



Customary Rituals And Practices Of Birth Amongst Meitei Pangal (Muslim) Of Manipur

Makakmayum Jahudah¹ & Salam Anand Singh²

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of History, Manipur International University, Manipur – 795140

²Associate Professor, Dept. of History, Manipur International University, Manipur – 795140

Abstract

The Meitei Pangal Community is one of the major ethnic groups while Meitei being the largest community inhabiting in the Manipur valley. They comprise of 8.40 percent of the total population of the state and majority Meitei community representing about 53 percent. They have been playing major roles in the socio-economic development of Manipuri society thereby earning a unique position for them. Meitei Pangal began to settle in 1606 A.D in Manipur during the time of King Khagemba (1597- 1652) as recorded in Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Royal Chronicles of Manipur. They assimilated into Meitei society by marrying Meitei women. Meiteilon (Meitei Language) is adopted as their mother tongue. They practice the Meitei way of living and culture though they profess Islam religion and strictly following the Islamic code of conduct and the Islamic Sariyat (Law). The main objective is to study on the customary rituals and practices of birth amongst Meitei Pangal. Descriptive and explorative research methods will be employed. The present study is based on field work, open ended interviews of Moulavis and other Islamic Scholars. Royal Chronicles (Cheitharol Kumpaba and Ningthourol Lampuba), Puyas (archaic manuscripts), foreigners accounts, books, newspapers, magazines are taken as literary sources.

Key Words: Ritual Practices, Customs, Birth Ceremony, Meitei Pangal

Introduction

The Manipuri Muslims are locally known as Meitei Pangals. They came to Manipur in different periods. The Meitei Pangal Community is the one of three major ethnic group of Manipur. They are the second largest community staying in the valley areas of Manipur, where the Meiteis are the largest community inhabiting in the Manipur valley. The Meitei Pangal began to arrive and settled since 1606 A.D. in Manipur during the time of King Khagemba period (1597- 1652) which was recorded in the Royal Chronicles of Manipur called *Cheitharol Kumbaba*. This was followed after the invasion of Manipur by the combined forces of then the King of Cachhar and the King of Taraf (Sylhet) under the instigation of

Shanongba, the youngest brother of King Khagemba over an issue of boat wreckage. Those migrated Muslims were given Meitei women which ultimately led to the establishment of Pangal family. They are assimilated with the Meitei society by marrying Meitei women. Meiteilon (Meitei Language) is considered as their mother tongue. They adopted the Meitei way of living and culture though they are the follower of Islam strictly following the Islamic code of conduct and Islamic *Sariyat* (Law).

The word 'Pangal' is derived from the word 'Bangal' meaning Bengal. The earliest Muslims settlers came from Bengal and were consequently called the 'Bangals' a corrupted word from the word 'Bengalees'. During King Khagemba Maharaj's Period Muslim warriors are allowed to settle as Cultivate, allowed to serve in army, built their own houses, allowed to practice on Justice Systems of Islamic custom etc. On this excellent success with talent of commander Muhammed Sani for war the Manipur King Khagemba Maharaj gave name as '*Pangalba*' to him and the whole Muslim warriors as 'Pangal Community' (Khullakpam, 1997, pp.32 & 35). Thus, The Meiteis called the Manipuri Muslims as 'Pangal'. The eastern countries called the Muslims as by local names, such as 'Moro' and 'Hui' etc. The 'Moros' are the Muslims of Philippines and the 'Hui' are the Muslims of China.

Rituals and Practices of Birth

Birth ritual is one of the important life cycle rituals performed when an individual enters into different stages of his or her life. It is a cultural relationship and customary practices performed by different groups of religious people in the world. It is also a welcoming of new born baby into their respective communities and caring them. Various religious traditions around the globe have certain ways of welcoming a new born child into the community. Every religious community regarded children as precious gifts from God. Different beliefs and rituals are surrounding this important stage of life from religion to religion. It means birth practices and rituals are all greatly influenced by the religious beliefs of the particular community. In Manipur, Meitei culture influences Meitei Pangal community as they assimilated and adopted Meitei culture part and partially although they follow strictly the Islamic and *Shariyat* culture. There are given some religious rituals and cultural practices which are related to the customary of birth of Meitei Pangal.

Azaan and Eqamad Prayer

Prayer is performed immediately after delivery. The newly born child is given bath with warm water and wrapped in pieces of cloth specially prepared well in advance for the purpose and then call of 'Azaan' (Islamic call for prayer) is done by a respectable person probably an old man or a Maulavi or male member of the family preferably father of the child. This *Azaan* is recited into the right ear and *Eqamad* into the left ear.

The Eqamad is reads as: '*Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar Asshaduallab la illahaillallah, Asshaduallab la illahaillallah Ashadaunna muhammadar rasullullah, Ashadaunna muhammadar rasullullah Hei alas-shala, Hei alas-shala Heiyallalfala, Heiyallalfala Kadakamatissala, Kadakamatissala Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar Asshaduallab la illahaillallah, Asshaduallab la*

illahaillallah'. It is believed that the sooner the *Azaan* and *Eqamah* are said before anything else is heard by the child, the better it is considered. After recite to the ear of baby then he or she is to be recognized as Islam. Giving honey to the child is considered to be the (*Sunnat*) tradition of the Prophet to taste sweet.

Burying Placenta and Navel Cord

In the early days when a woman is in labour, an elderly woman known as *Maibi* (mid wife) was engaged to assist in the delivery as there existed only a few physicians to concern with. For safety and security, most of the pregnant women now a days delivered in the hospital where medical facilities are available. The head of the mother is laid oriented towards the north in the delivery. It is to ward off the bad lucks. When the child is born the navel cord is cut by *Maibi* with a sharp bamboo splinter called *Kabak* amongst Meitei Pangal. Hot water is kept ready and every requirement is made available for the purpose of delivery. The *Naopham* (placenta) is then collected and put into a new earthen pot and buried on the right side of the courtyard if the child is male and buried on the left side if child is female. The burial is made at the dept of about one and half to two feet believing that if the placenta is buried in shallow the child may face the problem of vomiting. The burial has to be done either by father or any male members of the family. At the time of performing this ritual, extreme care should be taken not to break the earthen pot or change its position.

Akika or Hakkikat Sacrifice

The custom of *Akika* ceremony is usually performed either on 7th, 14th or 21st day of birth otherwise it may do later. The performance of this ceremony depends upon parent's conditions (*niyat*) unless parents promise to make it compulsory. It is also called *Loo Kokpa* (Head Shave). The naming of the child is also done on this day. On this day the child's head is properly shaved and the nails are trimmed. The weight of the shaved hair and nails are measured and the equal amount of gold is donated to the poor and needy people. It is believed that the child is protected from disease, unwanted incidence or danger in his/her life by performing this sacrifice. On this day the father of the child also made an animal sacrifice, may be a cow or a goat in the name of God. If the child is male then he should sacrifice two cows or two goats and if a girl he should sacrifice one cow or a goat. In *Aqiqa*, if sacrificial animal is cow, then the fresh meat is distributed to the poor, orphan and other relatives whereas cooked meat is distributed to the needy people if sacrificial animal is goat. The shaven head is massaged with a *Kumkum* oil (mixture of Safran and water). Usually naming of child is done in Arabic language as other languages are prohibited.

Postnatal Care During Postpartum Period (*Meining Hippa or Kunba*)

During postpartum period both the mother and child are usually look after by her own parents and therefore she has to stay at least 40 days at her parental house. This period of time is known as '*Meining Hippa or Meinig Kunba*'. However, the *Meining Hippa* is done in certain cases at the husband's house with regular visits of female members from the maternal side. During these days, mother has to remain confined mostly to the bed and consume simple food consisting mainly of boiled rice with a kind of indigenously produced salt locally called *Meitei Thum*. She consumes the local dry fishes such as *Ngamu*

and *Ukabi*, boiled vegetables and meat soup for twenty days. The personal hygiene of mother is considered very important, and hence first ablution is done either on 11th or 21st day followed by final ablution on 39 days. After 40 days, the mother is allowed to drink a little 'sharbat' (syrup) prepared after blending ingredients such as sugar, betel leaf, ginger and water. A well-known person recites *Al Fateh* (Quranic verse) over the sharbat before drinking by mother. Now both the mother and child could return back to husband's house and join with other members and resume household chores.

Circumcision (*Sunnat Touba / Khanah Touba*)

This customary practice is performed when a boy is attending at the age between 7-12 years, but mostly prefer below 10 years of age. The term '*Sunnat Touba*' is the combination of two words; '*Sunnat*' (the trodden path) is an Arabic word that denotes the practice of following the path of prophet and '*Touba*' is Manipuri word meaning 'to perform'. Therefore, *Sunnat Touba* literally means undergoing circumcision or *Sunnat/Sunnah*. This practice is compulsory for all the Meitei Pangal boys when they attend certain age and is done by a specialist called '*Napit*'. Usually, most of the boys are circumcised at any houses of their locality. It is believed that performing *Sunnah* gives better health to the boys. Immediately after this practice, boys should take at least 4 to 5 days off and avoid playing during this time. The *Napit* would visit them every now and then to check their well-being and healing process. During these days boys are advised to take simple foods such as boiled rice, boiled vegetables, dried fish with *Meitei Thum* and should avoid oily foods. Now-a -day with the advancement of medical facilities the *Sunnah* is done by specialist like doctors and medical practitioners at clinics or hospital.

Piercing of Ear and Nose (*Na Hutpa and Naton Hutpa*)

The Meitei Pangal girls piercing their nose and ears as a custom. There is no age limit for a girl to have her nose and ears pierced. It can be usually done after one year but sometimes even less than a year. It is common to have nose pierced on the left side. This is not just for religious purposes but also for wearing other luxurious ornaments; the ornaments worn on the nose is called *Nasika Chinba* and the ornaments worn on the ears is called *Sana Chinba*. The practice of *Naton Hutpa* is to identify that the girl is from a Pangal community. On the other hand, Pangal boys are not practicing *Na Hutpa*. Meitei and Tribal boys also do this practice. This custom shows the identities of those boys and girls and communities which they belong.

Practice of Islamic Learning (*Tasmiya Khwani*)

Like other Islamic countries of the world, the Meitei Pangal children both boys and girls of Manipur are sent to Masjid or Maktab to learn do's and don'ts and manners of Islam and Quran. This practice is called *Tasmiya Khwani*. When children are 4 years old, it is compulsory to learn and acquire the knowledge of every aspect of Islamic religion. They may go to Masjid or Maktab with their elders of the family or may entrust to *Maulavis* or *Munsis* or *Qazis*. The Meitei Pangal called their teachers as *Miyazi* or *Miyashab*. At first the children learn to read the sentence, '*Bismilla Hir Rahama Nir Rahim*' (we are started learning with the humble and sympathetic name of Allah). And then they learn Arabic and Urdu. They further learn

'*Kalima*' - the process of Namaz and reading of Quran. Both the boys and girls learn to undergo fasting of *Roja* from the age of 8-11 years. They are advised to read Quran. They join *Sahery* meal at mid night, *Iftar* after sun set and also join *Esha Namaz* and *Tawaric Namaz* with their elders.

Practice of Wearing Amulet (*Tawiz or Zantra*)

Amulet locally called *Tawiz or Zantra* is usually worn by every community of Manipur. *Zantra* is a small *Kaboch* (small iron hollow capsule with lid) and it is hung commonly by black threads and wear in any part of the body such as arm, neck and waist. It is believed that by wearing *Zantra* the child will protect or prevent from devils and certain disease like epidemics.

Resemblance of Meitei and Meitei Pangal in Birth Ceremony

Many customary practices are found alike amongst Meitei and Meitei Pangal specially in birth ceremony. Meitei culture and tradition influence the Meitei Pangal. After the delivery of a baby both Meitei and Meitei Pangal performed their ritual ceremony. It is just after knotting the navel cord by the sacred threads, it is cut off by the sharp bamboo knife with placenta (*Naopham*). In continuation of the ritual process, the baby child is cleaned with lukewarm water and then covered with a soft cloth and handed over to the father. The father whispers the following *Mapugi Mingkhei* also known as *Yaibirel Mingkhei* (religious spell praising the Almighty Lord) three times into the right ear of the child in case it is a baby boy, and into the left ear in case the baby is a girl: '*Hung! Haa! Hei! Hey! Hing! Hayi – Haya- Hayum-Sidaba- Sidaba- Sidaba Mapu*'. (Tomba,2020). Meitei Pangal recites Azan and Aqamat on the ear of the new born baby and whispered by Moulavi or his or her father or head of the male members of the family. In Meitei community, if the baby was a boy, it would be on the area adjoining the right side of the house where *Piba ka* (room for male youths of the family) was allotted. In case of a girl child, it would be on the area adjoining the left side of the house where *Ningol Ka* (room for maiden) was allotted. After the delivery of the child, the mother is given due care for a period of five days. This period of confinement is known as *Maning Kumba* (post-natal care) whereas Meitei Pangal, also performed *Meining Kunba* for the periods of forty days and same in food eating style during the post partum period. Mother is provided only boiled rice with dried fish specially *Ngamu* and roasted *Meitei Thum* (traditional salt cake). On the day of birth ceremony, both the mother and the child take bath and cut off their nails. *Epanthaba* or *Heisoi-Epanthaba* is one of the most significant birth rituals of the Meiteis/Meeteis and it is performed on the sixth day after the birth of the baby. Meitei Pangal performed ablution at the time of completion of 40 days and cut off their nails.

Conclusion

We can conclude from the above analysis of religious beliefs and cultural practices related to birth ceremony that Meitei Pangal observed birth ceremony as very important ritual practice like other communities across the world. Meitei Pangal followed the Islamic and *Shariyat* principles although they adopted many cultural practices of local community Meitei as their traditions. Meitei and Meitei Pangals are living together in a same place particularly in valley regions besides they are closely binding

relationship since the early times. Both Meitei and Meitei Pangal are not separable from each other as there are having blood relationship. They are depending each other and work together at the same places. Therefore, Cultural and tradition practices related to birth ritual ceremony is also influenced by many customs of Meitei community.

References

1. Ahamed, A. Q. (1979). *The Manipuri Muslim*. Baskandi, Assam. (p. 29)
2. Ahmed, I. (1978). *Family kinship and marriage among the Muslim*. Imphal: Khonthang Publications. (p. 29)
3. Ahmed, M. M. (2011). *Manipuri Muslimgi Chatnabi Amasung Harao Kumhei*. Imphal: Writers Union. (p. 48)
4. Ahmed, M. N. (2013). *The Muslims in Manipur: A study in their history and culture* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Manipur University. (p. 121)
5. Bhagyachandra, L. (1991). "The Meitei rites and rituals". In N. Sanajaoba Singh (Ed.), *Manipur past and present* (pp. 127-129). Delhi: Mittal Publications.
6. Bhogeshor Singh, O., & Khan, J. (1973). *Nongsamei Puya*. Imphal: Stationery and Printing Industries.
7. Chaudari, K. (1990). *The Culture of the Manipur Muslim* [Souvenir]. Baskandi, Assam. (p. 6)
8. Directorate of Census, Government of Manipur. (2011). *Census of Manipur*. Imphal: Government of Manipur.
9. Huda. (2019). *Common practices of Islamic birth rites*. Retrieved from <https://www.learn-religious.com/islamic-birth-rites-2004500>
10. Irene, S. (2010). *The Muslims of Manipur*. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications. (p. 21)
11. Kamei, R. (2011). *Historical studies of Muslim women in Manipur* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Manipur University. (p. 76)
12. Kheiruddin, K. (1997). *Turko-Afghangee Chada Naoda*. Lilong: The Council of Islamic Renaissance on Cultural Literary and Education. (pp. 22-23)
13. Parrat, S. N. (2013). *The religion of Manipur* (2nd ed.). Guwahati/Delhi: Spectrum Publications.
14. Samarendro, A. (1998). "Manipur Amasung Meitei Pangal". In A. Rahamand (Ed.), *The culture of the Manipur Muslim (Pangal) and Meitei influences* (p. 6). Imphal: P. S. Printing.
15. Shah, M. A. (1994). *A brief historical study of religion and society of the Pangals of Manipur* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Manipur University. (p. 45)
16. Sharma, B. Kulachandra, & Badaruddin. (1991). *Meitei Pangal Hourakpham*. Imphal: Laininghal Babu Research Center. (p. 11)
17. Singh, T. S. (2007). *Socio-economic condition of the Manipuri Muslim in the Pre Colonial Period* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Manipur University. (p. 84)
18. Tomba, N. (2020). *Sanamahi Laininggi Tinthou-Laithou Thouramlon (Rites and rituals services of the Meitei Sanamahism)*. Imphal: J. C. Offset Printing Works at Paona Bazar.