

Ethnomedical Practice in Manipur: A Case of Evil Eye

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THE MEITEIS

The Meiteis are one of the indigenous inhabitants of Manipur state in North-eastern part of India, who took their abode largely in the valley area covering about 750 sq. miles and the plain portion of Jiribam sub-division in the western part of the state. They constitute the largest population of the state. Along with the Meiteis, other ethnic groups such as Naga, Kuki, Pangans (Manipuri Muslims), Brahnims (Meitei Bamon), Lois (Scheduled Caste group of Meiteis) and Non-Manipuris like Nepalis, Bengalis, Biharis, Jains, Sikhs, Bangladeshis and Burmese refugees, also inhabit in Manipur. The Meiteis, the Nagas and the Kukis are predominantly mongoloid who speak the Tibeto-Burman languages. Historical reasons greatly influence the independent growth of these social groups with varying degrees of cultural development and civilization, of which the Meiteis among these are the most dominant and advanced community.

RELIGION OF THE MEITEIS

The Meiteis are Hindu and the other major religious groups in Manipur are Christian and Muslim. Most of the Meiteis are Hindu Vaisnavite. Hinduism is of comparatively recent origin in the Meitei civilization. Although the people have been practicing it for nearly 300 years, they still believe in their traditional deities. In other words, they have not yet given up their old tradition of worshipping their ancestors and local deities. They worship all Hindu Gods and Goddesses (such as *Ram*, *Krishna*, *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, *Ganesh*, *Hanuman*, *Jaganath*, *Vishkarma*, *Durga*, *Laxmi*, *Saraswati*, *Radha*).

A momentous event in modern Meitei history was the conversion of the Meitei to Hinduism. Previous to the 18th century, the Meiteis were animists, worshipping deities that were vested with characteristics of fire, water, wind, sun, moon and other natural phenomena. Converted Meiteis observe and celebrate important milestones in Hinduism, such as birth adoption

of the sacred thread, marriage, death and cremation with prescribed ceremonies.

The number of deities worshipped by the Meiteis is computed to be 364 in addition to the three members of the trinity, i.e., *Atiya Guru Sidaba* (Sky God – the immortal supreme creator), *Sanamahi* (Sun God) and *Pakhangba* (Moon God). They also believe in certain spirits of good and evil. The traditional deities may be classified broadly into four groups:

1. *Lam Lai*: (*Lam* Deity or Tutelary deities) i.e., gods of the country side who shade off into Nature Gods controlling the rain, guardian spirits connected with particular places or areas, rivers, mountains, etc., e.g. *Koubrou*, *Wangbaren*, *Thangjing*, etc.
2. *Umang Lai*: (Forest deities), e.g. *Nongpok Ningthou*, *Panthoibi Khunthokhanbi*, *Khoriphaba*, etc.
3. *Imung Lai*: (The household or domestic deities), i.e., Lords of the lives, the births and deaths of individuals, e.g. *Lainingthou Sanamahi*, *Leimarel*, *Imoinu*, etc.
4. *Apokpa*: (Ancestor deities), i.e., important deity associated with one particular *Yek* (clan), e.g. *Pakhangba* for the *Ningthouja* clan, *Poireiton* for the *Luwang* clan, *Pureiromba* for the *Angom* clan, *Khamdinggon* for the *Moirang* clan, etc.

Every Meitei house keeps separate abode for *Sanamahi* and *Leimarel* towards the south-western corner of the house. They daily worship these household deities with incense (stick or powder) and lamp.

MAIBA AND MAIBI

MAIBA

There are Different types of Maiba

1. *Maiba*: A man who performs rituals (priest) especially during the festival of *Lai-haraoba* (merry making of gods and goddesses).
2. *Maiba*: As a medicine man that includes (a) man who performs the rituals, which are related to the treatment of *Hingchabi*

Changba. (b) man who can cure ailments (like stomach ache, fracture, sprain, boils, etc.).

3. *Maiba*: As a shaman who performs magic that may be good or bad (*Potshem Jadu Touba*).
4. *Maiba*: A man who performs a ritual for the benefit of family or person or community. The ritual can be of many types. One of them is to drive away the evil.

For example, among the Meiteis, there is a belief that beehive can either be good or bad omen according to the kind of bee as well as the place of beehive. So, a *Maiba* is consulted for this case and he will guide them what is to be done with the beehive.

It is not necessary that a particular *Maiba* performs a specific function / duty as mentioned above. A *Maiba* can perform either one or more duties.

Every *Maiba* does not know all kinds of treatment and procedures of any ritual. Among them, there is no particular rule for the ingredients of a ritual. Each and every *Maiba* might have worshipped and performed a ritual in different styles depending upon the concerned power.

The age group of *Maiba* is usually above fifty but some young *Maibas* are also seen. Usually, the *Maiba* wears a white *Pheijom* (*Dhoti*) and *Pumyat* (*Kurta*) but during the festivals (like *Lai-haraoba*) the *Maiba* wears a particular costume of *Khamen Chatpa Pheijom* (a traditional block print in geometrical pattern which is purple-black on the white *Pheijom*), velvet top or white *Pumyat* and white *Kokyot* (turban). A *Maiba* does not enter into trance. He is usually vegetarian, but some may take fish. However, *Maibas* abstain from meat and eggs. Any person can become a *Maiba* by learning the *mantras* (holy litany) and observing the procedures of the rituals conduct. Sometimes, an individual may become a *Maiba* after he has had a dream in which it is performed that he should become a *Maiba*, and thereby he learns the holy words (*mangtak*).

MAIBI

According to the function or duty of the *Maibis*, they can be of different types. They are:

1. *Maibi*: who performs rituals (priestess) during the festival of *Lai-haraoba*, *Apokpa Khurumba* (worshipping of the ancestral

deities of a particular *Salai / yek*, i.e., clan), *Imung Lai Khurumba* (worshipping of the household / domestic gods and goddesses like *Sanamahi*, *Leimarel*, *Imoinu*, etc.). This type of *Maibi* usually enters into trance and the words of gods are spoken through her. She also predicts the future of a person, or village, or community. *Maibis* are the mediators between gods and human beings.

2. *Maibi*: A woman who attends a delivery, a mid-wife. She does not enter into trance unlike those *Maibis* who participate in the *Lai-haraoba* festival.
3. *Maibi*: A woman who participates in witchcraft. She performs this ritual when a person asks her to do something for good or bad purposes, e.g. to do *Potshem Jadu Touba*, *Mingshel Kanglon Yengba* (In this case, a *Maibi* uses a mirror and chants mantras in order to find a thief or someone has lost things / goods, then she will inform them the place where the goods may be kept.), *Thaoda Yengba* (A method in which the *Maibi* uses oil with *mantras* and by looking at this she can describe the physical features of the culprit and can also tell the thief / place where things that have been lost would be found.).

A *Maiba* can also do this type of work. Thus, there is no specific division of labour among the *Maibis*. A *Maibi* may get into trance, but it is also possible to come across one who does not. However, both can do the work mention earlier.

Those *Maibis* who serve as priestesses are chosen either by gods or goddesses at any time. It happens among the age group of eleven onwards and mostly unmarried females. Sometimes, it occurs to the woman of thirty to fifty years of age. But men are also chosen by gods and goddesses and they are usually called *Maibi* and they used to dress up like a female *Maibi*. *Maibis* wear white *Phanek*, white blouse and white *Inaphi* (*Dupata* or *Chadar*). They used to wear a piece of cloth called *Khangchet* at the waist on the top of the *Phanek*. They are very strict in the cleanliness and purity of place and goods / things (like food, cloth, water, etc.). They are vegetarian but some of them eat fish of a particular type. They do not eat *Machipanba Nga* (such as *Ngakra* i.e., catfish, *ngashep*), *Nga Amuba* (i.e., fish in black colour e.g., *Ngamu*) and *Ngaprum* (eel).

Both the male and female *Maibis* are possessed by the sylvan deities (*Umang Lais*) and they get into trance. From their utterances, people come to know what will happen in future. For the welfare of the people they also worship the concerned forest deity.

In the beginning when a person becomes a *Maibi*, he / she shows abnormal behavior and gives an unrelated speech. They show symptoms of madness, occasional trances and restlessness, hair sometimes coiled up in three places and attacks like epilepsy. Usually parents do not like their daughter to become a *Maibi* and they try hard to suppress the symptoms with the help of a *Maiba*. In doing this, the person may return to his / her normal life but sometimes if the ritual is not performed well, the person may become mentally disturbed (almost mad). Few years later the person might be chosen again by the god. Then, she chooses a Guru of her own and takes up a new life-style and profession. The *Maibis* get trained in dance, music chanting and ritual procedures under the supervision of their own *Ima Guru* (Mother Guru). While performing a ritual a *Maibi* always rings a brass bell.

The *Maibis* are usually married and have children and lead a normal life. If a married woman becomes a *Maibi*, she stays at her *Ima Guru*'s house for about one year, and during this period she is not allowed to sleep with her husband. The status of being a *Maibi* is permanent and she is a full time specialist.

HINGCHABI

L. Angou Singh, a *Maiba*, gave me a brief description of the origin of *Hingchabi* as follows.

According to Meitei mythology, *Atiya Guru Sidaba*, the immortal supreme creator wishes to create world. In the beginning, he fails to complete it. As he requests *Leimarel* (*Durga*) to complete it, she produces *Veirabi Salai Taret* from her left hand and *Devi Salai Taret* from her right hand. *Leimarel Apoibi* (one of the incarnation of *Ima Leimarel Shidabi*) reproduces *Hingchabi*, a kind of spirit, which comes under the group of *Devi Salai Taret*. [When a *Maiba* performs a *pooja* or certain ritual to ward off evil, which is believed to be caused by *Hingchabi* from a patient, he first tries to satisfy

Leimarel Apoibi, i.e. mother of *Hingchabi* offering her some ingredients and requests her to call upon her child as she (*Hingchabi*) becomes so naughty that she troubles someone innocent entering into the person's body. If the *Leimarel Apoibi* gets satisfied with the ritual of the *Maiba* then the *Hingchabi* cannot possess the person longer]. Now, the *Devi / Hingchabi* demands one hundred humans and another one hundred animals as her food everyday. The *Guru* thinks that if the *Devi* eats so much then his desire of creating the world would not be fulfilled. So, *Guru* asks *Devi* to eat only a particular animal instead of 100 human beings and 100 animals per day. He further says that her food should be:

1. *Shaireng* (a kind of fish) in *Sataya Yuga*,
2. *Shandang* (Mithun) in *Treta Yuga*
3. *Oak* (Pig) in *Duwapura Yuga* and
4. *Ngakra* (catfish) in *Kali Yuga*.

The *Devi* accepts this food menu suggested by the *Guru* who advises her to eat catfish only, instead of others, whenever she felt like eating living beings in *Kali Yuga*. Therefore the *Maiba* offers catfish to the *Hingchabi / Devi* while performing a ritual for the treatment of *Hingchabi Changba*, because the present phase belongs to *Kali Yuga*.

There are other female spirits produced by *Leimarel* from her body, which are -

1. *Helois Taret*: Seven sisters of fairy who stay in thick bushes or dark and dense forest.
2. *Yogni Taret*: Seven sisters of water.
3. *Nongthang Leima Taret*: Seven sisters of lightning.
4. *Lam Leima Taret*: Seven sisters of land. Its literal meaning is the spirit of the land and this particular spirit is found in barren areas, such as paddy field, forest, etc.

The seven sisters of the fairy (i.e., *Helois*) are believed to be beautiful maidens and amongst them the youngest is the most beautiful and attractive. They always appear as beautiful young girls luring young men, only to turn them insane. It is also believed that *Helois* are most powerful amongst the female spirits, which cause diseases.

However, *Nongthang Leima* and *Lam Leima* are believed to be married. [In ancient times, in the Meitei chronicle, the word *Leima* was used by married women as their title, that is their third name. Nowadays this word is used by those Meitei married women who are *Meitei Marup*

by religion (*Meitei Marup* = a traditional Meitei religion slightly influenced by Hinduism). Among the unmarried girls, the word *Chanu* is used as their title unlike those Hindu *Vaisnavite* females (both unmarried and married) who prefer the word *Devi* as their title] .

The above spirits cause harm when in contact with human beings. If a person is possessed by any of the above said spirits, then a ritual has to be performed. The symptoms of the victim differ as do the spirits. Usually the *Maiba* performs a ritual in accordance with the spirit, confirmed by checking the pulse of the wrist and tip of the fingers. The ingredients required for the ritual depend upon the concerned spirit. In other words, the ritual for each and every spirit has specific ingredients and *mantras*.

For example, the ritual for a victim possessed by *Nongthang Leima* consists of the following:

1. *Laphoi Laphang Chang Thokpa Ama*: A bunch of bananas in odd number.
2. *Phanek Phidon Ama*: A small piece of cloth cut from the tip of the first *Phanek* made on loom.
3. *Mingshel Ama*: A mirror.
4. *Kabok*: puffed rice.
5. *Athum-Ahao*: Sweets

The *Maiba* performs the ritual after putting all these in a *Kharai Pungna Taret Panba* (a kind of basket made of bamboo strips).

But in case of *Heloi*, there should be:

1. *Heiram Taret*: Seven different types of fruits.
2. *Leiram Taret*: Seven different types of flowers.
3. *Kabok Nachal Taret*: Seven handfuls of puffed rice.

All these have to be offered to the *Heloi*, putting them together in the basket. Likewise, the ritual for a *Hingchabi Changba* is also different from the rest. It will be discussed later.

Hingchabi is a compound word in Meitei language. It comes from the words *Ahingba* (which means living) and *Chabi* (meaning eater) i.e. *Ahingba* + *Chabi* = *Hingchabi*. So, the literal meaning of the *Hingchabi* is 'cannibal'. But, it does not consume a thing or person physically. It is through an unknown supernatural power from birth is usually known as *Hingchabi*. The woman (i.e., possessor) fails to notice this spiritual power within herself.

A woman cannot be identified or recognized as *Hingchabi* from her physical appearance until

and unless her spirit enters into another person. In other words, people will come to know a woman as *Hingchabi* from the words uttered by the victim during the *Maiba*'s process of treatment.

HINGCHABI CHANGBA

Hingchabi Changba means entering of the *Hingchabi*'s spirit into another person. The person in whom the *Hingchabi* (spirit) has entered suffers a lot both mentally and physically, and the spirit takes full control over the victim's body. So, the word *Hingchabi* is different from the *Hingchabi Changba*.

It is a mysterious interaction between the spirit and the victim, which is unexplainable scientifically. The victim loses his or her real identity and identifies himself / herself with the character of the spirit / *Hingchabi*. From then onwards the desires of the spirit become the desires of the victim or patient. The spirits mostly enter into women. Sometimes, a man is also possessed by the spirit, however it is extremely rare.

This phenomenon of *Hingchabi Changba* is quite similar to the evil eye, but it is totally different from witchcraft or sorcery or magic. In the case of *Hingchabi Changba*, the spirit enters the victim's body unintentionally but in the case of witchcraft or sorcery or magic, the power is used intentionally with a purpose to harm a person irrespective of age and sex. But the phenomenon of *Hingchabi Changba* is found mainly among the females rather than the males. Usually the spirit enters into a person's body when he is mentally and physically weak. It also happens when the zodiac star of the person is not in a favourable place.

SOME CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF HINGCHABI

The following characters may not be present in all the *Hingchabis*; some may have all the qualities whereas others may have few of them.

1. They are usually attractive and have magnetic personality.
2. It is believed that most of them are born on Sunday, at 12 noon.
3. Some of them are very persuasive and get people do things for them even when they are unwilling.

4. Some of the *Hingchabis* are not well off. They may not be able to satisfy their cravings and wishes, so they enter the bodies of other people to satiate themselves.
 5. It is believed that most of them have long tongues and sometimes they sleep with the mouth open and by the time the tongue can reach the chin or the tip of the nose.
 6. Most of them are very strong and powerful and their husbands are quite submissive.
 7. Most of them have strong will power, they are usually fearless and stubborn.
 8. They have melodious voice.
 9. They are very observant.
 10. They are scared of *Ngaprum* (eel).
 11. Usually it is hereditary (from mother to daughter even to the grand-daughter). If the son inherits the supernatural power of the *Hingchabi*, it remains more or less recessive. However, he is capable of passing it to his daughter. Sometimes, the son has the power of entering to somebody but it happens very rarely. Although all the daughters inherit the power from their mother the youngest is the most powerful, but it is not necessary that all the daughters will express this inborn power equally.
 12. *Hingchabi* will always possess the supernatural power throughout her lifetime.
 13. Before puberty, the supernatural power of the *Hingchabi* is dormant. After that it makes its full appearance.
1. Sudden changes in the behaviour of the patient, such as excitement or depression, laughing or crying and murmuring to oneself.
 2. The patient is at a sub-conscious level / state and is unaware of his or her environment. And the patient has no idea of what he / she is uttering.
 3. The patient gets a kind of epileptic attack.
 4. The patient starts rocking his / her head vigorously from side to side.
 5. The patient froths at the mouth and has difficulty in breathing.
 6. The patient is obsessed with food or anything that the spirit craves to have.
 7. The patient sometimes vomits or sometimes suffers from severe stomachache.
 8. The patient sometimes is very talkative and at other times remains silent with his / her eyes closed.
 9. Sometimes the patient sits in a corner cuddling himself / herself or lies down on the bed quietly.

SOME PREVENTIVE MEASURES

There are preventive measures based on certain beliefs or myths of the Meiteis. They commonly practice the following preventive measures.

HOW DOES THE SPIRIT ENTER INTO A PERSON

The spirit of the *Hingchabi* enters into a victim under certain circumstances, e.g. when the victim is eating something like *Singju* (vegetable salad), *bidi*, *pan* (betel nut), fruits, sweets, fish, etc. or possesses an object which the *Hingchabi* really desires to have, for example a lovely new born baby. It need not be the case that the *Hingchabi* has to see the object, but the spirit of the *Hingchabi* will see it.

SYMPTOMS OF THE VICTIM

The victim may not experience all the following symptoms. Each patient may have similar or different symptoms, according to the power of the *Hingchabi*.

1. Wearing of *Kurao-Angouba*: *Kurao-Angouba* (*Angouba* = white) is a kind of tree which is commonly found in Manipur. This tree does not have any leaves during its flowering season. The flower is white in colour. A person who wears a piece of *Kurao-Angouba* in the form of *Tabiz* is considered safe from the evil eye of the *Hingchabi*. Most infants are made to wear this.
2. One of the common beliefs to protect oneself from the spirit is to touch one's knee(s) in the presence of *Hingchabi* without noticing or showing her.
3. Eating in front of the *Hingchabi* is considered a risk since the *Hingchabi* might cast an evil eye on the person's food. It is believed that if a person is seen eating or carrying food by the *Hingchabi* and if the *Hingchabi* happens to like the food then the person is usually possessed by the spirit or a mere glance of the *Hingchabi* on the food might cause the same. So, if a person wants to eat food then before eating he / she should offer a piece (or

a part of the food) as her (spirit) share by saying the words *Hingchabi Gee Sharuk* i.e., *Hingchabi's* share.

4. According to some informants, there is a belief that hanging a dried eel at the main door on a particular day called ' *Lamta Thangja Ahanba* ' (i.e., the first Saturday of March) helps to ward off the *Hingchabi's* spirit as well as the evil deity. But most of the people do not practice it as they believe that *Laxmi*, the goddess of wealth, does not come to the house.
5. Spitting one's saliva thrice is a common practice when a person happens to meet a *Hingchabi*.
6. An infant usually wears a black thread with some kind of beads in red and black colour around the wrist of right hand in case of a boy and left hand in case of a girl or sometimes around the neck to protect from the *Hingchabi* and other evil spirit.
7. *Maiba* makes *Jantra* (*Tabiz*) which can be worn by any person. For making of a *Jantra*, generally, the *Maiba* collects some items available in the soil of Manipur like *Shing* (ginger), *Yai-ngang* (turmeric), *Hamok* (*Hamok* is a kind of black flame which stained on the three stands used for supporting the vessel of a hearth), etc. These are put together inside the *Jantra* with few *mantras* and after closing the lip, it is tied with a black thread around one's upper arm or waist at the navel level. However, the item that has to be put inside the *Jantra* might be differed depending on *Maibas*.
8. Sometimes people used to wear a piece of *Tera-Angouba* (a kind of tree) to protect themselves from *Hingchabi*.
9. There are many *mantras* which could be used by any person as a precaution. One of them is given below:

'*Mee-hing Chaba Ngamba Wani*
Lai-hing Chaba Ngamba Wani
Nara-singh kapacha Mantra Soha.'

(Narrated to me by L. Angou Singh, a *Maiba*).

After getting recovered from *Hingchabi Changba* the patient might again possessed by the same spirit or another else if the patient does not take any precaution. Especially those people who are very prone to *Hingchabi Changba* should also take the above preventive measures.

METHOD AND PROCESS OF TREATMENT

If *Hingchabi* possesses a person, then the family members of the patient do not consult any doctor, but they approach the *Maiba*. Usually, the *Maiba* provides the treatment. Sometimes the *Maiba* also provides the help, but it is rare. In some other cases, where the family members of the patient are not aware of the symptoms of *Hingchabi Changba*, when it happens for the first time, then, instead of approaching a *Maiba*, they first consult a doctor for the treatment. However, if medical facility (i.e., health center) or a doctor is not accessible then they call a *Maiba*. According to some respondents, a *Maiba* even in the hospital can perform a ritual after the family members are advised (sometimes by the doctor) to consult a *Maiba*. Perhaps, the doctor already knows the symptoms of *Hingchabi Changba* or he may not be in a position to diagnose the disease of the patient.

Usually a male member of the family goes to the *Maiba* for the treatment of the patient. It is not compulsory that this man should be a member of the patient's family. However, in a situation when a man is not available, a woman can go but a boy should accompany her. She is not permitted to go alone in the absence of the boy. Because in Meitei tradition, there is a belief that if the woman goes alone then the consequent result will not be good. Nowadays, according to some other people a woman can also call the *Maiba* without a male accompanying her. It is also said that if the *Maiba* is found either with a knife or spade or axe in his hand then the man (who goes to the *Maiba's* house) will request him to have a look at the patient after telling him to leave the knife. Otherwise, people believe that it is a bad omen for the patient.

The man describes all the symptoms of the patient to the concerned *Maiba*. Then the *Maiba* comes immediately to attend the patient. He feels the pulse of the wrist and tip of the fingers especially the index finger of the patient in order to know whether the patient is possessed by the spirit or not. After the *Maiba* chants *mantras* somewhere on the face, or on top of the head or on the tips of the fingers, all the symptoms shown by the victim such as pulling of the hands and legs, shivering of the body, shaking of the head vigorously, crying and laughing, etc. become calm / slow down and the patient remains silent.

A ritual has to be carried out by the *Maiba* to cure the patient. Right after confirmation of the patient's condition, the *Maiba* asks the members of the family to arrange certain ingredients required for ritual performance. The ritual is conducted to satisfy the spirit. After this the spirit is likely to leave the patient's body.

The items required for ritual performance are:

1. *La-laton* (banana leaf)
2. *Langthrei Maton* (a kind of plant, which is considered as sacred. The shoots or buds of *Langthrei* should be in odd number, mostly seven)
3. *Ngakra Ahingba Ama* (a live catfish)
4. *Kwa / pana Tang-ga* (decorated betel nut with pan leaf put together on banana leaf made in a circular shape)
5. *Heiruk Tang-ga* (decorated fruit as mention above)
6. Flower
7. *Thangmei* (oil lamp or candle)
8. *Shindur*
9. *Dakshina* (may be a coin or any amount of rupees but do not usually use the coin of 25 *paisa*)
10. *Ishing Ashengba* (clean and pure water).

Besides the above listed items there are certain inevitable particular items, which the spirit desires. The process of treatment and the required ingredients for a ritual might differ according to different *Maibas*.

The *Maiba* puts all the required ingredients on a banana leaf (*La-laton*) and place it in front of the patient's bed (*Phamang*) after cleaning a small area. First of all, the *Maiba* picks up the shoots of *Langthrei* with which he touches the body of the patient softly right from the head to toe with *mantras*. A common belief among the Meitei is that this particular leaf can be extremely painful for the patient's body, which happens to stand against the spirit. After a ritual has been performed, the *Maiba* collects all the ingredients used in the ritual and place them at the foot of '*Tulsi* (basil) plant' (It is not necessary for some *Maibas*. They can perform the ritual at any place wherever they want.) Which is planted in the centre of the courtyard. This plant is found in every Meitei house.

Then, the *Maiba* worships the spirit and requests it to leave the patient's body. In this form of worship the *Maiba* places himself in a submissive and inferior position to that spirit. Actually, the *Maiba* worships the goddess

Durga to retrieve the spirit from the patient or to control it as the spirit i.e., *Hingchabi* is believed to be her daughter or grand daughter. [According to L. Angou Singh, a *Maiba*, there are different views as to what the spirit is. In the opinion of some *Maibas*, the spirit is a reincarnation of goddess *Durga*, to some others the spirit is daughter or grand-daughter of goddess *Durga* and to some other *Maibas*, the spirit's power is equal to the power of goddess *Durga*. But it is believed by everyone that the spirit is an unseen female creature who is evil and causes harm to other people and can even kill them.] The *Maiba* cajoles and tries to make the spirit understand that the patient is a simple human being, who is not aware of anything, so please be kind and leave the patient's body. Then the *Maiba* takes those ingredients and goes straight towards the gate without looking or turning back. He leaves those items beyond the gate. As soon as the *Maiba* returns, he examines the condition of the patient. The *Maiba* charms water with some *mantras* and makes the patient drink it. After a few minutes, the patient returns to normalcy, i.e. the spirit has left the patient.

In some cases the spirit does not leave the patient even after the ritual has been performed. In such situations, the *Maiba* asks for some pure water and he chants *mantras* in it. He sprinkles the charmed water all over the body especially on the face of the patient. Then he tries to communicate with the spirit asking some questions such as- who are you (spirit)? Where are you from? What do you like? Sometimes the patient does not respond to these questions. If so, the *Maiba* makes the spirit irritate till it is ready to answer. From the utterances made by the patient the *Maiba* comes to know what exactly the spirit wants. The *Maiba* offers the special items to please the spirit once more. Sometimes, the spirit does not accept if the *Maiba* offers something else (somewhat similar) instead of that particular item since it was not easily available at that moment. In such a case the *Maiba* requests the spirit to tell him the place where the item would be found and the spirit tells the place. [Here, it is to be noted that the item, the place and others are indeed sought after by the spirit but not the patient.] If the spirit gets satisfied, it will go away.

Sometimes the spirit is stubborn and stays

back with the patient even after all the rituals have been completed. Then the *Maiba* starts to challenge the spirit and threatens it. A ritual known as *Ushin Shinba* is performed with a *Ngakra Ahingba* (a living catfish) or a *Yen* (cock or hen) or a *Yen Amubi Marum* (an egg of a black hen). Sometimes, *Khamen Ashinba Maton Taret* (i.e., 7 shoots of tomato plant) are used for the occasion. These seven shoots should be plucked by a person holding up his / her breath.

The catfish is offered with other items including flowers, fruits, *Pana Tang-ga*, *Khoiru Thangmei* (a lighted candle made of beewax), *dakshina*, rice grain, *Til* (sesame), *shindur*, etc. The *Maiba* performs the ritual putting the rice grain, sesame, flower and *shindur* on the head of the catfish and chants *mantras* with all the ten names of *Arjun*, one of the *Pandavas*. During the ritual the catfish remains in absolute silence just like a dead fish. It is believed that the spirit enters into the catfish (or anything living / non-living which is being sacrificed at the ritual) and has eaten it. However, if the catfish moves then it signifies that the spirit does not accept the offering and is still inside the patient's body.

In case of tomato plant, the *Maiba* touches the patient with the chanted seven shoots of the plant. Soon after this the patient becomes normal. Then the tomato plant from which the seven shoots have been plucked dies. It is assumed that the spirit has taken the soul of the tomato plant instead of the patient's soul. Hence, the object is made to sacrifice for the life of the patient. Finally, the patient returns to normalcy soon after the spirit has left the body of the patient due to *Ushin Shinba*.

In some other cases, if the spirit does not leave the patient then the *Maiba* performs a ritual called *Mei-da Jaigya Toubu* (i.e., a ritual performance with the fire). The basic idea of doing this is to chase the spirit away from the patient by torturing the soul of the spirit.

Unlike other *Hingchabis*, some are very cunning and reluctant to communicate with the *Maiba* for a few hours or about a couple of days. (Then, the same *Maiba* or someone else performs other methods of treatment and ritual.)

In such case, the *Maiba* performs another ritual in which he takes a hollow piece or a stem of bamboo (*Waa Gee Utong*). He calls the soul of the *Hingchabi* by chanting few *mantras* and

it is captured inside the bamboo stem like a prisoner. Then the mouth of the *Utong* is covered with a banana leaf (*La-laton*) and it is again tied at the neck with a long, thin strip of bamboo (*Paya*). [*Maiba* says that during this period the particular woman who is the possessor of the spirit will become restless and lethargic. She will experience backache and become tired so that she would not be able to concentrate on anything.] Now, the spirit asks the *Maiba* to free its soul. The *Maiba* lets the spirit know that if the spirit is willing to leave the patient then he will do the same. If the spirit agrees then the *Maiba* will open the mouth of the *Utong*. Finally, he sets the soul of the spirit free from the *Utong* after making her (spirit) promise not to return to the patient. In this way, the spirit leaves the patient after receiving the special offerings which it always liked to have.

According to L. Angou Singh, a *Maiba*, *Hingchabis* are usually shameless about their ambition. They easily make a promise when a *Maiba* asks them to do so. But they hardly honour their promise. Therefore a *Maiba* has to remind the spirit again and again about the promise. Sometimes they might ask for something more even if their wishes are fulfilled. So a *Maiba* always tries to keep a limit as to which wishes can be fulfilled.

The above observation gathers further support from a proverb which is common among the Meiteis and is used in their day-to-day life. The proverb is: "*Hingchabi Gee Shaari Waashak*". The literal meaning is "*Hingchabi's* promise". It is said that a *Hingchabi* does not keep her promise. So if a person says, "You are making a *Hingchabi's* promise", it means he does not believe the promises an individual is making and takes it to be unreliable, false, and can be easily broken.

There are certain rare cases when the same spirit returns to the patient after a few days, three to four days. In such cases, the spirit is very powerful and stubborn. It does not accept any kind of offerings and requests of the *Maiba*. At last the spirit takes away the soul of the patient (i.e., the patient dies) even if the *Maiba* tries to save the life with his best endeavours.

The family members of the patient give some amount of money to the *Maiba* as *dakshina* for curing the patient. Thus, the process of treatment ends.

It may be mentioned here that any male member of the patient's family should offer the *dakshina* to the *Maiba*. But the head of the family rather than a young one mostly does it. According to some informants, a man who is a relative or neighbour of the patient can also do it. Females are usually not allowed to do this. The following may be the reasons for giving *dakshina* to the *Maiba*.

1. To please the *Maiba* for curing the patient or for his successful ritual performance.
2. It is given as an expression of respect.
3. Among the Meiteis there is a belief that without *dakshina* the ritual process for the treatment is incomplete and unfruitful.

It is a custom to offer *dakshina* (money) to the *Maiba* after putting it on a piece of banana leaf. The giver bows to the *Maiba* regardless of his age and social status. Some informants say that a piece of paper can also be used in case, a banana leaf is not available. After taking the money the *Maiba* tears off the banana leaf or paper into shreds of specific number and style. But it is different from other religious ceremony like "*Sharadha*" (a ritual performed 13 or 14 days after a person's death but it is not performed for the infants who are below three years of age). The style and number of pieces that result may differ depending upon the wish of the *Maiba*.

CASES

Case I: The present case is of a married woman, forty-eight years old and I interviewed her highly qualified sons. In fact, one son is doing a Ph.D. in Environmental Science and the other holds a post-graduate degree in Geology.

The informants told me that the victim has been attacked five times. The victim seems to have been attacked at a time when she was psychologically weak, depressed or under some strain and distress. She was attacked when her zodiac / star sign was placed in a weak place.

The main symptoms shown by the victim when she was possessed by the spirit (i.e., *Hingchabi*) are –

1. *Abnormal Behaviour:* The victim showed contrast behaviour like talking all of a sudden or keeping quiet, lying silently on the bed with her eyes closed or refraining to talk to anyone, and sometimes aggressive behaviour like anger. At times she started

crying and laughing suddenly in a loud and abnormal way like a mad woman. And in between she had difficulty while breathing.

2. *Epilepsy:* Her whole body starts shaking vigorously and all her legs and hands pull towards her body and her head also starts shaking from side to side vigorously as if there is something within her body that she could not bear. The other members of the family including the informants have to catch the victim's hands and legs so that her body could come back to normalcy. The moment she becomes breathless, they give her mouth respiration.

One of the family members (male) called the *Maiba*. [Since the *Maiba* was their neighbour they called him first but had an allopathic doctor been accessible, they would have called him first. They were not aware of the symptoms when the victim was attacked for the first time. But by the second and the third time, they first called *Maiba* since they were aware of the symptoms of *Hingchabi Changba*.] After the *Maiba* arrived, he checked the victim's pulse and diagnosed that a spirit possessed her.

For treatment the *Maiba* brought the following items:

1. *Yong Lamshi* i.e., the bone of the monkey's hand (*Yong* = monkey)
2. Teeth of the tiger
3. Piece of leather

After the *Maiba* had confirmed that the victim was possessed by the spirit, he asked the following questions:

1. Who are you?
2. Where are you from?
3. What do you like?

When the victim did not respond to the questions then, in order to make her respond to the questions, he tried to irritate her by scratching her with the nail of a *Yong Lamshi* and the tiger teeth. The victim responded after being irritated and she told the *Maiba* to stop scratching her. The *Maiba* told the victim that he would stop scratching her if she answered his questions. Then the victim answered who she was and from where she had come from and what she wanted from the victim.

At the first time when the spirit possessed her, it asked for *bidi* the second time, chicken and so on. Actually, she never used to smoke and never ate chicken. When the *Maiba* gave

her *bidi* / chicken she started smoking as if that was the last *bidi* and she would not get anymore and she ate the chicken very greedily as if she had not eaten it for a long time.

The *Maiba* told the spirit to go away but the spirit refused. Then the *Maiba* asked for some ingredients like flower, fruit, *Langthrei*, *dakshina* (one rupee coin), *La-laton* (banana leaf) to perform a ritual. The *Maiba* put all the ingredients together on banana leaf and performed the ritual near the victim and he chanted a lot of *mantras* and the members of the family were not allowed to witness the procedure of the ritual. The *Maiba* took the offerings of the ritual to a place opposite of the gate and left them there.

After that the *Maiba* again chanted more *mantras* to the victim and blew three puffs of breath (send out in puff). Then, the victim got freedom from the spirit. She was left exhausted with no energy to open her eyes and speak to them. She slept throughout the night without waking up until morning. She was perfectly normal in the morning but felt ache, especially backache.

In another instance when she was possessed by the spirit the *Maiba* was not available at that time. So, the husband now familiar with the treatment, asked some questions like who are you and what do you want, and accordingly performed the basic ritual without the *Maiba* as he did not know the *mantra*.

The spirit wanted to have *Singju* (*Singju* = a kind of a vegetable salad). The ingredients commonly / generally used by the *Maiba* to perform the ritual with *Singju* were taken by the victim's husband and son (Raju) near the *Hingchabi* (spirit)'s house and left it there as told to them by the spirit and they were asked to draw three lines. After coming back the spirit was not satisfied as Raju had unknowingly crossed the lines, so they had to give the offerings and draw the lines again. Then the spirit left the victim's body. But the next morning they found their calf suffering from a kind of epilepsy attack somewhat similar to the victim's attack. Before the doctor (veterinary doctor) could reach the calf died. Actually, the calf was perfectly normal and healthy and had not medical problem. The members of the family believed that probably the spirit might have taken the soul of the calf instead of the victim's soul.

Case II: This case study is of a 71 years old woman. It was narrated to me by her son, an

Associate Professor in the Department of Forensic Medicine, RIMS, Imphal.

I interviewed Dr. A.M. Singh at his office in the last week of November 1999. When I asked him about the supernatural phenomenon *Hingchabi Changba*, he narrated the following story, which he had come across during his childhood days when he was 11 or 12 years old.

A woman (*Hingchabi*) who was a fishmonger stayed about 1 km. away from his house. She often came to his locality to sell fish. The informant had seen the phenomenon happened twice to his mother (at the age of thirty) during her pregnancy. At night (around 11 p.m.) the victim started showing the symptoms of *Hingchabi Changba* like crying, laughing, uttering unrelated words, etc. The husband of the victim called a *Maiba*, Bijoygopal Singh (now, nearly 78 years old), who stayed nearby.

When the *Maiba* checked the pulse of the victim he confirmed that she was possessed by spirit i.e., *Hingchabi*. Then the *Maiba* asked the members of the family to arrange the ritual ingredients. The informant told me that he could only remember the following ingredients –

1. *Ngakra* (living catfish)
2. *Shindur*
3. *Dhup* (incense stick / powder)
4. *Thangmei* (lamp)
5. *Dakshina* (coin)
6. *Pana Tang-ga* (betel nut and pan leaf put together on banana leaf made in circular shape)
7. Flower and fruits
8. Buds or shoots of *Langthrei*

As the informant was a young boy he could not remember the whole procedure of treatment clearly. After the ritual had been performed, the *Maiba* requested the spirit to leave the victim. At last the *Maiba* gave *bidi* to the victim as the spirit wanted to smoke. Then, after few minutes the victim got free from the spirit.

According to the opinion of the informant, his mother (victim) was possessed by the spirit when she was mentally and physically weak and at that time she bore a great responsibility of the family.

In order to protect herself (victim) from the *Hingchabi Changba*, she wore *Jantra* (*Tabiz*) with black thread which was made by the *Maiba*. Since then she has not been suffering from *Hingchabi Changba*. But the informant could not state the reason whether the *Hingchabi*

(spirit) usually does not like elderly / aged people or due to the preventive measures like wearing the *Jantra* by the victim.

The informant says that so far as his knowledge is concerned nobody could prove what exactly is the scientific reason.

Case III: This case study is collected from a 23 years old girl studying for an M.A. in English at Delhi University.

The patient was a 15 years old girl who was also a relative and neighbour of the informant. On one particular day, both the informant and patient were supposed to attend a festival called *Lai-haraoba*. After getting dressed up, the informant went to the patient's house where she found the patient crying in a dark corner. Even if the informant asked the reason she did not reply. The patient was sitting silently and after few minutes she started murmuring to herself. At that time the informant did not understand what was happening to the patient. So she went directly to the patient's sister-in-law and described the abnormal behaviour of the patient.

They called some other members of the family and made her lie down on a bed. Few minutes later, the patient started shivering, frothing and showing some kind of epilepsy attack. Sometimes, she was crying and became sub-conscious. Her elder brother went to call a *Maiba*, staying in the same *Leikai* (locality).

Within half an hour, the *Maiba* came with the brother and checked the pulse of the patient and said that *Hingchabi* possessed the patient. First of all, the *Maiba* told the brother to bring seven leaves of *Tairen* (*Tairen* = a kind of tree which is believed to be sacred). In order to help the patient regain consciousness the *Maiba* touched the patient's face slowly with the leaves of *Tairen*. The *Maiba* asked some questions to the patient, such as the name of the spirit, the place where she came from and the thing what she really liked to have. The patient seemed to have great pain with those leaves. At last the patient replied that she wanted to have chicken. Then, the *Maiba* asked the brother to bring a black hen immediately. He told her sister-in-law to clean a space (*Wai Teiba*) with '*Ishing Ashengba*' in front of the bed where the patient lay (*Phamang*). The *Maiba* performed a ritual offering the items of goods such as flower, a coin of 10 paise, a *La-laton* (banana leaf), buds of *Langthrei*, etc. After chanting the *mantra* to the buds of *Langthrei* the *Maiba* touched the

patient with that *Langthrei*. In front of the patient the *Maiba* again recited *mantra* by holding the hen. Then, he took away the hen along with other items of goods used in the ritual and put it beyond the gate where he had to pray / worship the spirit again. After coming back, the *Maiba* checked the patient to confirm whether the spirit was still inside the body or not. A few minutes later, the patient returned to normalcy. Her brother gave Rs.10 as *dakshina* to the *Maiba* for curing her sister i.e. the patient and offered him *bidi* to smoke. Then the *Maiba* left.

Case IV: The informant saw a boy of 12 years old who was possessed by *Hingchabi* when he went to meet one of his friend staying at Churachandpur, a revenue district of Manipur. For him it was the first time in his life to see *Hingchabi Changba* even though he heard a lot about it.

The informant was supposed to spend the night at his friend's place. At around 9.30 p.m. he witnessed his friend's younger brother showing certain symptoms. They found him crying. When his friend asked the reason, the boy did not respond. Suddenly the boy started difficulty in breathing. When he started pulling his legs and hands they tried to control him. After some struggle he became calm. After a few minutes he started uttering unrelated words. His friend's mother told them to call a *Maiba*.

As soon as the *Maiba* came he checked the pulse of the patient and told the patient's brother to pluck 7 shoots of tomato plant by holding up his breath. The *Maiba* beat the boy softly with the chanted tomato shoots on his face. It seemed that the patient could not bear the pain so he shouted to stop touching his body with those leaves. When the *Maiba* asked the name of the *Hingchabi*, the patient identified himself by telling the name of the woman who possessed the spirit. At that time the patient's eyes remained closed. Then, the *Maiba* tried to communicate with the spirit and requested to leave the patient. Now the identity of the patient was replaced by the woman i.e., *Hingchabi* and so the patient replied in the voice of the *Hingchabi* that she (spirit) would not go until and unless her desires were fulfilled. The *Maiba* further asked what the spirit wanted to have. The patient replied to offer her *bidis* from a particular shop.

The patient's father went with one of his friends and they bought a bundle of *bidis* from a different shop since that particular shop was

closed. They thought that the spirit would not be able to make out the *bidi*. When the *Maiba* offered the *bidi*, the patient refused to take it. Suddenly, the patient (spirit) got angry and broke the *bidi* into pieces and then threw them away. The patient's father went again and bought the *bidi* from that particular shop after making a request to the shopkeeper. Then, the patient smoked the *bidi*. Actually, the patient never used to smoke in his life. The *Maiba* performed a simple ritual (*Puja*) in front of the *Tulsi* plant by offering flower, fruit, pan, candle and a coin of one rupee and prayed to goddess *Durga* to take away the power of the spirit from the patient. After half an hour the patient became normal. Then the patient's father gave some amount of money (as *dakshina*) to the *Maiba* for his work.

Case V: I have collected the present case study from an informant who saw *Hingchabi Changba* happened to her uncle's daughter.

They were very happy when the informant's aunt gave birth to a baby girl. On the 6th day after the baby was born they celebrated a ritual ceremony known as *Swasti Puja* (Among the Meiteis this ceremony is a must for each and every new born baby). For the ceremony they invited their friends, neighbours and relatives. A Brahmin *Pandit* (Priest) performed a ritual and offered prayer to the *Swasti Devi* (a Goddess) for a long life and happy future of the new born baby.

After the ritual (i.e., *puja*) all the guests blessed the baby with gifts (money or cloth). After everyone had left, around 9 p.m. the baby was crying continuously and the informant's mother tried to console the baby but all in vain. Immediately the informant's father went to call a *Maiba*. The *Maiba* checked the pulse of the baby and noticed that the baby was possessed by a spirit i.e., *Hingchabi*. He asked to arrange some ingredients required for a ritual. The *Maiba* asked to place the baby on a mat and ordered to clean a space / portion beside the baby with pure water. The *Maiba* put all the ingredients (such as one rupee coin, flower, a *Ngakra*) on a banana leaf and kept it at the clean area to perform the ritual. After chanting *mantra* to the seven shoots of *Langthrei* collected by the informant's uncle from one of the neighbour's garden, the *Maiba* touched the baby with those *Langthrei*. Then he picked up the catfish (*Ngakra*) and requested the spirit to take it instead of the baby. During

the ritual the catfish remained silent. After performing the ritual the *Maiba* took only the catfish and went out of the house without turning back and he kept the catfish beyond the gate.

As soon as the *Maiba* chanted *mantras* on the head of the baby the baby stopped crying and became normal. At that time the spirit left the baby. The father of the baby was very happy and gave Rs. 100 to the *Maiba* as *dakshina* for the treatment. In the next morning the *Maiba* made *Kurao- Angouba* to wear with a black thread around the left wrist of the baby. After that day the baby was not possessed by *Hingchabi* i.e., spirit any more.

Case VI: I interviewed a 23 years old girl, a student of Delhi University. The informant told me that she witnessed *Hingchabi Changba* happened to a 35 years old man who was a neighbour.

In the evening around 3.30 p.m., she saw the victim lying quietly and all of a sudden he started uttering and murmuring and also he had an attack of fit and epilepsy. People were trying to keep him in a normal position. At that moment the younger brother of the victim came with a *Maibi*. After checking the pulse of the victim she chanted mantra that made him calm down. Then the victim remained silent with his eyes closed.

First of all, the *Maibi* asked to bring seven shoots of *Langthrei*. The informant saw the *Maibi* beating softly on the face of the victim with the chanted *Langthrei*. Then the victim responded to the *Maibi*'s queries. From the words uttered by the victim they came to know the name of the *Hingchabi*.

After cleaning a small space / area in front of the bed where the victim was lying, the *Maibi* performed a ritual putting all the ingredients like red flower, a lighted candle, a coin, fruit, *Kwa Tanga*, *Langthrei* shoots, etc. on a banana leaf. The *Maibi* requested the spirit to satisfy itself with those ingredients. She further asked the victim what the spirit wanted to have more. The victim replied that she (*Hingchabi*) would reside in the victim's body until and unless she was offered a glass of tea from a particular tea stall known as Ibemhal's tea stall. Again the *Maibi* performed a ritual with that particular tea and gave it to the victim. The victim took 2/3 sips of the tea and again after chanting *mantras* in a glass of water the *Maibi* made him drink it.

With the ingredients used in the ritual the *Maiba* went straight to the gate without turning back. After coming back she checked the pulse of the victim. Within half an hour the victim became normal and opened his eyes. When they asked him about the *Hingchabi* he could not remember what he had said but his body was aching especially his back, legs and hands. The *Maiba* after having tea left the victim's house with the *dakshina* offered by the victim's family for her work.

The informant expressed that she wanted to study more about the supernatural phenomenon even though she got much scared that day.

Case VII: In this case I interviewed a 24 years old man who is doing M.A. (final) in the Department of Psychology, Delhi University. He narrated me about an incident of *Hingchabi Changba* where he was an eyewitness.

The seven years old victim was a son of an Assamese officer posted in Manipur who stayed in a rented house owned by the informant's family. One day the informant heard that the boy was suffering from an unknown disease and hospitalized in R.I.M.S. (the then R.M.C.). When he visited the patient he found him shivering, frothing, sometimes with attack of fit and epilepsy. In the meantime his head was shaking from side to side. After a thorough checking of the symptoms of the patient the doctors were trying to diagnose the disease but failed. The condition of the patient remained the same as earlier even after he had given an injection. The parents were crying as they saw their son having difficulty while breathing. There was no chance of recovery as the doctors could not prescribe anything for further treatment. The people including the informant were so sad when the senior doctor informed them that the boy would die within few hours.

They brought the boy back home from the hospital. Meanwhile a *Maiba* came to one of the informant's neighbours to perform a religious rite. His mother suggested that it would be better to check once by the *Maiba*. Then his father requested the *Maiba* to have a look at the condition of the patient and explain to him everything what had happened in the hospital.

After checking the pulse of the patient the *Maiba* said that it was *Hingchabi Changba* and nothing to worry about it. As told by the *Maiba* the informant plucked "*Langthrei Maton Taret*

" (Seven shoots of *Langthrei*) from his garden. The patient became silent after the *Maiba* with the chanted *Langthrei Mato Taret* touched his face. Again, the *Maiba* asked to bring a *Ngakra* and *Khamen Ashinba Mana* (tomato leave) which had to be plucked by holding up one's breath.

The *Maiba* chanted a few *mantras* on the tomato leaves and made the patient smell those leaves. He continued the treatment by performing a ritual where he had put a catfish and a coin of one rupee on a banana leaf. While performing the ritual the catfish remained silent just like a death fish.

The *Maiba* asked the patient what the spirit really liked to have. The informant's father translated the question into English and the patient's father again asked the question in their own language. The patient was murmuring but no body could understand the words uttered by the patient. So, the patient's father repeated the same question. Finally, the patient replied as *Roti*. Immediately, the patient's mother made *Roti* and *Maiba* gave it with mantra. The *Maiba* took all the goods which had been used in the ritual and kept all beyond the gate. After coming back the *Maiba* asked for a glass of clean and pure water. He chanted *mantra* on that water and sprinkled on the body of the patient especially on the face with the leaves of the *Langthrei*. After few minutes, he again chanted *mantra* on the tip of the right hand fingers of the patient and made him relax.

After about an hour, the patient returned to his normal state. All of them were very happy to see the better condition of the patient as he had got free from the spirit. The parents of the patient were too surprised and thought that the *Maiba* had given a new life to their son. The patient's father gave Rs. 500 as *dakshina* to the *Maiba* for his successful treatment. Few days later, they had a good lunch with the *Maiba*.

Case VIII: When I interviewed L. Angou Singh, a 65 years old *Maiba*, he narrated some of the incidents which he had come across and had performed the rituals for treatment.

In one case, he had come across a married woman (around 30 years old) who was possessed by a very powerful and stubborn *Hingchabi*. The other *Maibas* treated her before they consulted him (informant). The earlier *Maibas* could not chase the spirit away, so on

the fourth day some of the members of the victim's family persuaded him to have a look at the victim.

After the *Maiba* checked the victim, he performed a ritual and asked what the spirit wanted. The spirit refused to answer. Then the *Maiba* requested the spirit to have mercy on the victim as she had a family to look after, she is a simple human being and so on. The stubborn spirit agreed with the *Maiba* for sometime asking him to offer her 4 *mohors* of gold. In order to fulfill the desire of the spirit the members of the victim's family borrowed the required quantity of gold from their neighbourhood.

Even after offering the gold with a ritual the spirit refused to leave the victim's body. She was not satisfied, as she wanted to take the soul of the victim. After much request of the *Maiba* the spirit left the victim informing the *Maiba* that she would come back after three days. Meanwhile there was no communication between the *Maiba* and the spirit as the spirit left the victim's body and no precautions could be taken.

After the spirit had left, the victim returned to normalcy. While the victim was recovering the *Maiba* and the rest of the members of the family were waiting for the crucial day. Finally the spirit returned on the fourth day. As soon as it entered, the victim showed the symptoms of the *Hingchabi Changba*. The *Maiba* tried with his best level to negotiate with the spirit but the spirit was not ready to give up the soul of the victim. The *Maiba* was helpless at that time and the victim died.

Case IX: Not only I heard a lot about *Hingchabi Changba* but I also witnessed its cases as many as four times in my life.

The first time I saw *Hingchabi Changba* was in the case of my friend. I was around 11 years old at that time. In the evening around 3 p.m. we found a friend missing among us while we were playing a game.

She was lying on a bed when we went to see her. We scolded her for going back home without informing us. Instead of responding to us she started crying. I got surprised when she started laughing suddenly and in between she was murmuring something. After sometimes she was shivering and started pulling her legs and hands towards her body. Her head was moving from side to side. At that moment we had a tough

time as we did not have that much strength to catch and keep her body in the normal position. We informed her sister and immediately her eldest brother went to call a *Maiba*.

The *Maiba* checked the pulse and asked to pluck seven shoots of *Langthrei*. He stroked on the face of the patient downwardly with the chanted *Langthrei*. He tried to communicate with the spirit asking many questions. But the patient (spirit) was reluctant to answer who the spirit was though she was ready to respond. And she also said that she felt shy to tell everything in front of others except the *Maiba*. Therefore the *Maiba* told us to go out of the room. We were sitting on the veranda and waiting for the patient to recover. After half an hour the *Maiba* left the house. (Here, I do not know whether he performed a ritual or not). Later on we came to know that the *Hingchabi* was one of our friends who was playing together.

The other two cases happened to a woman of 48 years old and her unmarried daughter of about 24 years old who were staying next to my house. Both the victims showed similar symptoms of *Hingchabi Changba* as mentioned earlier. In the case of the first woman, the spirit asked to offer *bidi* whereas in the later woman the spirit asked catfish. In both cases, a *Maiba* performed rituals during his process of treatment. But I cannot remember the whole thing as I was too young at that time.

It was in 1993, I witnessed another case of my uncle's daughter-in-law of about 35 years old. In the evening around 3.30 p.m. my mother told me that my sister-in-law was possessed by *Hingchabi* (spirit). I went into her room and found her crying. I sat besides her. She was murmuring and sometimes spoke unrelated words. We even could not make out what she was saying. Her body was shivering and often showing some kind of epileptic attack. Her head was also shaking frequently. We tried to control holding her hands and legs. Then she was silent. After few minutes she again started showing the same symptoms. I was so scared and thought that she would die. In the mean time my uncle came with a *Maiba*.

As soon as the *Maiba* checked the pulse of the patient, he chanted *mantras* on her eyes and forehead in order to subside the condition of the patient. The *Maiba* asked some questions about the *Hingchabi* but she was very angry

and did not respond to him. The *Maiba* told my aunt to arrange some ingredients required for a ritual. He again asked to pluck seven shoots of *Langthrei* and also to bring water. Then he chanted *mantras* to that water and sprinkled the water with *Langthrei* leave on her body especially on the face. When the *Maiba* asked, she identified herself by telling the name of the *Hingchabi* and also replied everything whatever the *Maiba* wanted to know.

The *Maiba* put all the required ingredients such as three flowers (China rose), a coin of one rupee, seven shoots of *Langthrei* (newly plucked), a lighted candle, a live catfish and a little quantity of rice grain on a banana leaf and he placed all those in front of the patient's bed after cleaning a small area. During the ritual the catfish remained silent just like a death fish. After completing the ritual he went straight to the gate and left all the things beyond the gate. Then he chanted *mantras* on her head. After around ten minutes the patient got free from the spirit i.e. she came to normalcy. My uncle gave Rs. 50 to the *Maiba* as *dakshina* for the treatment and after having tea and *bidi* the *Maiba* left the house.

When we asked the patient about the spirit she did not remember anything. But she was feeling tire and pain at the back, knees, upper and fore arms. She did not take any allopathic medicine to get relieved from the pain but used hot water bag.

In the next morning my sister-in-law (i.e., patient) was again possessed by *Hingchabi* and showed the same symptoms. My uncle came with the *Maiba*. The *Maiba* chanted *mantras* on the tips of the left-hand fingers of the patient and also to the *Langthrei*. He touched softly on the face of the patient with those leaves and kept on questioning. From her answer we came to know that she was again possessed by the same spirit. When the *Maiba* further asked, she (*Hingchabi*) replied that she returned to the soul of the patient as she wanted to kill her. Then, the *Maiba* started to challenge with the spirit. First of all, he performed a ritual in front of the Tulsi plant putting a banana leaf with the ingredients like flower, coin, *Kwa Tanga*, *Heiruk Tanga*, *Khoiru Thangmei*, rice grain, etc. He worshipped goddess *Durga* to take away the spirit. He also prayed to the Lord "*Lainingthou Sanamahi*" of the patient's house. Then he started "*Mei*

Puja" (*Mei* = fire, a ritual offer to the fire). He made the fire with a kind of tree called *Uchan* (pine tree). He performed the ritual throwing rice grain and "*Thoiding Amuba*" (a kind of black sesame) into the fire with *mantras*. After few minutes the patient shouted to stop the ritual. The *Maiba* threatened the spirit that he would kill her (spirit). She again screamed as if she could not tolerate. She said that she would go immediately after getting offer a *bidi* and would not return again to the patient. The *Maiba* gave a *bidi* to the patient and she smoked it hastily. Actually the patient never used to smoke in her life. The *Maiba* chanted *mantras* on top of her head and after that the spirit left the patient. My uncle gave Rs. 300 as *dakshina* to the *Maiba* and invited him for dinner.

She told us that she felt pain all over her body and could not do any work properly for a few days as her condition was very serious. She took precaution wearing a *Jantra* (*Tabiz*) made by the *Maiba* with a black thread around her left upper arm. From that day neither the same spirit nor the other else possessed her.

CONCLUDING NOTE

This phenomenon of *Hingchabi Changba* has been observed among the Meiteis of Manipur since time immemorial. The similar phenomenon is also seen among other tribal people of Manipur such as *Kabui Naga*, *Tangkul Naga*, *Kuki* tribe, etc. (as told me by some respondents who belong to the above different ethnic groups).

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KEY WORDS Evil Eye. Spirit. Hingchabi. Maiba. Ritual. Langthrei. Ngakra. Dakshina. Symptoms

ABSTRACT The Meiteis of Manipur believe in evil eye (evil spirit) which is locally known as Hingchabi Changba. It is a kind of supernatural phenomena in which the Hingchabi's (Possessor) spirit enters into

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another person who suffers both mentally and physically and the spirit takes full control over the victim's body. It happens when the spirit wants to eat something or possess an object which it really desires to acquire. Most of its victims are women. When a person is possessed by the spirit then the victim shows abnormal behaviour such as shivering, crying, laughing, frothing, difficulty in breathing, etc. A *Maiba* (medicine man) is called upon for the treatment, who performs certain rituals to ward off the evil spirit by offering the specific materials which the spirit wanted to have. Certain precautions are taken up by the people to protect themselves from evil eye.

Here, it is worth mentioning that it cannot be cured with modern medicines or any other else except the traditional method of treatment performed by Maiba.

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