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Revival of Sanamahism in present day Manipur

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Abstract

One of Northeast India's oldest spiritual traditions is Sanamahism, the native religion of the Meitei people of Manipur. Sanamahism, which is based on the worship of Leimarel Shidabi (Mother Earth), Lainingthou Sanamahi (the household deity), and other natural deities, represents social harmony, ancestor reverence, and an eco-centric worldview. After King Pamheiba (Garib Niwaz) converted to Vaishnavism in the 18th century, Sanamahism was marginalised as caste structure there has been a vigorous revival movement in recent decades. Bengali alphabet, and Hindu rites were implemented. There has been a powerful comeback development in modern ten years period to protect and replace this native conviction as a depiction of cultural identification and society. Movements for ethnic origin, resurge and the recovering of historical practices have all gave to the growing revival of Sanamahism in Manipur in last few decades. Oral histories have been preserved, the Meitei Mayek script has been promoted, and ancient rituals have been restored by revivalist groups, academics, and community leaders. In the midst of globalisation, integration and political dynamism, this resurgence is more than just a comeback to divine tradition, it is a confirmation of indigenous identity. The movement, which connects spiritual legacy with cultural pride and environmental responsibility, is in line with international indigenous rights campaigns.

Keywords: Indigenous, Globalisation, Identity, Legacy, Ancient, Spiritual

Introduction

Among the Meitei population, one of the most important cultural and religious developments is the resurgence of Sanamahism in modern-day Manipur. Prior to Vaishnavite Hinduism's significant impact in the eighteenth century, Manipur was home to the Meiteis' native religion, Sanamahism. The religion, which has its roots in the worship of Lainingthou Sanamahi, ancestral spirits, and natural deities, represents the Meitei people's spiritual worldview, traditions, and cultural identity. Due to changes in religion and outside cultural influences, many indigenous literature, customs, and ceremonies eventually declined.

However, there has been a resurgence of interest in Sanamahism's preservation and restoration in recent decades. The recovery of Meitei identity, language, script, and cultural legacy is intimately linked to the revival movement. The revival of customs, celebrations, and the Meitei Mayek script has been greatly aided by academics, youth organizations, religious organizations, and cultural activists. In addition to being a religious awakening, this revival is part of a larger movement in contemporary Manipur for ethnic self-assertion and cultural preservation.

Sanamahism is still becoming more well-known and influential in the academic, cultural, and social domains today. The movement emphasizes how crucial indigenous customs are to preserving historical continuity and cultural variety. Consequently, the resurgence of Sanamahism in contemporary-day Manipur is an attempt to maintain indigenous identity in a quickly evolving modern culture as well as a return to ancestral roots.

Historical Context

1. History and Customs: Archaeological and literary evidence suggest that Sanamahism has existed for more than two millennia, predating written history. Worship of Lainingthou Sanamahi, Pakhangba (serpent deity), and Leimarel Sidabi (Mother Earth goddess) are among the fundamental beliefs. Decline under Vaishnavism: When King Pamheiba (1709-1748) formally endorsed Vaishnavism, it resulted in widespread conversion, the erasure of ancient writings, and the substitution of Hindu customs for native ceremonies.

2. Decline of Sanamahism under Vaishnavism: With the official endorsement of Vaishnavism by King Pamheiba (1709-1748), there was a widespread conversion, the

erasing of ancient texts, and the replacement of native ceremonies with Hindu practices.

3. Family survival: Despite repression, Sanamahism persisted informally in households where Sanamahi was still revered in a special section of the house (Sanamahi Sanglen).

Three stages can be distinguished in the resurgence of Sanamahism:

1. Cultural Awakening in the Early 20th Century to revitalize Meitei identity, groups such as Meitei Marup were founded in the 1930s. Attempts to recreate lost Puyas and record oral traditions.

2. The 1950s–1980s Post-Independence Era Meitei Mayek’s promotion in publishing and education. Restoration of Lai Haraoba in its original context.

3. The Present Era (1990s–present) Sanamahi Kiyong (temples) were established in Imphal and other places. Sanamahism’s inclusion in scholarly investigations and cultural initiatives are a positive step forward. A variety of cultural, religious, educational and social activities have revived Sanamahism in modern-day Manipur. These endeavours aim to preserve native beliefs, revitalize old practices and foster a sense of Meitei identity and heritage.

Important Revival Initiatives of Sanamahism

1. Restoring the customs and beliefs of worship

A significant effort has been made to revive ancient Sanamahi customs, family cult, and indigenous festivals. Traditional deities, such as Lainingthou Sanamahi, have been reintroduced into the homes and common areas of many Meitei families. The practice of Sanamahi is gaining popularity due to the traditional practices of birth, marriage, and death.

2. Temple construction and restoration

Sanamahi temples and sacred places have experienced a revival, with the construction and reconstruction of these sites being key factors. Today, the Shree Shree Sanamahi Temple is a significant hub for spirituality and culture among believers. Sacred groves and ancient worship sites are being conserved and restored.

3. Establishment of Religious and Cultural Organizations

A number of organizations have promoted the revival of Sanamahism through public awareness drives, publications, and cultural events. The mission of Apokpa Marup and other Sanamahi groups is to safeguard indigenous religious practices, organize festivals, and educate the community on Meitei spiritual heritage.

4. Promotion of Indigenous Festivals

New enthusiasm is being generated for Sanamahism's traditional celebrations, such as Lai Haraoba. The festivals preserve traditional dance forms, oral traditions, myths, music, and rituals that reflect the cosmology and philosophy of the Meitei people.

5. Meitei Script revival

Reviving and promoting Meitei Mayek has become one of the most important cultural projects associated with this revival movement. By teaching it in schools and incorporating it into literature, signs, and magazines, the script is now being utilized to promote indigenous identity and history.

6. Academic Research and Publications

Significant contributions were made by scholars and scholars in recording Sanamahi ideas, philosophy, mythology, rites. Sanamahism is experiencing a surge in academic interest and wider acceptance as universities, scholars, and authors are increasingly exploring indigenous religions and cultures.

7. Mechanism for Media and Digital Platforms

Through the use of social media, online forums, digital archives, and documentaries, younger generations have been better educated about Sanamahism. Native histories, traditions and cultural teachings are now being advanced through the use of online platforms.

8. The movements for Indigenous rights and cultural identity

Sanamahism's rebirth is closely tied to Manipur's autonomic politics, cultural preservation, and traditional heritage recognition. Many perceive this renaissance as the chance to recover some of the historical traditions while fighting against cultural differences.

9. Participation in Census and Public Recognition

Officials have made efforts to include Sanamahism as a distinct religion in both census and public discourse. The Meitei community's increasing recognition of their own religion is evident in this project.

Cultural festivals and Social media campaigns

1. Sanamahism is essential to maintaining the Meitei people's indigenous identity. It is a reflection of their historical memories, mythology, folklore, and traditional beliefs. The religion aids in preserving continuity between previous and current generations through rituals and customs.
2. Sanamahism is strongly associated with many of Manipur's traditional festivals and rituals. Celebrations like Lai Haraoba honour the connection between people, the natural world, and the gods. Ancient dancing styles, music, oral traditions, and indigenous cultural manifestations are all preserved through these rites.
3. The Meitei language and oral literature are preserved in part by Sanamahism. Myths, ritual chants, and sacred hymns are passed down from one generation to the next. This preserves traditional knowledge and promotes cultural continuity.
4. Sanamahism places a strong emphasis on human-nature harmony. Fire, water, forests, and mountains are examples of natural elements that are revered. Respect for the environment and sustainable lifestyle choices are promoted by this ecological philosophy.
5. The restoration of historic writings, rituals, attire, and cultural traditions has been aided by the Sanamahism revival movement in modern Manipur. It now represents indigenous rebirth and cultural pride.

Sociocultural Significance of Sanamahism

1. Sanamahism uses social events, festivals, and group rituals to improve ties within the community. Engaging in shared religious practices fosters social harmony, solidarity, and collaboration.
2. Sanamahism's teachings promote virtues including integrity, deference to elders, social responsibility, and interpersonal harmony. Community discipline and a pleasant social life are facilitated by these moral precepts.

3. In the home, traditional Sanamahi rituals are frequently carried out, particularly in the vicinity of the hallowed domestic area devoted to Lainingthou Sanamahi. Respects for ancestors' customs and family togetherness are strengthened.

4. Sanamahism has evolved into a tool for defending indigenous identity and opposing cultural homogenization in contemporary times. Many Meiteis want to preserve their unique cultural legacy in a world that is becoming more interconnected by the day, and this is reflected in the revival movement.

5. The religion encourages harmony, tolerance, and harmony between groups. The region's intercultural cohesion benefits from its emphasis on respect for humans and the natural world.

Conclusion

Sanamahism is not only resurrected in modern times but also serves as an important cultural restoration, identity construction, and social consciousness movement among Meitei people. As indigenous practices are frequently disregarded in a globalized world, the growing popularity of Sanamahism suggests broader collective efforts to reconnect with ancestral heritage, customs, and spiritual traditions of Manipur. The revival has been fuelled by the efforts of academicians, cultural organizations, religious practitioners, and the younger generation in the pursuit of preserving and reinterpreting indigenous knowledge in contemporary society. The movement has played a significant role in safeguarding the culture of Meitei, which includes language, literature, festivals, and traditional ecological values. By restoring indigenous activities and sacred practices, Sanamahism fosters a sense of community belonging.

Gleichzeitig with the rebirth, indigenous religions can be transformed to fit contemporary norms while maintaining their rational and spiritual foundation. Sanamahism's popularity in Manipur and beyond is attributed to the use of education, digital media, public debate, academic study, and other means. Sanamahism's future hinges on maintaining a balance between preservation and inclusion. Why? This resurgence should foster cooperation, mutual respect, and coexistence with various religious groups while also acknowledging their indigenous roots. Moreover, it is necessary to record oral traditions in advance, conserve sacred sites, and integrate indigenous knowledge into academic and cultural settings for future generations.

Ultimately though, revival of Sanamahism in modern Manipur is an imperious assertion of indigenous identity and resilience. It shows how traditional belief

systems can survive, evolve and remain relevant in today's society. Through active cultural engagement, scholarly pursuits, and community involvement, Sanamahism can become a viable living tradition that contributes to North-east India's spiritual and cultural diversity.

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