

Traditional medicinal practices among the Meitei of Manipur: Panoramic view

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***Abstract:** This paper highlights the basic traditional medicinal practices in the context of Manipur, especially among the Meitei society. It also explained the local notion of diseases and various traditional healing practices over the generations. It reveals the role of the medicinal practitioners, which is an integral part of the socio-cultural and economic institutions of the Meiteis people in Manipur State of India.*

***Keywords:** Traditional medicinal practices, Meitei people, Manipur.*

Introduction: Manipur is known for its rich flora and fauna, surrounded by blue mountains and lush green valleys. The state's population identifies as Meiteis, concentrated in the valley. Meiteilon (also known as Manipuri) is spoken as a first language and the state's official language. It was officially recognised as one of India's national languages in 1992. The paper is based on sources like official reports, archival records, and local narratives. This paper relies on descriptive analysis methods, legends, folklore, and mythology.

A brief overview of the Indian context: Since time immemorial, the Indian populace has possessed the ability to use plants as medicinal treatments, and skilled specialists and practitioners have been a tremendous asset to the public's Health. This is seen through the design of their drainage system, restrooms, sewage douse-pits, waste receptacles, and block-lined wells that prevented the spread of disease (Leslie, 1998, p. 148.). In addition, the preventive measures centered on Health and sanitation, as well as their knowledge of hygiene, nutrition, and safe drinking water, validated the civic services of the Harappan people (Session & Congress, 2001.p.3.).

Ayurveda is the oldest medical system in India, dating back millennia. Ayurveda is an alternative medicine discipline based on natural ingredients practised in what is now known as the Indian subcontinent. Ayurveda is regarded as the most ancient framework for treating diseases, dating back to the Vedic period and recognised practices of the most flourishing indigenous medical system (Jaiswal & Williams, 2016, pp. 50-53). Historically, it was believed that most ailments were caused by the displeasure of divine beings and the influence of evil spirits. Prayers, please, and a few hymns were used in the healing art to cure such diseases. Besides, traditional herbal remedies have been standard practices over the decades (Muthu, 1913.)

Traditional Medicinal Knowledge and practices in Manipur: Layeng Pathap, a traditional medical system, has been used since ancient times. Maiba and Maibi are the common names for those who work in this field (local male and female healthcare physicians). In Manipuri, the word maibarol refers to the practice and study of healing. Maiba practitioners were called Ametpa Litrearly masseurs, but colloquially

therapists, and the therapy and therapists administrative institute was called Aমেপ্তা লোইশাগ in the social and political administration of the former monarchical kingdom of Manipur. In the year 1570 A.D., the ameppta institution was founded (Parratt, 2005,p.60.). During the later era, the ameppta loishang used hymns, spells, and other magical practices to treat illness. (Khumukcham, n.d.2021.) Before modern medicine, health problems were taken care of by the Meitei Maibas, who used plants and vegetables as medicine. In the folklore of a love story called "KhambaThoibi," Khamba was strong because he liked eating pennyworth (*Centella Asiatica*). Meiteis liked mixed greens (singju), boiled vegetables with chilli (eromba), vegetable soup (chamthong), cooked vegetables (champhut), grilled vegetables (kanghou), blended curry (chagempomba/utipomba), fruits curry (heithongba). Every home in the Meiteis family ate a lot of them. Plants and vegetables were used so that people could eat them and get medicine from them. They knew a lot about how plants could be used to heal. Traditional healers in the Meitei religion have known for a long time how certain herbs and plants can help people get better, and they also know how to use herbs and parts of plants to make home remedies and therapy. Rituals, prayers, and customs were done to offer something to god and get better. A myth says that the sun god spent seven days making seven medicinal plants called sidahidak. (Singh,2001,p.76).

When King Puthiba was sick, these Sidahidak were used to treat him. Since then, sidahidak has been called the king of all medicinal plants. It treats illnesses in Manipur's seven salai (direction) (Singh,2001,p.77).

The Healing Practices : The Meiteis people had learned about primary health care and how to treat diseases over the centuries. Margaret Read said, Health is the result of a proper relationship between a person and his environment, the world around him, and other people, and it is linked to good gifts and beauty, all of which are positively valued in everyday life (Read, 2013). Cough, cold, fever, piles, skin disorders, dysentery, snake bite, urination problem, leprosy, indigestion, jaundice, women's troubles, diabetes, asthma, bronchitis, chicken pox, cholera, malaria, etc. were some of the frequent ailments or illnesses that were prevalent during the early period. Another method of treating scabies was through rituals, including the Inllukok (a local plant) performance. The worried individual was required to pick their breath without holding it while gathering the leaves, and reciting was required to be done upon the leaves. Following the completion of the chant, the leaves were pulverised, and the juices were consumed. It was believed that the leaves might ease the discomfort felt by the ill body. Typically, the medicinal compounds were collected from various sections of the plant, including the roots and bark, the stem and wood, the leaves, flowers, fruits, and seeds, as well as the entire plant, gum resins and oleo-resins, etc. The Maiba and Maibi families are responsible for carrying out the above actions by employing their ties and traditions. As a consequence, they filled a significant function in the Meitei society.

Conclusion: It is clear from the discussion that the traditional knowledge system has been an integral part of our society and the people of Manipur. The people recognised the role of traditional medicine and its application over the generations. The belief system of the people, rites, and ritual performances of medicinal practitioners played an essential role in shaping the social-cultural and economic institutions of the Meiteis people in Manipur.

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