



TRADITIONAL RULES AND REGULATIONS WITH THE OLD AGE CUSTOM OF THE MEITEI MARRIAGE

Dr. Oinam Ranjit Singh

Associate Professor , Department of History , Bodoland University.

ABSTRACT :

Marriage is an institution which authorizes man and woman to family life. The establishment of the institution of marriage is a landmark in the history of human society. It did not prevail among the primeval people because in the early days sex life was absolutely free and promiscuity was well founded. As civilization advanced, people started to lead settled life abandoning the habit of shifting from one place to another in search of food. In this phase, food gathering economy turned into food producing economy and man began to lead some regulated life. As in the food gathering stage the sex relationships was promiscuous, only motherhood alone could be the ascertainable parenthood without the trace of definite fatherhood. Fatherhood could be possible to judge if sex relationship became exclusive union of male and female. In men's aim to identify with the paternity of children lie the seeds of the institution of marriage. From promiscuity to monogamy there was a long march from pre-agricultural to agricultural economy in which monogamy and monogamous marriage were institutionalized. Society permits man and woman to be husband and wife and to have children by involving the right of sexual relation through the institution of marriage. At diverse places and in different stages of human development marriage had been emerged in different forms with elaborate rule, regulation and custom.



KEYWORDS : Yek-Salai, Munghaba, Shairuk Tinnaba, Pee Tinnaba and Pendinnaba.

INTRODUCTION:

Marriage is one of the very important social institutions in human society. No society sanctioned a man and woman quietly to pair off, becoming husband and wife, having children by involving the right of sexual relation. Every society has, therefore, developed a pattern for guiding marriage. In Meitei society also elaborate rules, regulations and customs of the marriage have been found in well established way. Exogamy and endogamy play a vital role in the institution of marriage. People are forbidden marriage between individuals sharing certain degrees of blood relationships which termed as exogamy. It does signified marriage outside the group. A Meitei is not permitted to look for his or her spouse from his or her own clan. They also must stay away from the clans of all the grand-parents in marriage. In the institution of marriage there existed certain relations whom are not to be married or married, but the degree of nearness differs from community to community. No doubt, today the marriage of parents with their children is universally prohibited in every society of human being. In case of endogamy marriage within the class or clan is practiced. For the reason nuptial alliance with the out group people is debarred. Even today inter-caste marriages are not encouraged among some group of people or communities. A paradigm is that a Brahman entered into marriage with only a Brahman and a Brahman married of his own sub-caste in India. The

wedding of Vaishya with the Brahman was not socially accepted. The matrimony between nobles and commoners was denounced in the old Polynesian society. Nevertheless, today the attitude of endogamous has become somewhat or to a great extent alleviated and not so tighten.

It is the well developed and well established custom in the marriage of the Meitei that betrothal and nuptials is not allowed to take place within the same *Yek* (clan) or same *Sagei* (clan). In true sense of term it is exogamous. *Yek* is considered as social exogamous group within which matrimony is unacceptable and taboo. The remark of Gangmumei Kabui is placed here that *Yek* and *Salai* are being used more or less in the same sense. Consequently *Yek-Salai* is within the degree of proscribed relation in the marriage institution of the Meitei. It is alleged that the marriage rules namely *Yek-Salai*, *Mungnaba*, *Shairuk Tinnaba*, *Pee. Tinnaba* and *Pendinnaba* were put into operation during the reign of Pakhangba (33-154 AD). *Yek* being the binding force of the wedding in Meitei society, the rules of *Yek* become the mandatory in the marriage of the Meitei.

Yek -Salai denotes the kinship relation of the clan and lineages and sub lineages having a common ancestor. Marriage within the clan is not permitted. This restriction is understood in the term as *Yekthoknaba* which signified of having consanguineous kinship. Marriage relation within the clan or *yek* is totally outlawed. There were nine *Salais*- (i) Ningthouja, (ii) Angom, (iii) Luwang, (iv) Khuman, (v) Moirang, (vi) Khaba, (vii) Nganba, (viii) Sarang-Leishangthem and (ix) Chenglei. Later Khaba and Nganba had grouped together and formed one *Salai*, called Khaba-Nganba. And the last two groups i.e Sarang-Leishangthem and Chenglei were grouped together to formed one *Salai* known as Sarang-Leishangthem- Chenglei. In the first century AD, the seven *Salais*-(i) Ningthouja (ii) Angom (iii) Luwang (iv)Khuman (v) Moirang (vi) Khaba-Nganba and (vii) Sarang-Leishangthem (Chenglei) were found. Hodson recorded that Ningthouja clan, Angom clan, Luwang clan, Khuman clan, Moirang clan, Khaba-Nganba clan and Sarang-Leishangthem (Chenglei) clan consisted of 113,30,41,17,56,98 and 64 *Yumnaks*. Marriage within the same *Yek* is illegal because of having same or common progenitor. The word *Yek thoknaba* is also known as *Pu-tinnaba*. *Yek thoknaba* is mainly based on blood relationship. Inter-marriage between two different clans but having common progenitor is also illicit.

Shairuk Tinnaba signifies persons belonging to different clans however they are the descendants of common ancestor. Gangmumei Kabui said that "*Shairuk Tinnaba* is of manifold nature. The old Moirang and old Chenglei are of the *Shairuk*. They are proscribed to inter-marriage". Khuman, the descendants of Luwang, who was the son of Luwang Ningthou Punshiba Hongnem, Luwang, Khaba-Nganba and Chenglei, old Moirang and Nganba are of the same *Shairuk*. Matrimonial relations for them are not permitted. There are two category of *Shairuk tinnaba*- a) *Shairuk Achouba* and b) *Shairuk Macha*. Dr.N.Pramodini Devi stated that the progeny of the different father but of same mother are *Sairuk Tinnaba*. Ch.Budhi Singh asserted that "this is equally a proscriptive patrilineal marriage rule. But, unlike the previous one, this rule operates in the inter-clan context, i.e. in the relationship of certain patrilineally consanguineal kin members yet belonging to two or more different clans. It may so happen quite often that some of the children of a father remain in the clan of his origin while some other children of the same father become affiliated to other clans than his under certain circumstances. By the prohibiting law of *Yek-tinnaba* alone descendants of these children of the same parents yet affiliated to different exogamous clans could, by that very fact, be allowed to inter-marry. But they are real consanguines (patrilineal); the Meitei culture has its aspect which is very much particular about real blood relationships, wherever members of concerned clans may be attached to. Accordingly, the negative rule of marriage, namely, the rule of *Shairuk-tinnaba* is imposed to debar such individuals from their marrying among themselves".

Mungnaba according to Gangmumei Kabui means "persons having a common maternal grandmother of the fifth degree and person falling within the different surnames with a common maternal grandfather and the later relationship so established have blood relationship called the *Ee Mungnaba*". The rule of *Mungnaba* has three classifications - *Manem Matung inba*, *Mingouna Yaba* and *Ningol macha masel lounaba yadaba*. *Manem matung inba* and *Mingouna Yaba* are the types of cross-cousin marriage and *Ningol macha lounaba yadaba* is the form of maternal parallel cross cousin marriage. The method of cross cousin marriage is deemed as ideal. The form of matrilineal cross cousin marriage is known as *Manem matung inba*. In the case of *Ningol macha masel lounaba yadaba*, children born to two sisters who got

married to different Sageis, are considered to have blood relationship. Matrimony among such children has been checked very strictly by the rule of *Mungnaba*. *Mungnaba* is in force only five generations. *Mungnaba* is another marriage rule in Meitei marriage institution.

Pee Tinaba according to Gangmumei Kabui means "persons having a common maternal ancestor."

Pen-dinnaba is described by Gangmumei Kabui as "persons belonging to different *Yek-Salai* but having a common maternal grandmother. Such relationship is caused by a woman having issues of more than one husband". So, the progeny of different *Sagei* who have been given birth by a mother who married to more than one husband of different *Sagei*, are not allowed to marry even if they belonged to different clan or *Sagei* as they have common mother. Gangmumei Kabui stated that "progeny of uterine brothers born of great grandmother by more than one husband are said to be within degree of prohibited known as *Leinung Pendinnaba*". The rule of *Pen-dinnaba* is more or less similar to that of *Shairuk tinnaba* but *Pen-dinnaba* is based on matrilineal kinship whereas *Shairuk tinnaba* is on patrilineal system. Ch. Budhi Singh avowed that "*Pendinnaba* is kin relationship holding between descendents, belonging to two or more exogamous clans, yet if a common married to more than one husband of different clan affiliations one after another. This kind of relationship is locally taken to be a consanguineal one though it is traced through the female. It is, therefore, a matrilineal type kinship relationship.....concomitant rule proscribing their inter-marriage as the rule of *Pendinnaba*"

There are various forms of marriage in Meitei society which are - a) **Marriage by Capture** but this technique is growing rare with social advancement, b) **Marriage by mutual consent and elopement or love marriage** which is most commonly practiced in Manipuri society right from early period to present day, c) **Arranged marriage or marriage by engagement**, the most approved form of marriage in Manipur right from ancient days to present and d) **Nambothaba** (Persuasion) in which a boy along with a huge bundle containing various articles used to go to the girl's house and persuaded for the hands of the girl whom he wanted to be his wife. He took a seat in the *Sangoi* of the family and started working for the family of the concern girl until and unless to get her as life partner. But this practiced is vanished or no more in present day. In all forms of these, the rules and regulations of the marriage are made mandatory.

Marriage with the *Yek* or *Yek-Salai*, *Mungnaba*, *Pendinnaba*, *Shairuk Tinnaba* is declared illegal. The marriage rules of the Meitei are still observing in Meitei society. The evidence of endogamous marriage system in Manipur is found in early days. As for example, Khaba Shokchromba, the father-in-law of Panthoibi got married with a woman called Manutengcha from his own clan.

The Meitei have a well-established marriage rules, regulations and customs. T.C. Hodson has provided the information relating to the Meitei marriage as "The Meiteis are exogamous as regards the clan or *Salais* into which they are divided, but are endogamous as regards members of other tribes, though there are cases on record of marriages between Brahmins and Meitei girls. Such is the strict rule, but it may be inferred that it has not always been rigorously adhered to, since the Chronicles refer in more than one passage to the wrath of the Raja at the disregard of the proprieties and his orders that they should not marry people of their own kins. There were special penalties on breaches of this rule in the shape of the loss of the privilege of giving water to the Raja, but their validity was derived, in the first instance, from the superstitious fear of divine wrath for the violation of an essential tabu (namung-ba in Meitei)..... Angoms are not permissible to marry with Khabanganbas, Moirangs or Luwangs. The Luwangs are not allowed to take their wives from among the Khumals, and the Moirangs are forbidden to marry the Khabanganbas, and one or two families of the Chenglei Salai are also proscribed to them. The marriage of the family of Moirang Leipham with Ningthouja clan seems to have been outlawed, but the case is obscure, and if genuine, constitutes the only prohibition affecting the Ningthoujas..... There seem to be a rule requiring the Meiteis Ningthou to be close connection by marriage of the Angom Ningthou..... Further, the bridal of a man with a woman from his mother's clan is not allowable. The prohibition goes no further than the one generation". He further stated that "widows are allowed to remarry, but not with their deceased husband's brothers. No ceremony is required for the remarriage of windows. In polygamous households the

husband's attention to the several wives are strictly regulated according to precedence, the eldest getting twice the nominal share of the wife below her. In actual practice, I am given to understand these rules are often broken. I have had to adjudicate upon complaints of conjugal discourtesy in polygamous households". It is fact that those person who married by breaking or violating the prescribed marriage rules are deprived of many social and religious privileges e.g. deprives of *Pibaship* if eligible, debarred from leading marriage ceremony in case of woman, forbidden in all religious ceremony etc. Sometimes the culprits were exiled in the days of past.

Dowry is vogue in the Meitei society but this system seems not to be considered as an essential part of the marriage in most of the cases from the early period. In all probability it is presented voluntarily and no compulsion is exercised. The presentation like ornaments, cloths, cash etc are given in marriage in the form of dowry since the ancient times. There is no hard and first rule of giving dowry since early days. The quantum of dowry obviously varied in accordance with the financial position, ability or capacity of parents or family of the bride. Panthoibi Khongul refers to dowry. It is stated that "after marriage, Panthoibi was escorted to her husband's home with dowry. She took with her a basket of cooked rice, a pot of cooked meat and pitcher of wine"

In the past there was no hard and first rule in dealing with divorce. However with the beginning of Christian era, a court known as '*Pacha — Loishang*' had established to deal with all the cases relating to women such as adultery, insult, beating, divorce etc. Col. M. McCulloch mentions the divorce of the Meitei as "A man can put away his wife without any fault on her part, and of a person of influence he may do so without its being noticed. The rule, however, is that if a man puts away his wife without any fault on her part, she takes possession of all his property except of drinking vessel and the cloth round his loins. A man and wife may separate by mutual consent, and a wife may quit her husband on giving the value of slave. Women are really the slave of their husband". Although T.C. Hodson commented that "I never came across any case in which the rule mentioned above was even cited, and inquiries made among Manipuris of good position only elicited a denial of its existence. The statutory penalty for adultery carrying with it divorce was fifty rupees, the price of an adult slave, and the statement that women are the "slaves" of their husbands, receives a curious confirmation from the fact that a woman is said to become the property of a man (*mingonda nai-ba*) when she marries". With the statement of Hodson, the account of Col. M. McCulloch needs to be reexamined.

Some sort of pre-marital sexual freedom also subsist in Manipur in the early days. The tales of Khongchomupi, Mainupemcha etc. have testified the preponderance of this custom. It is narrated that while Tabungba (1359 - 1394 AD) was halting at Chingshong village, he had love affair with Lalar Sang-nu Saphabi, a beautiful wife of the Chingshong chief Khamlangba. Chingshong chief was not happy at all because of the affair of his wife and king Tabungba. He organized all the tribe inhabiting the area to revolt against king Tabungba.

In remote past, a married woman who was involved in adultery was banished, deported or exiled. Every now and then she was exposed to the Bazar which commonly known as '*Khongoinaba*', and occasionally the culprits' hair was cutting off. It is clearly proved that the Meitei are not in favour of adultery right from ancient times. Pre-marital sexual relation is not encouraged by the society till date. If such act was noticed by the parents or guardians she was tuned out from the family. They had a little chance of marriage. Infringements of marriage rules and punishment in that regard have been referred to in *Royal Chronicle of Manipur*.

The Lost Kingdom (Royal Chronicle of Manipur) recorded as "Ngangbam Chanu, the wife of the Raja was fined and her lover Langdenba was transported to Sugunu" in English era 1677-78. In English era 1742-43 "A brother and sister of the Yumnam fell in immoral love with each other and both the brother and sister were transported to different Loi." "Moirang Konjemba Mani was degraded from his caste for marrying a Sekmai girl in English era 1706." In 1788 of English era "Loitongbam was transported to Loi at Ethai for making immoral love with the wife of his eldest brother." "21st Friday, a slave women and a nurse were *Khongoinaki* (dragged in Manipuri custom) for killing illegal child in her womb. The father of the child,

Bebasthakari was banished to Heirok and another Brahmin concerned was sent to Hawjong" in the English era 1865. "In English era 1867, 11th Friday Thokchaw Chirai Laloop Chingba was sent to Howjongband for taking his brother's wife as his own wife." "4th Sunday Koorajamba Kangbooren brought a Burmese woman, the husband for the latter came up forthwith and complained to the Cheirap Court, the court ordered Kangbooren to pay him Rs. 70/- and the court paid him Rs. 30/- and sent him to his country in English era 1868" and so on.

It is a matter of difficulty to present an accurate picture of the marriage ceremony of the Meitei during the pre-Hindunisation period. Colonel McCulloch says that "Although to become man and wife it is not necessary that the marriage ceremony should be performed, still it is usually performed, but as often after as before cohabitation." But Hodson remarked that "It should be noted that the penalty on irregular marriages is the loss of the right to obtain offices..... The fact is that most Manipuri regard cohabitation and public acknowledgement as sufficient, provided that due regard has been paid to the rules restricting marriage to members of the Meitei tribe and forbidding the intermarriage of persons of the same clan, *Salai*." In fact, the rites of *Laitin thabal Apok-asha-thaba* (offering of oblation to the ancestors), worshipped of Almighty God, ancestral gods, deities, *Lainingthou Sanamahi*, local and guardian gods etc, the ritual of invoking the ancestors for their blessings, the rite of 'Meetam Nga Thaba' (lit, sending away offish or set free the two fishes in the pond) etc are the dominant features in the marriage of Meitei. It may be noted that the marriage of the Meitei is a union of the male and female not only to satisfy biological need.

CONCLUSION:

Hence, the Meitei have elaborate marriage rules, regulations and old age customs. Marriage rules namely *Yek-Salai*, *Mungnaba*, *Shairuk Tinnaba*, *Pee Tinnaba* and *Pendinnaba* are in operation in Meitei society. *Yek* being the binding force of the wedding in Meitei society, the rules of *Yek* become the mandatory in the marriage of the Meitei. No doubt, Meitei society has well developed and well established comprehensive rules, regulations and customs of the marriage since the ancient days.

REFERENCES:

1. Singh, N. Birchandra, *The Meitei Society*, Delhi, 2006.
2. Cf. Smith, W. Robertson, *Marriage and kinship (in Early Arabia)*, cf. Hodson, T.C. *The Meiteis*, Delhi, 1989.
3. *Panthoibi Khongul MS*.
4. Singh, R.K. Jhalajit, *A History of Manipuri Literature, Vol. 1*, Imphal, 1987.
5. *Nungbal Pombi Luwauba. MS*.
6. Singh, L. Bhagyachandra, *A Critical Study of the Religions Philosophy of the Meitei before the advent of Vaisnavism in Manipur*, Imphal, 1991.
7. Sharma, B. Kullachandra, *Meiteigi Luhongba Amasung Louna Leinabagi Wayel - Wakhun*, Imphal, 1998.
8. *Heiren Puwari, MS*.
9. Singh, Moirangthem Chandra, *Panthoibi Khongul*, Imphal, 1972.
10. Kabui, Gangmumei, *History of Manipur, Volume One Pre-Colonial Period*, New Delhi, 1991.
11. Mangang, S.R., "Prohibited Degrees of Meitei Marriage", in *Lanmei Tanbi*, August, Imphal, 1986.
12. McCulloch, M., *Valley of Manipur*, Delhi, 1980.
13. Singh, W.I., *The History of Manipur (An Early period)*, Imphal, 1986.
14. Singh, L. Joychandra (Ed), *The Lost Kingdom (Royal Chronicle of Manipur)*, Imphal.
15. Singh, Dr. Oinam Ranjit, "Marriage of the Meiteis in ancient times" in *The Orient Vision, Vol. IV, Issue 2, Oct.-Dec, 2007*.
16. Singh, Yagyendra Bahadur, *Social Life in Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1980.
17. Devi, Dr. N. Pramodini, *The Cultural History of Early Manipur*, Kakching, Manipur, 2011
18. Budhi Singh, Ch, "Marriage Systems in Meitei Society" in *Sources of the History of Manipur the Adjoining Areas* (Ed) by Dr. S.N. Pandey, Delhi, 1983.