

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 7 : 12 December 2007

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Meithei Personal names

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1 INTRODUCTION

Meitei is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the northeast Indian state of Manipur, Assam, and Tripura. It is also spoken in Burma and Bangladesh. The knowledge of Meitei names gives insight into Meitei culture, philosophy, thought, environment, religion, language and social changes. Despite this, the study of personal names in Meitei has not received adequate attention so far. In this paper, an attempt is made to study Meitei personal names of Manipur. It looks at the Meitei names within the purview of Anthropological linguistics. It considers Meitei names as not arbitrary labels but socio-cultural tags that have socio-cultural meaning and functions. It discusses:

1. Concept of name,
2. Meitei concept of name
3. Development of Meitei naming system.
4. Typology of Meitei given names: flora and fauna names, circumstantial names, names associated with certain features.
5. Indic and western names.
6. Changes in Meitei personal names
7. Given names and gender, and (8). closing remarks.

The topic of names is a multidisciplinary field that has occupied the attention of philosophers of language anthropologists, linguists, sociologists, economists, religious person and ordinary people. We will see this as we progress in this paper. Considering Meitei personal names as an aspect of linguistic relativity, that is language is too intricately linked to its own culture so that it is impossible to fully understand the message (or thoughts) through a different language, and being a native speaker of Meitei I have looked on the data both on the etic and emic view points.

1.2 CONCEPT OF NAME

Different scholars have given various definitions. Rey (1995:26) says in logical and philosophical sense, a name refers to a different element of human experience i.e. to an individual or a collective entity. Names are thus referential.

For Mill (1906), proper names are denotative. He says in his “A System of Logic” (1906: 20),

Proper names are not connotative: they denote the individual who are called by them, but they do not indicate or imply any attributes as belonging to those individuals. When we name a child by the name Paul, or a dog by the name Caesar, these names are simply marks used to enables those individuals to be made subject of discourse. It may be said indeed, that we must have had some reason for giving them those names rather than any other; and this is true; but the name, once given, is independent of the reason.

On the other hand, there are philosophers and linguists who studied names in the socio-cultural contexts. Algeo (1973:57) has remarked that in many naming system, name-giving is by no means arbitrary but very carefully patterned. “In the US, onomastics is scarcely recognized as a scholarly field at all” (Bright 2003: 670). This reflects that in the US name can function as a name without any lexical meaning. Even if names can function without lexical meaning, some societies like that of Meitei tend to put a strong socio-cultural meaning on their names. Therefore the lexical meaning of a name is an aspect, which needs to be taken into account in the analysis of Meitei anthroponymic system.

2 MEITEI CONCEPT OF NAME

According to Hanks and Hodges (1990:vii), a person’s name is “a badge of cultural identity”. According to Alford (1988:51), personal names symbolize individual identity in two ways: they tell the members of the society who the individual is, and they tell the individual who he or she is or is expected to be. This is the case in Meitei as well. Meitei personal name indexes a great deal of information about the culture; values, cultural practices, ethnic and religious background, environment, language and so on. It also tells a great deal of information about the name bearer: clan, constituent tribe name of Meiteis, circumstances surrounding the birth, physical features, feeling, social, hierarchy of birth, and economic condition of the parents etc.

In Meitei philosophy, the name is so closed to the person that it can be considered as the person himself. In other word name is the person. This is reflected in the various oral narratives. In the story of *Chinjing Naral Paganba*, a boy who does not have a name challenged the assembly of gods to wrestling. The gods turned down the challenge as they only challenge with someone who has a name (Moirangthem 1993:173).

Another story says name gives life to a child. It is a common idea in Meitei society that an appropriate name may bring luck that shapes the name bearer. Therefore, names of people with dubious reputations are not usually adopted. For example, *Nongban* (villainous character in the *Khamba* and *Thoibi* Epic) and *Pemcha* (the first Meitei female to commit suicide by hanging) are not adopted. In Meitei society, people bearing same name share similar ideals, characteristics or personalities. So in history, *Pakhangba/Poireiton* is borne by many. Each *Pakhangba/ Poireiton* has similar characteristics of the first one (see Moirangthem 1993:173).

The name and the person are so close that names are often used in witchcraft. It is the general belief in Meitei culture that there is hidden power in personal names. Moirangthem says “the sudden end of *Purenpa*’s life (hero of Moirang) confirmed the belief about *Thonglen*’s psychic and will power upon his victim’s name”. He further says the evil spirits, wild animals and even god can be won over to one’s side by saying the names and genealogies (male and female names up to the fourth line).

Hallgren (1988:159) in his study says to know the name of a person means to control him or her. Similar is the situation in Manipur. Because of such situation Meitei’s started keeping secret names. The name may be non-zodiacal name or zodiacal name¹ but everyone is supposed to keep a secret name. This also shows that a person has more than one name.

The personal names are so important and so close to the self that they should not be used carelessly or unnecessarily. The result is the custom of name avoidance practice, which is widespread among the maximum Meiteis.

Teknonymy

For example, a woman is not supposed to mention the names of her husband and her elder-relatives in-law. Likewise a man also avoids mentioning the name of his father and mother in law and even his own wife. Meitei husband and wife usually mention one another by the teknonymy. These teknonymy are 'child's father or child's mother', 'X's father or X's mother', 'your sister-in-law or your brother'. Every one is so reluctant to say his name that even when he is asked many times who he is (while knocking on somebody's door) he would say it's me.

The closeness of name and self has also resulted in a unique form of address. Almost everybody avoids using name while addressing a person. Male peer group address one another as *Bhai u' Bondhu u' Itao u' Marup*. Female as *Ita* or sometimes *Ibemma*. A younger person will address an older man as *Iyamba, Tada, Tamo, Khura, Mama* older woman as *Itaima, Inamma, Ice, Ine* etc. An older person will address a younger man as *Ibungngo* and younger female as *Ibemma*. Spouse address one another by the teknonymy mentioned above or they do not address but draw attention by asking *taribara*. 'Are you listening' by male and *tabiribara* 'Are you listening' by female. Thus, these evidences show that names are viewed as components of the self in Meitei culture.

3 DEVELOPMENT OF MEITEI NAMING SYSTEM

The personal names were so private that people were spoken of and known by their profession², addresses, physical characteristic, and peculiar features among others.

The descriptive expression found in ancient text such as *Phunal Tenheiba* 'a good archer from Phunal' *Thingkaruk Kokchaoba* 'a big head from Thingkaruk', *Khurai Thangsaba* 'a blacksmith from Khurai', *Keke Laojamba* 'an owner of many rice fields from Keke, Moirang' etc., were not names but these were descriptions with which people were known. Even the ancient historical texts and treatises that were written before the advent of Meitei Hinduism have no compiler or writer's name. This further proved that people kept their names as secret.

As the real name had been kept secret, the description like those mentioned above became their nickname, which was known to the world at large. In course of time these nicknames could no longer categorize people. Therefore a new naming system developed. It consisted of a double name system. First name may index the profession or place of origin or any memorable incident and the last name may indicate any of the physical characteristics, peculiar features, hope or aspiration etc. The first name was inherited and it is called *Sakei* 'clan'³. Second name was what is now called given or Christian name.

There were traditionally 445 *Sakeis* in Meitei community. Each *Sakei* has an *apokpa* 'progenitor of the clan' and it is tied to a particular territory. Clan marches and ceremonials are done in this sacred territory. The historical narratives associated with clanship, clan-lore and clan lands are kept as resources by the *Peepa* 'living chief of the clan'. He is the best person to consult for genealogy research.

The population increased and many new families were assimilated into Meitei community or immersed from the community itself through various social processes. Number of *Sakeis* is now increased to above 840 and it is now popularly known as *Yumnaks* (yum+nak= house +surrounding 'homestead').

Yumnak corresponds to surname in the sense that it is an additional name. But the difference is we can adopt a new surname like Pilot in Rajesh Pilot, an MP in Indian Parliament but we can no longer create a new Yumnak. Surname may be a patronym (father's name) like Vishwanathan in V. Anand, the grand master. Yumnaks are in a sense Sakei 'clan' names which are mostly compound words indicating the profession of the originator and his homestead. Any Meitei Yumnak is in the range of 500 years to 900 years old. Surname may be only one generation old. Some of the Yumnaks are:

- 1 Thangsabam (archaic Thangsapam)
 t^ha +sa+p^h m
 sword make place
 Blacksmith's homestead
- 2 Leirikyengbam (archaic Lairiklengpam)
 lairik+le +p^h m
 book scribe place
 Scriber's homestead
- 3 Maibam (Archaic Maipam)
 maip + p^h m
 shaman place
 Shaman's homestead
- 4 Laurangbam (archaic Laulangpam)
 l w +la +p^h m
 paddy field practice place
 Farmer's homestead
- 5 Sagolsem (Sakolsem)
 Sa+kol+sen+p^h m
 animal curve herd place
 (horse) Herder's homestead
- 6 Sansenbam (archaic Sansenpam)
 s n+sen+p^h m
 cow herd place
 (cow)Herder's homestead
- 7 Tensubam (archaic Tensupam)
 ten+su+p^h m
 arrow make place
 Arrowsmith's homestead

With the coming of Muslims in Manipur, a new group emerged known by the name (Meitei) Pangal⁴. They were given Yumnaks. This added many more Yumnaks to Manipuri

community such as *Yumkhaibam*, *Korimayum*, *Pukhrimayum* etc. Toward the end of the 17th century and beginning of 18th century the contact with Hindus reached its zenith. Another group emerged known by the name (Meitei) Bamon⁵. These further added many more new Yumnaks to Manipuri community such as *Samulailatpam*, *Hangoibam*, *Kakchingtabam* etc. The names of these two groups will not be studied in this paper.

“Language and culture are inseparable: neither exists without the other. It is equally impossible to imagine a human culture without a language and a human language without a culture” (Haslett 1989:31). It is agreed that the relationship between language change and cultural change has been that it is the changes in culture that cause linguistic changes, not vice versa (Blount & Sanches 1977:4).

Although Muslim religion did not change much of Meitei culture, the contact with Hindus did change a lot. Meetingu⁶ Pamheiba (Garibniwaj) proclaimed Hinduism as state religion in 1725 (Ibochaoba et. al 1995:4). However, it was doubtful to many observers. “It is difficult to estimate the precise effect of Hinduism on the civilization of the people, for the outward observer they seem to have adopted only the festivals, the outward rituals, the caste marks, and the exclusiveness of Hinduism, while all unmindful of its spirit and inward essentials” (Hodson 1993:97). Another observer remarked, “In fact their observances are only for appearance sake, not the prompting of the heart” (Col. McCulloch quoted in Hodson 1993:97).

The contact between Meiteis and Brahmins resulted into a new religion, which may be called Meitei Hinduism: a product of acculturation. This new religion has both the elements of Meitei and Hindu cultures. For example, birth ritual of a child begins with Ipanthaba, ‘the offering of rice and vegetables to the Lam lai⁸ and feeding the child with the remains’. Only after this native ritual is performed the Hindu style Swasti Puja⁹ can be initiated.

We have two rituals in one ceremony like that of birth and marriage ceremonies or pairs of rituals and ceremonials like Meitei New year and Hindu new years, Paithoibi Iratpa and Durga Puja, Imoinu Iratpa and Deepawali etc.

Again, Lainingthou ‘Supreme Almighty God’ is worshiped in every Meitei’s home. Lainingthou is also worshiped in every house of the Aryan Brahmins in Manipur (Ibochaoba et.al. 1995:iv). The new religion of the Meiteis has the outwards rituals and ceremonials aspect of Hinduism and inwards faith in Lainingthou. The outwards rituals were adapted to suit the Meiteis for example when a Meitei prays to a Hindu god (idol) he must not face the god directly but face north if the idol faces east.

Many Meitei accepted the Meitei Hinduism because holding on the native religion was treated as *Loi* (finished). The Lois were deported to *Loiyalam* (finished habitation or uninhabited far off places). The descendents of those Lois are now in the list of scheduled caste of Indian Constitution. The new religion was a new way of life of the king and the court. The common populace could no longer stay away from the society of the elites.

With the advent of Meitei Hinduism, the writing of birth document was introduced. A child is named in this document beginning with the syllable that corresponds to one's birth star, called *nakshatra*¹⁰, which is the constellation with which the moon was aligned at the moment of birth. The tradition of keeping the secret name still continues and it is this zodiacal name that is being kept secret now. So now the Meitei personal name consisted of a Yumnak and a

given name. It follows the eastern order i.e. Yumnak (surname) preceding the given name like that of Japan, Korea, China, Malaysian Chinese, Taiwan, Taipei, Vietnam (see Huridocs 2001), and many cultures in south India (also one country in Europe i.e., Hungary)¹¹. There are many motives for the choice of given name. This will be discussed later.

Another innovation, although not massive is the addition of *Chanu* ‘female sibling (cha=sibling, nu=female)’ to the female names to distinguish the gender of the name bearer. *Chanu* is added just after Yumnaks ‘surname’ and precedes the given name. For example, *Sapan Chanu Ningthil Chaibi*, the maiden name of *Leima Ningthil Chaibi* queen of *Meetingu Charairongpa* (1708-1747 AD). Likewise few male started adding *Cha* ‘sibling’ to their names intending to add male meaning to general term *Cha* that indicates sibling.

Another major innovation is the adaptation of last name *Singh* ‘lion’ for male and *Devi* ‘adapted as powerful and not as goddess’ for female. Singh was adapted as a marker intending to indicate martial character of the Meiteis and not adopted as cast marker as in Northern India. It was first the king who adapted it, then the courts officials, the town people and the villagers. Singh is borrowed from the north west Indian culture most likely Punjabi male marker Singh ‘lion hearted’. At some point of time, the size of Singh/Devi innovation was so large that every Meitei male was considered to be X-Singh and every Meitei female was Y-Devi. So, many outsiders asked me “What Singh are you?”. Many Meitei who did not like addition of Singh or Devi also received it at school or from board. The officer at the school/board added Singh or Devi to every pupil’s name without any consultation with the parent or the pupil in question.

With the downfall of king’s power many Meitei started adding Meitei or one’s tribe name such as *Luwang*, *Mangang*, *Khuman*, *Angom*, *Khaba*, *Chenglei* for male and *Chanu* for female similar to Singh or Devi as last name. So we have Nongthombam Tomba Meitei, Thingpajam Sanamacha Chanu, Laishangthen Lanchen Chenglei, Yumnam Tomthil Mangang, Ngangom Dingko Singh and Nameilakpam Kunjarani Devi etc. So the Meitei personal name now consists of a Yumnak ‘(inherited family name) surname’ then a given name and an optional last name.

4 TYPOLOGY OF MEITEI GIVEN NAMES

This section deals with socio-cultural descriptive study of names that exist in the community.

4.1. Flora and fauna names

Many Meitei names are derived from the flora and fauna. It is their physical features or structures that are compared. The flora includes:

Chaning ‘Gramineae (perennial)’	Chinggonglei ‘Delile Subspecies Indica’
Ingalei ‘Dendrobium Moschatum (orchid)’	Kaboklei ‘Cape Jasmine’
Kwaklei ‘Venda Coerulea’	Leisana ‘Dendrobium Densiflorum’
Numitlei ‘sunflower’	Sanarei ‘marigold’
Sangprei ‘P. Puspurascens Dalz’	Thariktha ‘blue water lily’
Tharo ‘water lily’	Thambal ‘lotus’
Tera ‘silk cotton tree’	Thambau ‘rhizomes of lotus’
Takhelei ‘ginger lily’	Urirei ‘woody climber’

The fauna includes:

Chekla ‘bird’	Khoimu ‘black bee (Asian carpenter bee)’
Nunga ‘Mishmi Garrra (fish)’	Samu ‘Asian elephant’
Theba ‘rabbit’	Thembi ‘a short leg animal’
Tharoi ‘snail’	Lairen ‘ Indian Rock Python’

The complexion of a person is also the basis for the choice of name such as *Thambalgau* ‘white lotus’, *Tharogau*, ‘white water lily’, *Samugau* ‘white elephant’, *Khoimu* black bee (Asian carpenter bee), etc.

4.2. Circumstantial names

The circumstances before and after the birth of a child prompt the parent to give a name X and not Y. The context may be gender, day and time of birth, the feeling of the parents, and the social and economic conditions of the parents, among other factors. According to Blum (1997:364) these circumstantial names are viewed as governing the child’s fate in some ways, they should harmonies with the time and often place of the child’s birth....

We can group the Meitei circumstantial names into:

- (a) Sex governing names
- (b) Historical names
- (c) Death prevention, survival names and birth control names
- (d) Periodic, and situational names
- (e) Positive attitude names

(a) Sex governing names

Meitei considers giving a male name to a female child will cause the sex of the next child male and vice versa. Therefore, when a female child is given birth to a parent who wants a male child, they will give her a male name. Any native name example *Yaima* ‘middle but usually second child’, *Chaoba* ‘big one’ etc will do the work. Similarly, when a male child is given birth to a parent who wants a female child, they will give him a female name, for example *Ibetombi* ‘last female’, *Asangbi* ‘lengthy female’ etc. The child then carries the name and when her parent got the desired child, she can live by the given male name or make positive amends to that name. For example, female marker -bi can be added to the male name resulting into a female name. For male name *Yaima* we have *Yaimabi*, for *Chaoba* we have *Chaobi*. But for male, it is more likely that he lives by that female name. So in Meitei community there are lots of males who bear female name.

(b) Historical names

A large number of Meitei names are associated with the important event of the state. Terms related to events such as political event, war, enthronement of the chief etc are reflected in names. This may be due to history keeping function of the personal name. Such as *Tekhaongamba* ‘one who defeated *Tekhao* group (Assamese)’, *Khagemba* (Khagingamba) ‘one who defeated *Khagi* group (a Shan group in Yunnan Province of China)’, *Zilagamba* ‘one who conquered *Zila* (Tripura)’, *Kiyamba* ‘one who defeated *Kiyam* (a Shan state in

Burma most probably Kyaingtong State)’ *Hojainganba*, the son of *Bodhachandra* (last king of Manipur before Manipur joined Indian Union) was named *Hojaingamba* because he was born when the king won a case in *Hojai*, a place in Assam etc. These names were borne by the Kings and princes themselves but, nowadays, common people also adopted such names.

(c) *Death prevention and survival names, and birth control names*

Many cultures believe the name one bears may create an attitude in those who hear it. This has resulted in creating death prevention names in many African cultures such as Akan, Mbeere, Basotho¹² etc. This happens in Meitei as well. Unlike many death prevention names in these African cultures, Meitei has a single death prevention names for example *Mangki* ~ *Manggi*. It is a combination of *mang* ‘graveyard/crematorium’ and *ki* ‘timid’ denoting *Mangki*~*Manggi* is the one who threatens the graveyard or crematorium. So parents sometimes name a baby *Mangki*~*Manggi* if he is born soon after the death of any member within the homestead.

Meitei has a name to combat constant child mortality. This is *Manglem* ‘left out by the graveyard/crematorium’ for male and *Manglembi* ‘left out female by the graveyard/crematorium’ for female.

Another interesting name is the birth control name. In past when the parents wanted to control the birth of another child, they name the present child *Khomton* (Khomdon) if the child is male and *Khomtonpi* (Khomdonbi) if the child is female. *Khomdon* consists of *khom* ‘breast’ and *ton* ‘last’. It means the baby boy is the one who is to be suckled last. *Khomdonbi* means the baby girl who is to be suckled last. *Khomton* or *Khomtonbi* must not confuse with *Tomba* or *Tombi* ‘last one’. These are birth control names because *Khom* ‘breast’ is a taboo word but it is used deliberately in order to achieve certain objective and the objective is to control birth.

(d) *Periodic and situational names*

Many Meitei names reflect the period in which the name bearer was born. The period may be flood, social and economic, political condition etc. Person born during flood may bear *Esingchaoba* ‘flood’, born during war may bear *Lancha* ‘war son’, born during an economic boon of the parent may bear *Lanchangbi* ‘female wealth absorbent’ or *Lanchangba* [l nc b] ‘male wealth absorbent’ *Lamcha* [l mc] ‘born not at home’. I have found two names indicating the season of birth: *Mera* ‘seventh month of Meitei calendar starting from March / April’ and *Wakching* ‘tenth month’.

Meitei has a single name that reflects the birthday. We have *Irai* ‘Friday’ like Akan day name Kofi ‘Friday’ used in Kofi Annan¹³.

Meitei names have a few morphemes that refer to the order in which the children come: first one –*hal* as in *Ebohal*, second one *Yaima* and last one –*ton*-. *Yaima* may stand alone or suffix onto some other morpheme like *Ebo*- as in *Eboyaima*. *Ton*~*Tom* may be suffixed or prefixed as in *Eboton* and *Tomba*.

Other situational names include *Tompok* ‘the only child (male)’ and *Lairambi* (l jr mbi) ‘born after many male child/ the female child found after many male child.

(e) *Positive attitude names*

There has been a long tradition of knowing people by their appellation and by names. Appellation and by names are derived from the characteristics and achievement of the individual. Therefore these names often describe the characteristics of the named individual. This may inversely made people expect that the power of words in names influence the life of name bearer. Therefore a parent names his son /daughter according to his positive attitude.

Such names include:

Athouba ‘brave’, *Sanathoi* ‘excell’ , *Thoiba* ‘winner’, *Thougnamba* ‘able’, *Thouyangba* ‘spontaneous’, *Chingkheinganbi* ‘eastern star’, *Chinglensana* ‘desirable and gentle’, *Enakkhunbi* ‘wealthy’ *Angousana* ‘fair and desirable’, *Ebenungsi* ‘lovely lady’, *Sanaebemma* ‘desirable lady’ etc.

4.3 Names associated with certain features

The characteristics and complexion of a person can also be the basis of names such as:

Sanamcha ‘desirable little girl’, *Angouba* ‘fair’, *Lukhoi* ‘curly’, *Akhaba* ‘stubborn’, *Amuba* ‘black’, *Achaoba* ‘big’, *Chaoba* ‘big’, *Maipak* ‘broad face’, *Maipakpi* ‘female form of Maipak’, *Maitek* ‘shrunk face’, *Natek* ‘shrunk nose bridge’ *Khoimu* ‘black like bee (Asian carpenter bee)’, *Manggolchao* ‘limited courage’, *Ebehaibi* ‘skillful lady’ *Koireng* (Koileng) ‘over active’ etc.

5 INDIC AND WESTERN NAMES

INDIC NAMES¹³

Meitei Hinduism brought drastic change in anthroponymic system more specifically the given name although they never abandoned their Yumnaks. Meetingu Charairongba was given an Indic name *Pitambar*, Meetingu Pamheiba (1690-1751) was given **Garibnawaz**. He made Meitei Hinduism the official religion of Manipur. Meetingu Ching-Thang Khomba (1748-1799) was given **Bhagyachandra**. Meetingu Chinglen Nongdrenkhomba was given **Gambhir Singh**. The British were more familiar with the Indic names than the Meitei native names. Therefore they recorded the Indic names more frequently and those Indic names became more popular till today. But we can’t forget the importance of native names. Every Meitei King has a native name that has been given at the coronation function. Common people choose names that appeal to the ruling preferences in the society (Mahmood Arai and Peter Skogman Thoursie, 2006, 7).

Since Pamheiba till today as Manipur joined Indian Union in 1949 bearing an Indic name benefits the bearer. Another reason for adapting Indic name is Hinduism advocates bearing a Indic name is *a sign of commitment* (an important sign of religious sincerity to the Hindu community) (Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami 2000: Chapter 8). Even Christianity at the beginning of their expansion advocated the adoption of Saint Names. Therefore given names are also called Christian names. But after the Second Council of the Vatican (1963–1965), in which the Church made important decisions with regard to indigenous cultures, indigenous baptismal names were made possible (see Flannery 1980: 13).

Although Vaishnavism (a sect of Hinduism) is adapted to Meitei Hinduism, most of the Indic names Meiteis bear are not Vaishnava names. Vaishnava names usually end in *Das* or *Dasi*¹⁴ for example Sivadas, Kalidas, Haridas etc. However, in performing death ritual in Meitei Hinduism departed person will be given a Vaishnava name under Das[male]/Dasi(ni)[female].

Indic names which are borne as given names among Meiteis are mostly derived from Sanskrit. These names have undergone various phonological changes to suit the phonetic and phonological structure of Meitei in their spoken usage. For example /ʃ/ voiceless palato-alveolar fricative is changed to /s/ voiceless alveolar fricative and voiced labio-dental fricative is changed to voiced bilabial stop. Some of these names are:

Amit ‘nector’, *Anand* ‘pleasure’, *Anil* ‘air, wind’, *Arun* ‘reddish brown’, *Asha* ‘wish, desire, hope’, *Ashok* ‘without sorrow’ *Bala* ‘young’ *Basu* Bengali form of *Vasu* ‘bright, excellent’ *Bijoy* Bengali form of *Vijay* ‘victory’ *Chand* ‘moon’ *Chandan* ‘sandalwood’, *Daya* ‘kindness’ *Deepak* ‘inflaming, exciting’, *Dhananjay* ‘winning wealth’ *Dinesh* ‘day lord’ *Gita* ‘song’ *Kala* ‘art form, virtue’ *Kali* ‘the black one’ *Kalpana* ‘imagining, fantasy’ *Kamala* ‘lotus’ *Kanta* ‘desired, beautiful’ *Kavi* ‘wise man, sage, poet’ *Kavita* ‘poem’ *Kiran* ‘sunbeam’ *Kishor* ‘colt’ *Kumar* ‘boy, son’ *Lalit* ‘charming’, *Lata* ‘vine, creeping plant’ *Madhubala* ‘young and sweet’ *Madhuri* ‘sweetness’ *Mahesh* ‘great lord’ *Mala* ‘necklace’ *Mani* ‘jewel’ *Padma* ‘lotus’ *Prakash* ‘light’ *Pramod(m)/ Promodini(f)* ‘joy’ *Prem* ‘love, affection’ *Rachana* ‘creation’ *Radha* ‘success’ *Raghu* ‘swift’ *Rahul* ‘able, efficient’ *Raj* ‘king or prince’ *Rajani* ‘the dark one’ *Rajesh* ‘ruler of kings’ *Rakesh* ‘lord of the full-moon day’ *Rameshor* ‘lord Rama’, *Rani* ‘queen’ *Ranjit* ‘coloured, delighted’ *Ratan* ‘jewel’ *Rabi* ‘sun’ *Rohit* ‘red’ *Roshan* ‘light, bright’ *Sandip* ‘blazing’ *Sanjay* ‘completely victorious’ *Sankar* ‘auspicious, lucky’ *Sarita* ‘flowing’ *Shanta* ‘calm’ *Shanti* ‘peace, tranquility’ *Sharmila* ‘protection, comfort, joy’ *Shekhar* ‘crest, peak’ *Shila* ‘character, conduct’ *Shayam* ‘dark, black, blue’ *Sima* ‘boundary, limit’ *Subhash* ‘eloquent’, *Sudhir* ‘wise, considerate’ *Sumati* ‘wise, good mind’, *Sunil* ‘very blue’ *Sunita* ‘well conducted, polite’, *Usha* ‘dawn’ *Vivek* ‘distinction’.

WESTERN NAMES

Western names borne by the Meitei are not as many as Indic names. It is not Christianity that influenced the Meitei but rather mass media. It is also common for people to name their children after international personalities. Many a time the surname is used as a first name, like, Churchill, Kennedy, Shakespeare, Russell, Jackson, Stallone, etc. Like in Western societies, parents also give uncommon names, that aren't usually considered names, like Alpha, Gama, Omega, London, Jupiter, and Proton etc. Some of the most common western name borne by Meitei include: Johny, Arnold, Bruce, Shally, Lily, Shanan, etc. and Saint names include Angella, Joseph, John, Peter, Elizabeth, George, Lucy, Micheal, Priscilla, Robert, Samson etc.

One of the most devastating result of bearing non-native name as given name is that it changed the Meitei concept of name as discussed earlier to the status of name as arbitrary: a paradigm shift. Most of the non-native name bearers do not know the meaning, meaningfulness and even the origin of their non-native names¹⁵.

6. CHANGES IN MEITEI PERSONAL NAMES

Meitei Hinduism, westernization and mass media have brought about many changes in the structure and system of Meitei names. These days, apart from nicknames (at home) and surnames, given names are mostly non-native. Some members of the elite are also gradually shifting away from the traditional name order. They started writing their names following western order i.e. given names followed by surname for example *Ranjan Yumnam*, *Robindro Irom*, *Robin Ngangom* etc. This is a real shift from the tradition where our tradition records and writes names in the eastern order.

With the advent of Meitei Hinduism people started adding *Singh* (male) or *Devi* (female) as last name. Similarly those who concern about Meitei native names also started adding *Meitei* or one's tribe name for male, *Chanu* for female as last name. Another development is the addition of *cha* 'sibling' to the surname, for instance *waikhom+cha>waikhomcha*. Substitution of last morpheme of surnames for instance *Kangjam > Kangjia*, *Ningthoujam > Ningthoucha* and *Naorem > Naoria*. Other changes in the last morpheme are *Tongbram > Tongbra*, and *Nongthombam > Nongthomba*. However, these changes of last the morpheme do not alter or conceal the surname.

History has seen two episodes of mass change of given name: a) advent of Meitei Hinduism, and b) revivalism of *Lainingthouism*¹⁶.

a) It was a sovereign king Meidingu Pamheiba who proclaimed Meitei Hinduism as state religion in 1725. There was a mass baptism to Meitei Hinduism known till today as *Nongkhang Iruppa* (to dip to clean). The converts to Meitei Hinduism are required to take the name of Ram or Krishna (or their incarnation names) as given name in a ceremony called *Laiming Lauba*¹⁷ 'taking God's name' (theophoric names). This brought about drastic change in given names although they never abandon their family name. This name-changing pattern shows acculturation¹⁸.

b) The nominal and customary king Meidingu Pareihanba¹⁹ virtually debaptized the Meitei converts to Meitei Hinduism in Oct 6, 1974 (Sairem 2003:123). This brought a massive shift to native Meitei given names. On April 23 1992, Meidingu Pareihanba (Okendrajit) declared that "I open the Lubak Tabu and abandon Hinduism as state religion and recognition is hereby withdrawn by the Royal Customary Law of the Country, instead the Royal Customary Law revives the Lainingthouism as the state religion and do hereby give recognition as state religion" (Sairem 2002:168).

7. NAMES AND GENDER

Meitei female names usually have female marker *bi* to indicate female gender of the name. For example, *Lanchangbi*, *Manglembi*, *Khomdonbi*, *Khambi* etc. But an interesting thing about Meitei names is that male may bear female name and vice versa, the reason we have already seen : in order to govern the sex of the next child. Therefore, given name although has gender marker sometimes does not indicate the sex of the name bearer. But it entails that there are fixed ideas that certain names are female names and others are male names. For example, name of flower, names that have marker *bi*, and names that have morpheme *ebe* 'female' etc are female names. On the other hand, male names usually end in *ba* 'nominalizer' or begin with *ebu~ebo*.

Other gender identifier words in present day Meitei anthroponymic system are *Meitei / Singh* or *any tribe's name* for Male and *Chanu* or *Devi* for female. So *Wahengbam Ebetombi Meitei* is a male and *Wahenbam Ebetombi Chanu* is female. In the above example *Wahenbam Ebetombi Meitei*, it has two morphemes that indicate the name is female i.e. *ebe* and *bi*. However, it has word Meitei usually borne by male. So we can conclude that he was given a female name to govern the sex of the child born just after him.

Married woman takes husband surname and adds *Ongbi* 'married to' just after the husband surname like *Soibam Ongbi Tampha* 'Tampha who married to a Soibam male'.

8 CONCLUSION

Meitei personal names index the people's belief, ideology, culture, philosophy and thought. The names are best understood and analyzed when one understand socio-cultural norms, the language and culture of Meitei. This paper has claimed that these names are not mere arbitrary and meaningless labels but socio-cultural tags that have meaning and functions; that have relationships with various places, flora and fauna, time, people and events.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Every Meitei today has a birth document written by an astrologer. In this document he/she is given a name according to the constellation on the day he or she was born.
- 2 The king Loyumba (1074 -1122) was the one who carried out the distribution of works.
- 3 clan from Gaelic clann, "offspring": families in a tribe who claim common ancestry and share same surname. The term came to refer to those groups originating in Scotland and Ireland about ad 1000. Generally the members of a Scottish clan adopt a tartan, a distinctive plaid pattern used in socks, kilts, and capes.
- 4 the descendents of Aryan Muslim males and Meitei females
- 5 the descendents of Aryan Hindu males and Meitei females
- 6 Meetingu means (mee 'man' + ting 'straight' + u 'see') one who can see straight or one who knows the truth.
- 7 the male deity of that particular place
- 8 Meitei Hindu birth ceremony held on sixth day of birth
- 9 There are twenty-seven *nakshatras* and each *nakshatra* has four sounds, corresponding to the four quarters (*padas*) of each constellation. It is best to choose the syllable of that *pada* under which the child was born.
- 10 How to record names of person. Vol. 5 Published by Huridocs 2001.
Indexing personal names. Centrepiece to The Indexer, Vol. 25. No 2. October 2006
- 11 see Kofi Agyekum 2006 for Akan, Mthobeli Guma 2001 for Basotho, Hidetoshi Katakami 1997 for Mbeere
- 12 Kofi Annan indexes he/she was born on Friday and he/she was the fourth child. Akan numerals, 2nd-Manu, 3rd- Mensa and Mansa (female), 4th-Anane/Annan etc are given as name to index the sequence by which the mother has given birth. See Kofi Agyekum 2006.
- 13 Indic names because most Indian names derived from Sanskrit which is a language of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism etc and cannot be called Hindu names.
- 14 ISKON members at Imphal Centre (like in the West) bear Vishnavas names under Das/Dasi as their baptismal names when suits them in day-to-day circumstances, but maintain their given names on their passport, among relatives and for legal matters

- 15 Out of hundred persons who bear Indic names were asked about the meaning of their names only five gave meaning very closed to acceptable.
- 16 Lainingthouism also called Sanamahism.
- 17 Traditionally Meitei never bore theophoric names.
- 18 The contact between Aryan Brahmins and Meiteis brought about new naming pattern. Brahmins who brought Hinduism to Manipur were given new Yumnaks and they abandon their Hindu surname. Meitei take new Hindu given names although they maintain their Yumnaks. It is a process of acculturation.
- 19 Pareihanba means (parei 'twist' + hanba 'undo') undo the twist. Here the connotation is undoing the twist made by Hindu teachings. The concept is that the Meiteis have been screwed by the Hindu teachings and the person who is unscrewing is Pareihanba.

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