



Rain-Stopping in Manipur

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sister said,—“Now (as for) me, I shall not again choose a husband. Even if I be given a leper I shall agree.” That was because she had been punished.¹¹

¹¹Cf. Cronise and Ward, *Cunnie Rabbit, Mr. Spider and the Other Bees*, pp. 178-86.

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(*To be continued.*)

RAIN-STOPPING IN MANIPUR.

IN the village of Moirang lives Konjengbam Narain Singh, who claims that the power of stopping rain has been hereditary in his family for many generations. In the old Rajas' times the Rain-Stopper was exempt from all compulsory labour, and held a written order to this effect, but this was burnt when his house caught fire, and, as the people of the village no longer exempt him from his share of the common tasks, he refuses to exercise his powers.

If he desires to stop the rain, he first appeals to Sanamahi, who, in the Manipuri legend of “The man who shot the sun” as given by Mr. Hodson in *The Meitheis*,¹ is described as the mother of the Sun, but who is here spoken of as a male deity or *Lai*, with great power over the forces of nature. His method of procedure is as follows:—

A piece of white cloth, one *lam* (*i.e.* the distance from the tips of the fingers of one hand to those of the other across the chest when the arms are held out level with the shoulders) in length, is folded up and placed on a stone to form a seat for the *Lai*. In front of it are placed two circular pieces of plantain leaf, on one of which is some betel nut and pan leaf and on the other pieces of some fruit, and beside these is placed a small lamp. The Rain-Stopper, standing in front and facing the offerings, addresses the *Lai* thus:—“*Sibo linga Sri Swar Sanamahi, Sibbo linga Sri Swar Thangjing, maikei ngakpa Bishnu He ! Narayan.*” *Sibo linga*, I am told, means Siva's lingam, and Sanamahi is a Manipuri household deity. Thangjing is the chief god of Moirang, *maikei ngakpa* meaning protector of all directions. The

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mixture of Hindu deities, Siva, Vishnu, and Narayan, with the *Umang Lai* or forest gods of the Manipuris, is typical of the religious muddle in which the people are.

The Rain-Stopper claims that, if the rain stops with this charm, he can prevent it from raining again as long as the lamp remains burning and the articles remain untouched, and he keeps on saying the charm at intervals. He claims to have once, at harvest time, kept off rain thus for three months. [The harvest comes in December, the driest part of the year.]

Should Sanamahi prove unwilling or unable to stop the rain, recourse is had to Sorarel, the god of the sky, whose *pūja* (worship) is rather more elaborate. An earthen pot is half filled with sand, and this is placed over the fire, used for warmth and not for cooking, the hearth having been first freshly plastered over and the fire lit afresh. Above the hearth a light platform is constructed on which reposes the book containing the ritual of Rain-Stopping. The Rain-Stopper stirs the sand with a rice spoon on which the words *Ong karo Ong karo* have been inscribed, and while he does so he mutters the following charm,—“*Brahma, nang chako, Hango nang tumo*” (i.e. “Brahma you burn, O Soul wear away”). It was explained to me that, as the sand and the book were warmed by the fire, so it was hoped that Sorarel would warm the earth and the air. If both the preceding performances have no result, there remains only *nong-kamba*, (i.e. rain-stopping). The words *Ong karo Ong karo* are written on a billet of wood, and the Rain-Stopper goes out into an open place and twirls it round his head till he notices a break in the clouds. He then observes in what direction the clouds seem to be moving, and waves them in that direction with his stick, at the same time ordering them off. A wind then rises and blows them away. Sometimes the rain is obstinate, and the poor Rain-Stopper told me he had been kept at work for three days before the rain stopped.

While twirling his staff the Rain-Stopper shouts,—“*Gurugi thang di chumthangne. Gurugi chunggoi di leichinne. Leichin nongphai kaibane. Setkaiu settumu. Thangjing thang di tondumba, Nongpok thang di chinaiba, Mapugi thang di tongonba, haikup, haiphra. Thabat, thabat hiragi di thangne haidatlo. Ong Durga*

Debi kapacheyo! Swarha, Ong Jadurakha Debi, kapacheyo. Swarha Ong Debi, kapacheyo, Swarha! Durga gi thangne segāk segāk khaio! khaio! tumo. Gurugi thang di chumthangne. Gurugi chunggoi di leichinne. Leichin nongphai kaibane. Setkaiu settumu," the meaning of which is, "The Guru's sword, it is the rainbow. The Guru's shield, it is the clouds. The rain clouds are divided. Divide, destroy (them). Thangjing's sword is pointed, Nongpok's sword is three-pronged, the master's sword is curved, twirl glittering, twirl scattering. Apart! Apart! With jewel sword whirling cut. Ong Durga Devi, charm away! Swarha, Ong Jadurakha Devi, charm! Swarha Ong Devi, charm! With Durga's sword divide and break the clouds in pieces. The Guru's sword, it is the rainbow. The Guru's shield, it is the clouds. The rain clouds are divided." The extraordinary mixture of Sanskrit words with the Manipuri invocation, and the impartial appeal to gods of the Hindu Pantheon and the local divinities, exactly show the religion of the people. The Brahman and the Maiba carry on their vocations without interfering with each other, the former being ministers in the orthodox way to the Hindu divinities, while the latter has absolute control of the worship of the local gods and goddesses.

In the *Manipur Chronicle*, written, be it remembered, by the official chronicler of the Manipuri kings, we read of the advent of the first Brahman from Assam in 1704-5 A.D., and his success in winning the approval of the Raja and his ministers. In 1707-8 we read of the first temples being built and of sacred monkeys being maintained. In 1723-4 the worship of eleven of the local gods was prohibited, but four such divinities were retained, and Brahmans were appointed to their service in place of the Maibas. Later we read, in 1735,—“The Raja Garib Nawaz punished all those Manipuris who neglected to follow Hinduism.”

At the present day the Manipuri is a very strict and orthodox Hindu of the Vaishnava sect, but at the same time a firm believer in the ancient gods of his forefathers. What the resultant religion will be, time only can show.

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