctification of house is done by the priest on the twelve day of the baby. It is not allowed to feed anything except milk to the child before 'chak umba' ceremony. This ceremony is performed on five to seven month of the baby. A ceremony called 'Nahut Nareng' (ear piercing ceremony) is performed when the child reach three, five or seven year. Marriage ceremony is performed for three days. Before one or two days of marriage a ceremony called 'Heijingpot' is performed. Marriage ritual is performed in the bride's house. In the five days after marriage ceremony called 'Firuk Nungsang Kaiba' is performed'. On the next day great grant feast is performed called 'tarukni chak kouba'.*

Keywords: *Meitei, Rite, Ritual, Birth, Marriage.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A number of rituals and ceremonies are performed from birth to death in the life cycle of the Meiteis. Meitei performed birth and marriage rituals in a great honor. The paper is focused on the Birth and marriage rituals of the Meitei.

II. BIRTH RITUALS OF THE MEITEI

In the past, after the birth of the baby, the umbilical cord was cut off by a sharp bamboo knife known as 'wakthou'. The reason for cutting by the bamboo knife is due to the belief that just as the bamboo grows gradually in uniformity; the baby will also grow up in healthy in uniform stage. The umbilical cord was then put in the earthen pot covered with earthen lid and buried at the corner of the house. This is done for the good fortune of the baby.

The birth rituals ceremony of the baby is performed on the sixth day of the baby. This ritual is known as 'Ipalthaba' or 'Yupalthaba'. 'Ipalthaba' is a worshipped on various gods. Firstly goddess 'Pitai Khomtaibi' is worshipped. This deity is mainly worshipped because the Meitei's belief that this goddess looks after the baby since the commencement of

pregnancy. Further in the ceremony 'foudang fou' (a basket full of paddy) is included. A pair of salt plate and a pair of coins were place above the 'foudang fou'. Two pays (thin bamboo stripes) are tied by both ends to the paddy basket believing it to be the handle of the paddy basket. A garland of seven 'Ngari' (fermented fish) known as 'Ngari pareng achumba' are place above the paddy. These items are especially offered to the deity 'Laklao Leima' for the immunity of baby from cold and cough.

After that there is prepared of 'singju' (a raw vegetable mixture) by the maibi (priest lady). It is prepared with the 'Heibi mana' (meddler leaves), yendem (alocacia), banana stem, roasted fish, salt, chilli, a handful of rice and 'ngari' (fermented fish). The above items are prepared in the babana leaf and divided into seven parts. Then the Maibi pretends of feeding the 'singju' to the baby. It is done to ensure the long life of the baby from Meitei deities, 'Mangang, Luwang and Khuman'. Whatever offered to the baby was placed in the winnowing fan (yangkok) and carried outside the gate and again offered to deity 'Pitai Khomdaibi'. This offered is done to carry away the ill health, weakness and ignorance from the baby. After finished the offering to 'Pitai Khomdaibi' at he gate, the Maibi again came inside the house and further continue the rituals. The baby was then put in the

winnowing fan and rocked it three times above the burning fire. The 'maibi' then asks the mother to choose between the baby and winnowing fan. The mothers reply only the baby. Then the priest lady gives the baby to the mother. The reason for putting the baby in the winnowing fan is that, the Meitei considered the shape of the earth is like that of winnowing fan i.e. round. Though the baby is given birth by the mother but it will be brought up in the earth. The baby is to be brought up by the mother earth not by the parents. As a mark of respect to the mother earth, the baby is placed above the winnowing fan. The above mentioned rituals are performed in the morning.

There is also performed another ritual in the evening. This ritual is mainly begging to Pitai Khomdaibi for the long life and good health of the baby. In this an 'eratphu' (an earthen pitcher containing water) is offered to the deity Pitai Khomdaibi. On the one side, the maternal uncle of the baby shoots arrows in four directions beginning from the north east and ending on the North West. This rite is performed for the purpose of driving away evil from the child. By doing so, the birth rituals ceremony came to end.

In Meitei society, it is widely believed that after the birth of a baby, the house is impure for eleven days. Another ceremony for the sanctification of house is performed on the twelfth day of the baby. Both the baby and the mother are taken bath on this day. The ceremony is performed in morning. In this a priest sanctified the house by performing small rites. After that, the baby, mother and the house are treated as sacred.

In the Meitei culture, a child is not allowed to feed anything except milk before 'Chak-Umba' (feeding ceremony). The ceremony is performed on five to seventh month of the baby. The ceremony is performed in morning. An 'Athenpot' (A basket of vegetables containing some rice) is offered to 'Sanamahi' (household deity) and begging for the long life of the baby. Seven different kinds of fishes are cooked. The well cooked food is offered to 'Apokpa' (lineage deity) deity begging for long life of the baby. Rice feeding ceremony is held at 'Mangol' (Verandah). The mother holding the baby and sit on the verandah of the house. Then the mother feed the dishes to the child for five times. Further, five items such as piece of earth, gold, silver, paddy and a book are kept in front of the child. The first time that the child touches, determined the course of life of the child.

When the child reaches three, five or seven years, another ceremony called Nahut-Nareng (ear piercing ceremony) is performed. This ceremony cannot be held before completing three years. Before one day ahead, a priest performed a small ritual in the evening. In that three girls collect water from the pound in earthen pots for the ritual. While collecting water from the pound, flowers are offered to the deity 'Ireima' (water deity) in water and worshipped for blessing them. Only then the water is collected in three small earthen pots. Then the earthen pots are kept in a sacred place for the next day ritual.

For the ritual, an 'Iratphu' (earthen pot) and 'Mei Iratpa' (fire worship) are essential. For 'Mei Iratpa', first the 'Pafan' (kind of drawing) is drawn on the ground by the flour. This 'Pafan' represents the human body. The 'Pafan' is drawn for the aims of keeping the body and soul together for a long time. The Eratphu is again placed above the 'Kanga Men Pafan'.

Nearby the fire place, another three 'phambals' (alter) are placed for 'Mangang, Luwang, Khuman dieties'. Three 'athenpot' (three basket of vegetables) containing small amount of rice are offered to the 'Phambal'. Again a 'Kubipot' is prepared for the almighty God. 'Kubipot' is an item containing a Kambi (earthen lid), rice, a banana, a papaya, a petal of cotton of flower, a Lai phidol (a small wrapper), a small Inaphi (a small long cloth), and a scented fruit, a coin, betel nut and leaf, and some other fruits. These items are offered to the almighty God for the happiness and long life of the child.

In the fireplace, the elements to be burned are small branches of Heibong (fig), Shai (a king of tree), boroi (Indian plum), heikhru (gooseberry), heinous (mango), nongleishang (kind of tree). The ritual commences on the summoning of almighty in the 'Iratphu'. On the other side, the child to be evolved in the ritual is cleanly shaved and birth. Meanwhile, the priest began the fire worship. The seven items of different trees mentioned are offered to the fire. The child sit near the ritual's place with their parents and priest started chanting. In the process, the same three girls again collect the 'Chaphu of water' and pour above the child. The pouring of water is repeated for three times alternately. After finished the pouring of water, the child is dressed with new cloths and again set along with their parents near the fire place. They offer flower to the raging ritual fire. The parents prayed for good health, long life and to dispel evil spirits for their child. Finally, parents again bowed to fire and begging a brilliant life like fire for the child. After that the ear of the child is pierced by an experienced person and ear ring is inserted in the hole. On the other hand, in this present society piercing of ear is done at the time of 'Yumshengba' or 'Ipanhaba'. But the 'Nahut-Nareng' ceremony is still performed in a great honor. If ear piercing is done in the 'Yumshengba' then in the ceremony of 'Nahut-Nareng' the earring is again changed to a new one.

III. MARRIAGE RITUALS

In Meitei society, the boys are given the right to make a free choice of their own mate. The parents of the groom go to the house of the bride and ask for her hand. It is called 'Nupi Haiba'. After that a date is fixed for the marriage. Before one or two days of marriage, a ceremony called 'Heijingpot' is performed. In the ceremony, the horoscopes of both the groom and bride are exchanged. The elders and invitees from the groom's side carried Heijing Kharai, athelpot, clothing and ornaments. 'Heijing kharai' is a basket containing Heikru (gooseberry), Heining (a fruit), Heiri (a kind of fruit), Heitup (wild apple), Heijang (citron) and Heikha (plum). These baskets of 'athenpot' and 'heijing kharai' are offered to the household deity of the bride. In the rituals the father of the bride and groom pray to the deity. After this the items carried offered to the deity is shared to all those present in the ceremony. Then the father of bride and groom exchange the betel nut and leaves by expressing they are relatives. The above ritual is performed in the morning.

In the evening there is performed a ceremony called 'apok asha thaba'. The ritual is performed at the verandah or at courtyard. The ritual is performed on the day of the

'heijingpot'. The ceremony is consisting of a prayer to 'sagei apokpa' (lineage god). The things offered to this deity can be eat only the member of the particular sagei (lineage). The people of other lineage are not allowed to enjoy the things.

Before one day of marriage, there is small ceremony called 'Bor Baton Touba'. It is a ceremony of inviting the groom for the marriage. In this day, a boy of tender age with the elderly person goes the groom's house and invites him for marriage.

On the day of marriage, the groom wears a white turban, white shirt and dhoti. Marriage ritual is performed on the bride's family. In this day the groom's party carries different items. First seven women are going in a row. The first lady carry the 'Firuk Nunsang' (containing some fruits item). The second lady carry the 'Apok Asa' (containing fruits, sweets). The third lady carry the 'firuk' (containing sweets). The fourth carry the 'Mitam Nga' (alive fish). The fifth lady carry the 'athenpot' (containing vegetable and some amount of rice). The sixth ladies carry the 'Kujapot' (containing dress for the bride). Next the groom's mother follows. In Meitei society, the above order follows strictly. After that the groom follows with their friends. And the invites follows.

At the great of the bride, the groom is welcomed with the bonfire known as 'Mei okpa'. This is done to dispel the evil spirit from the groom. Puffed rice is also sprayed along the fire. After entering the house the groom is again welcomed by three ladies led by groom's mother. Then the groom sits in the northern side of the house with their friends. All the things carried by the groom's party are offer to the house hold deity of the bride except the 'Kujapot'. The 'Kujapot' is handed over to bride's mother. When the bride reach her husband's house, firstly she must wear the cloths contain in the 'kujapot'.

When the ritual begins, the groom and the bride sit at the center of the ritual place. They are sitting in the bench called 'luhong fan' and facing their face on east. The mother of the bride then tied the hand of the bride and groom which are place one above another. After that the 'Kujapot' handed to bride's mother is placed above the tied hands. The father of the bride prays to almighty for long life of the bride and groom.

On the other side, a ceremony called 'Mitam Nga Thaba' (releasing of fish) is performed during the rituals. This is done by the three women of two from the girl side and one from the boy side. One of them holds the light and the remaining two holds the two 'Ngamu fish' (latafish). Lata fish is used because the Meitei believed that god has created this fish firstly. The two fish represent the male and female that is the bride and groom. The two ladies holding the fish release the fish in the pond or river nearby. By observing the movement of the fish, they will come to some conclusion. If the fish moves one following after the other then it is believed that the two couple will lead a happy married life. In oppositely, if the fish moves different direction then it is believed that the new couple will face separation in future. After finish it, the three ladies again attain the rituals.

When the three ladies sit in their place, The 'Kujapot' from the hand of bride and groom is removed. Then the bride stands up from her sit and moves around the groom for seven time. She is also showered flower on the groom. This is called 'Lei Chaiba'. After that the bride put two garland of 'Kundo'

(a kind of flower) on the neck of the bride. Then the groom again takes out one garland from his neck and put on the neck of the bride. After this the ritual end. The bride and groom become husband and wife.

In 'Panthoini Khonggul', a manuscript states that, Panthoibi on the arrival of her husband's placed, she was welcomed at the gate by her mother in law Khaba Hoidon Kokpam Ningol Manu Teknga with a fire torch known as 'Shingchap Meira'. Puffed rice were also sprinkled above the fire torch. She was received and warmly embraced by her mother in law in the presence of a large crowd of 'Khaba'.

Such like that when the arrival of the bride, she is welcomed at the gate with a fire torch. Puff rice is sprinkle above the torch. After entering the house she is received by her mother in law and carries her inside the house and prays the household deity.

On the fifth day after the marriage there is performed 'Phiruk Nungshang Hangba'. This 'Phiruk' (basket) is offered to the house hold deity in the day of marriage. The basket can be opened only on the fifth day of marriage. On this day three women from groom's side and two from bride's side open the basket of 'Phiruk Nungsang'. When opening the basket if an ant or a Kachappi (an insect) found then it is counted as a good omen. If the insects are found dead than it is counted as a bad sign. On the sixth day of marriage a great grand feast called 'Chak Kouba' is performed in the bride's place.

IV. CONCLUSION

Lastly it can conclude that the Meitei performed several rituals in their life. They pray different god in their life. They offered different items to different god. For the child, mainly the Meitei's worshipped for the immunity, long life and intelligence of the child. In the marriage rituals they worshipped for the long life as well as the happiness of the newly family.

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