

13.2 Religious Communities

See Ata (11.1); Mehta (11.1)

13.3 Cults and Popular Religion

Khangembam, Indira: Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Lois of Manipur. *Man and Society: A Journal of North East Studies* 4 (2007): 31-56.

Written from a functionalist perspective, this paper describes the socio-cultural, and religious beliefs of the Lois of Manipur, and the challenges to these beliefs brought about by the Hinduization of the dominant Meitei society in the state. The study focuses on two Lois villages – Sekmai and Khurkhul – using both primary and secondary data sources. While there are different views among scholars regarding the origins of the Lois, who comprise about two per cent of the total population of Manipur state, they are generally considered to be a distinct ethnic group.

Religion is one of the most important aspects of Lois culture. It is firmly rooted in the physical ecology, and is the basis of their distinct cultural identity. The Lois' religious practices and beliefs contain elements of naturism, animism and ancestor worship. Lois religion has a rich repertoire of rituals covering the entire life-span of an individual from birth to death. Their religious pantheon comprises many gods and goddesses. Representing varied needs and invoked on different occasions, the deities are divided among household deities, village deities and directional deities. Worship of trees and spirits and the practice of witchcraft are also important elements of the Lois' religious beliefs and practices. The role of priests and priestesses in performing religious rites, and the practice of blood sacrifice are prominent in Lois culture.

However, with the ascent of Hinduism in Manipur, a gap has been created between the Lois and Meiteis, the degraded status of the former being further reinforced as a result of their denomination as a Scheduled Caste by the government of independent India. The Lois now face political subordination and social discrimination in the Meitei-dominated Hinduized society of Manipur.

See also Bhushi (23.2)

13.4 Fundamentalism / Communalism

See Aiyar (10.2); Hardiman (4.2); Jain (11.1)