

## **Gender Differences in Meiteiron**

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This article explores the gender dominance and differences in Meiteiron in some detail with a modest historical explanation. The linguistic evidence argues against the general claim of prior male dominance, particularly the linguistic evidence in archaic Meiteiron. It is argued that the speech of women was not considered inferior, a reflection of the high status women held in pre-Hindu Meitei society. Although there are decidedly matriarchal elements in the modern language, present day Meitei society is very much male dominated.<sup>1</sup>

Every society sets up societal norms for men and women which go beyond what would be required by the biological differences between the sexes (Mead 1949:8) so it is reasonable to look for evidence in language reflecting the differences in societal norms for men and women in different cultures. Key (1975:13) remarks that the differences between male and female linguistic behavior is as universal as the sex role is universal and that linguistic sex distinctions undoubtedly occur in every language of the world. The differences are often reflected in

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the lexical items, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics of the language.

The speech of women is frequently considered inferior, apparently for no other reason than women speak it. Parents are accustomed to correct the speech of children and of course they make sure that each child is being trained to use sex-appropriate forms. Lakoff (1975:5) remarks that, if a little girl 'talks rough' like a boy she will normally be ostracized, scolded or made fun of by the society. Thus, society through the behavior of parents and friends forces a female child to follow conventions, that is, to behave "appropriately". In Indian dramas women speak Prakrit (Prakrta, the spoken or vulgar language) and men speak Sanskrit (Sanskṛta, the "elevated" language) (Jespersen 1921:241). Sapir (1929), in a study of the Yana language, suggests that the "reduced female form" constitutes a conventional symbol for the lower status of women in the community.

This study of male and female differences in Meiteiron is restricted to (i) lexical items and particular phrasal expressions and (ii) morphological differences. Both "sex-exclusive" and "sex-preferential" differentiation exist in Meiteiron (Bodine 1975). However, the usages are not constrained solely by gender differences but also by age, in that some forms are used by old-men (for example, grandfather) and some by old-women (for example, grandmother). Initially, we shall examine the archaic forms of Meiteiron, which seem to reflect a higher societal position for women and then, we discuss male and female differences in modern Meiteiron.

Many linguistic studies of gender have shown that certain patterns result from male social dominance, a reflection of male dominant posi-

tions in family, economic, political, and legal affairs. However, the claim that archaic Meiteiron shows a pattern reflecting male dominance does not hold true.

Quite the contrary. There is evidence that women held high positions in ancient Meitei society. In Pre-Hindu Meitei society, for example, women played a major role in religion. Religion permeated the life of the people, with women not only active participants in religious ceremonies, but often having a leading role in them. This role is evident from the dominance of women in the goddess cult and in *Umang Lai Haraoba*, *umang* 'forest' *lai* 'deity' *haraoba* 'to please' (a festival for worshipping Pre-Hindu deities). In this the role of priestess is considered much more important than that of the priest (Parratt 1980:96). Not only were women believed to have the power to communicate with spirits and supernatural beings, but women were so central that when a priest performed the rituals of *Lai Haraoba* the priest usually dressed himself as a priestess.

In politics women participated no less than their male counterparts. They were very strong political force in a number of movements, for example, the *Nupilan* or women's movement of 1939, a revolt against colonial oppression and the corruption of monarchy. Another example is when, under the political pressure of women, Maharaja Chandrakriti<sup>2</sup> (1834-44, 1850-86 A.D.) postponed the catching of elephants until the

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2. Chandrakriti was dethroned in 1844 A.D. due to a family feud between the princes over the throne. He became King for the second time in 1850 A.D. and ruled until 1886 A.D.

end of the harvest season (October and November) as the elephant catching was interfering with the harvest. As they were well organised and well aware of politics, they could even correct injustices committed by king and by other high officials (L. Ibungohal Singh, 1969:42-43).

In economics, too, women played a major role, with their participation going way beyond managing economics of the house. In fact, as T.C. Hodson remarks, "the women hold a high and free position in Manipur all internal trade and exchange of the produce of the country being managed by them" (1908:23). Against this background, we shall now analyse the archaic forms of Meiteiron (*i.e.* the pre-Hindu Meiteiron). This analysis will, however, be restricted to the study of (i) forms of address and reference terms, (ii) social titles used for women, and (iii) the order of constituents of words.

### ***Forms of Address and Terms of Reference***

In the Pre-Hindu period it seems to have been the Meitei custom for husbands and wives to address one another using their respective personal names. For example, in a dialogue between Pakhangba and his wife Laisana (*Ningthourol Lambuba (An Account of Royal Tours)*, p. 14), one notes that the two addressed one another using personal names. Later, in the same dialogue as well as elsewhere in other dialogues in *Leithak Leikharol (Heaven and the Nether World*, Y. Bheigya Meitei ed. 1967) they also used the reciprocal terms *isabi* 'beloved' and *sanau* 'beloved' with each other (in a later period, the term *isabi* came to be used for males and *sanou* for females). Another instance worth citing is the form '*pan<sup>h</sup>oibi khongkun*'<sup>4</sup> 'in quest of Panthoibi'; in *Panthoibi Khongkun* (M. Chandra Singh ed. 1963:55), while



Panthoibi was talking to her beloved (Nongpok), she referred to her husband Khaba using his name. This contrasts sharply with the Hindu system, in which it is next to impossible to even mention one's husband's name. The address terms being used suggest that women were not considered second-class members of society in ancient pre-Hindu society. As E. P. Watermans (1967) noted, a society's terms of address reflect its status structure.

### **Reference terms**

The terms of references employed in the Pre-Hindu Meitei society suggest that Meitei wives were treated as companions of equal status, not as inferiors or slaves. It is evident from the words employed for wives for example, *lónabi* 'companion', *tallóy* 'companion who is also a consultant'. Similarly the word employed to refer to the husband is *ipúróybə* (< *ipú-lóybə* < *aypu-lónabə*) 'my companion'. Other forms support this analysis, for example, *marup-lóy* 'friend or companion', and *ita-róy* 'friend or companion (female)'. The meaning of the word *lónabə* is 'to accompany'. From the aforementioned examples it appear that the relationship between husband and wife was equalitarian.

### **Social Titles Used for Women<sup>3</sup>**

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3. The social titles used for women are taken from *Ningthourol Lambuba*, *Leithak Leikharon* and *Panthoibi Khongkun*

There are two kinds of titles used for women in earlier Meitei society: The first one refers to clans and the latter to family names or lineage. These can be illustrated with the help of the following examples:

I. Titles which refer to clans:

- |                |                             |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| 1) wahəmlon    | 'ladies of Mangang clan'    |
| 2) khayoyron   | 'ladies of Khuman clan'     |
| 3) khabaron    | 'ladies of Khaba clan'      |
| 4) nūṛban cənu | 'ladies of Luwang clan'     |
| 5) nōṇballon   | 'ladies of Angom clan' etc. |

II. Titles, which refer to family names:

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1) khuman cənú   | 'ladies of Uritkhinbams'      |
| 2) ləmbasu   | 'ladies of Arambams'          |
| 3) yawṛəyma cənú   | 'ladies of Mayanglambams'     |
| 4) ṇánúron yáybiróymá  | 'ladies of Khaidems'          |
| 5) cək <sup>h</sup> á tan <sup>h</sup> k <sup>h</sup> ul ṇám <sup>h</sup> bi | 'ladies of Mangsatabams' etc. |

From these, it is apparent that women in the earlier society had socially recognized titles, which referred to clans (as in I) and they had family names (as in II). For example, all the females of '*Mangang*' clan were known as *wahəmlón* and all the females of '*Urit<sup>h</sup>inbam*' families as *kh<sup>h</sup>umk<sup>h</sup>am cənú*.

Strangely, history does not record such comparable social titles for males. Males were apparently recognized by their family names. For example, *nin<sup>th</sup>əwjəm tona* 'Ningthoujam Tona', where *nin<sup>th</sup>əwjəm* is a family name and *tona* is a given name. The conferring of titles can be traced back in the history, as it is evident from Panthoibi Khongkun. In *Panthoibi Khongkun* (M. Chandra Singh, 1963:9) the deity called *Panthoibi* herself actually gave the title *wəṇəm* (that is, *wəṇəmlon*) and she herself declared to be called by the title she desired. Here, *lon* ~ *ron*

means lady. It is interesting to learn that she created the title for herself and it later became a convention. It is, therefore, quite possible that other social titles, which referred to women of other clans and lineages, were created on the same pattern by women themselves. In fact, the fact that women had titles conferring upon them but men did not at least suggests that women might have had a higher status than their male counterparts. Dale Spender (1980:142), comments that "... that the language is such an influential force in shaping our world, it is obvious that those who have the power to make the symbols and their meanings are in a privileged and highly advantageous position. They have, at least, the potential to order the world to suit their own ends, the potential to construct a language, a reality, a body of knowledge in which they are the central figures, the potential to legitimate their own primacy and to create a system of belief which is beyond challenge (so that their superiority is natural 'and and 'objectively tested')". Even though society was somewhat patriarchal then, some women still had the power to exert significant social pressure, for example, *Panthoibi* had the power to create a title for herself. It is therefore apparent that in the then patriarchal order women's status and power were recognized and realized. It is possible that this is one of the traces left from an earlier matriarchal structure which is thought to have existed.

### ***The Order of Constituents of Words***

Here the order of constituents means the order of words referring to males and females. We can find two types of arrangements: (i) the

words referring to females occur before the words referring to males (when they occur together) (ii) words referring to male occur before the words referring to females. It is found that most of the constructions used are of the first type.

This is illustrated below:

Set A

- 1) ima læymæren sidæbi ipa ibuŋo layniŋthou 'God and Goddess' > 'the immortal mother goddess and father god'
- 2) læymaræn guru sidæbi sidæba 'God & Goddess' > 'the immortal Goddess & God'
- 3) pølem-pænthou 'mother-father' > 'parents'
- 4) imá-ipá 'mother-father' > 'parents'
- 5) mæpi-mæpá 'mother-father' > 'parents'
- 6) læymæ-niŋthəw 'queen-king' > 'king and queen'
- 7) mætu-məwá 'wife-husband' > 'husband and wife'
- 8) læyráh-khóymú 'girl-boy' > 'boy and girl'
- 9) núra-pák'həŋ 'girl-boy' > 'boy and girl'
- 10) læysábi-pák'həŋ 'girl-boy' > 'boy and girl'
- 11) niŋól-pibá 'daughter-son' > 'children/son and daughter'
- 12) nupí-nupá 'woman-man' > 'man and woman'
- 13) piťát-pátəťpə 'motherless-fatherless' > 'orphan'
- 14) pi-pá 'female-male' > 'man and woman' etc.

Set B

- 1) mæťy-məŋaw 'husband-wife' > 'husband and wife'
- 2) sábi-sánəw 'male lover-female lover'
- 3) pári-imóm 'son-daughter' > 'son & daughter'
- 4) niŋthəw-məharani 'king-queen' > 'king and queen'
- 5) layniŋthəw-láyrémbi 'god king goddess' > 'god and goddess'

From the data, it may be observed that in most of the compound words referring to females and males the words referring to females

occur as a first constituent as seen in set A. Of the list in set A, except for numbers 4 and 10, the pairings are used strictly in the order given. Y. Bheigya Meitei (1967:43) in *Leithak Leikharol* reports that in most of the Meitei words, the words referring to females are written first and words referring to males later. He interprets that this is due to the popular belief that when god or creator was trying to create living beings, the first living being he made was a goddess. This is consistent with the practices of goddess cult, which is widespread in Manipur. It is, therefore, apparent that women were powerful enough to have their status reflected in the language structure. But in languages such as English, as Smith (1985:47) remarks, the usual and more expected order in the case of English language is male-female pairings, for example, “husband and wife”, “brother and sister”, “host and hostess”, “king and queen”, “Adam and Eve” etc. except the pair “ladies and gentleman”. In Meiteiron the expected order is just the opposite of the pairing we find in English. This evidence is consistent with the existence of the matriarchal order in the earlier Meitei social system.

We have attempted to distil the essence of asymmetries in the representation of the arrangement between the sexes into contrasts from the archaic forms of Meiteiron. The language data shows no evidence that women were lower class subordinate members of that society. However, in modern form Meiteiron, we see some evidence of gender-based dominance. Although there are decidedly matriarchal elements to be discerned, the linguistic evidence suggests that the present society is maledominated.

***Choice of lexical items and some special phrasal expressions in male and female speech***

We find clear lexical differences between male and female speech in: a) colour terms, b) exclamatory words, c) kinship terms, d) address terms, e) yes and no expressions, f) abusive expressions, and g) the inheritance of family names.

***Colour Terms***

a) A representative list of colour terms is given below. The terms used exclusively by women are given on the left side, while the neutral terms are given on the right:

<u>Terms</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
1) kəbókkəŋ məcu	'light violet'
2) nóŋjəbi məcu	'light orange'
3) thəámna khénjón məcu	'colour of tender lotus leaves'
4) səŋgóm ánəwbə məcu	'snow white'
5) həwáy úriməcu	'dark pink'
6) cīŋya təmya məcu	'colour little darker than tender lotus leaves'
7) həŋgámpən	'yellow'
8) əŋəwbə	'white'
9) əmúbə	'black'
10) əŋáhbə	'red'
11) əsəŋbə	'green' etc.

The list of colour terms exclusively used by women given above is by no means exhaustive. There are many newly-coined terms. The neutral terms are used by both sexes while, the other set of terms is largely confined to women's speech. Terms which are associated with women's speech have acquired a negative connotation. If men in Meitei society

use these colour terms, they are often criticized as feminine or un-masculine. Males, in fact, often make fun of women for having such fine discriminated colour terms, which they feel are unnecessary. Therefore, such words remain unimportant in the society at large. R. Lakoff (1975:13) argues that words restricted to women's language are not relevant to the world of male influence and power.

A question may be raised. Why are such fine discriminated colours relevant for women, but not for men? A clue is contained in the fact that the majority of Meitei women traditionally earn their livelihood by weaving. The various distinct colour terms are required particularly when producing cloth for female customers, who want a rich range of colours. So, it is likely that they acquire such fine discriminated colour terms as part of how they earn their livelihood. Weaving is solely the business of women. Here, women, instead of getting recognition of their economic independence are being mocked for using "too" finely discriminated colour terms. As a result, terms, which are coined and used by them, have undergone pejorativization. Spender (1980) goes even further arguing that in our society masculine with associated with positive and negative with feminine.

The terms are, therefore, devalued because of the patriarchal frame of values. In conjunction with the other asymmetries that have been described above and will be described below, it contributes to an overall picture of the ways in which sexes are represented.

### ***Exclamatory Words***

There are well-defined lexical differences in exclamatory terms. Women use one set. Men generally use another set; however, the exclamatory terms, which are otherwise exclusively used by women, are used by men while playing with small kids, that is, in baby talk, but these exclamatory terms are never used in their normal speech. Similar distinctions are reported in the language of the North Indian Gross Venture tribe (Regina Flannery, 1946) and in Japanese (Chikamatsu 1979 & Jordan 1974, both cited in J.S. Shibamoto 1985:55).

Examples of exclamatory terms used exclusively by women are given on the left; others used by both sexes are given on the right.

Terms used  
by females

1. is 'painful\disapproval\disbelief'
2. i-i 'offended\disapproval'
3. ima 'surprise\unexpected'
4. həyma 'surprise\ shock\shyness'

Terms used  
by males/females

- ə  
hèrá  
eh  
há

Set II

Terms used  
by females

5. imáypemá 'surprise\shock\disgust'
6. həymáypéma 'surprise\shock\disgust'
7. əcá 'disgust\hatred'
8. he-radhika 'challenge'

Terms used  
by males/females

- báh 'admiration'  
ihé 'forget'  
əcá-cá 'offended'  
hé-hé 'contemptuous\  
challenge' etc.

The list given is a representative list of exclamatory words, English equivalents however, are only approximates since the precise meaning depends on the social context.



Exclamatory words of surprise, shock and disbelief are mostly found in women's speech. Of these words, some are found mainly in the speech of women fifty or older, e.g. *imáypéma*, *háymaypéma* and *heradhika*.

### *Yes and No Expressions*

Women have their own ways of saying 'yes' and 'no'. The following examples exemplify this:

- |    |               |  |
|----|---------------|--|
| 1. | màydə         | 'no'                                   |
| 2. | màydə-təllidə | 'no'                                   |
| 3. | hàw           | 'yes'                                  |
| 4. | kəri-háyge    | 'yes please' (lit. 'What do you say?') |
| 5. | kəri-oyrámno  | 'yes please' (lit. What do you say?)   |
| 6. | káyno         | 'yes' (lit. What do you say?) etc.     |

Examples (1) and (2) are found mostly in the speech of older women. Example (2) *maydə-təllidə* is a double negative, which indicates 'no' with greater disapproval. The word *hàw* 'yes' is found in the speech of both males and females; however, if girls answer with *hàw*, they are considered impolite. Girls are explicitly taught to use the more polite answer *kəri-háyge* 'yes please' or *kəri-oyrámno* 'yes please', a practice found in cultured families.

An extension of this usage in which the sex differentiation occurs is the case of a proper wife who, for example, never responds to her husband with the word *hàw* 'yes' but instead with the polite expressions *kəri-háyge* 'yes please' or *kəri-oyrámno* 'yes please'. However, the hus-

band may respond to his wife with *háw* 'yes' or *kəyno* (< *kəri-háyno*) 'what do you say?' When the husband uses such expressions, it is considered masculine; if the wife uses the same words, it is often considered impolite, aggressive, or uncultured.

### ***Abusive Expressions***

Similar asymmetries exist in abusive expressions: Some are neutral in that both men and women may use them, some are confined to male speech, and others to female speech. However, most of the conventional abusive expressions are directed at female sexual behavior.

Abusive expressions used by females	Abusive expressions used by males
1) <i>nəpa-yánni-məca</i> 'son of many fathers'	<i>nəpa-thoráyməca</i> (< <i>nəpa-tara-məca</i> ) 'son of ten fathers'
2) <i>ləmsáy-məca</i> 'son of prostitute'	
3) <i>besáy-məca</i> 'son of prostitute'	
4) <i>kəsúbi-məca</i> 'son of prostitute'	
5) <i>ləmsá</i> 'prostitute'	
6) <i>besá</i> 'prostitute'	

### **Abusive terms used by both males and females**

1]	<i>hoyróh</i>	'anus'
2]	<i>huy<sup>th</sup>u</i>	'sex of bitch'
3]	<i>nəməymə<sup>th</sup>u</i>	'sex of your mother'
4]	<i>kəsúbi</i>	'prostitute' etc.

Most of the abusive language is directed at female sexual behavior, an indication of the inferior position of women.

Some abusive expressions are exclusively used by men, for example, *nəpa-thoráymáca* (< *nəpa-tara-máca*) 'child of ten fathers'. This occurs mostly in the speech of older men. Other abusive expressions occur in the speech of females, but the abusive expression *nəpa-yánni-máca* 'child of many fathers' (lit. 'child of mixed fathers') occurs exclusively in the speech of old women.

The abusive expressions (particularly, the two expressions namely, *nəpa-yánni-máca* 'child of many fathers' and *nəpa-thoráymáca* (< *nəpa-tara-máca*) 'child of ten fathers') may reflect an earlier period of polyandry. It is possible that with the increasing male dominance such practices were criticized.

The words namely, *kəsúbi* 'prostitute' and *besá* 'prostitute' are not Meitei native words. The word *kəsúbi* 'prostitute' is a borrowed Hindi term (Chaki Sircar, 1984: 85) and the word *besá* 'prostitute' is derived from Sanskrit *vesya* 'prostitute' (Monier-Williams, 1981:1019). The fact that there was no Meitei word for 'prostitute' in the earlier periods could also be related to the earlier existence of polyandry. It is apparent that the two words were introduced into the vocabulary of Meiteiron only after the introduction of Hinduism to Manipur.

Interestingly and in contrast to the situation with polyandry, the existence of polygamy in the present Meitei society has not resulted in abusive terms, that is, we do not find any comparable abusive expression, which refer to male sexual behavior. This may be due to wide-

spread male dominance, which is evident in a popular Meitei saying typically used by women - *nupadi tǎrági mǎpúni* meaning 'man is the master of ten' (which means master of ten wives).

However, we do find a few negative expressions, which refer to male sexual behavior such as *turumjaw* 'big balls' and *burijao* 'big balls'. These expressions are used mainly by women and generally in the absence of men, only rarely being used by men criticizing other men. Females who use abusive expressions referring to male sexual behavior are considered neurotic, especially by men but also by society at large. The use of such expressions is associated with uncultured behavior.

### *Inheritance of Family Names*

In a patriarchal society, the women's family name or surname is lost at marriage, as the social norms require them to adopt the name of the husband after marriage. This pattern leads Miller and Swift (1976:14, cited in D. Spender 1980:24) to conclude in one of their studies that "only men have real names" and this retention of the family name after marriage is one of the rights of being a male.

This patterns is only partially true for Meiteis. In Metei custom, at marriage a woman does not have to lose her family name. For example, if *irom cǎnu/nǐjol tombi* 'Miss Irom Tombi' marries *thokcom cawbǎ* 'Thokchom Chaoba', then her name would be *irom cǎnu/nǐjol thokcom oŋbi tombi* 'Irom Tombi married to Thokchom' (lit.), where *thokcom* is the family name of her husband. As a consequence of this pattern, women are said to marry into family names. Similar cases are reported

(M.R. Key, 1975: 48) in some Spanish-speaking countries and Scotland.

Nonetheless, children inherit the father's family name as in other patrilineal systems. However, if a person bears only female children, it is said that a family dies out as a consequence of having no one to "carry on the family name". Similarly, a female belongs to her father's clan before marriage but to her husband's clan after marriage; as Lakoff (1975) argues, men are defined in terms of what they do in the world, while women are rated in terms of the men with whom they are associated. Here, it is appropriate to mention the Meiteis saying *nupigi yum-nak sagei layte* 'females do not have family names and clans.' Before marriage they are defined in terms of their fathers' family names and clans and after marriage in terms of their husband's family name and clan. This becomes a problem when a female is divorced; women are either their father's or their ex-husband's family. One consequence of this practice is that it makes tracing the female line difficult, which in turn makes history much more closely connected to the male than the female line.

The fact that women still retain their fathers' family names seems to be a remnant of the earlier, higher position of women in society. But, in part, in contemporary Meitei society some women drop their father's family name completely, simply adopting their husbands' family name. For example, in the examples like the one discussed above, the woman could now be addressed simply as *thokcom ohbi tombi debi* 'Tombi Devi

married to *Thokchom*'. Though the change is not yet widespread, this tendency indicates the increasing male dominance.

Furthermore, other minor changes in the direction of male dominance are also occurring, for example, addressee terms like *Sri* and *Sri-mati Wangkheimayum Chaoba Singh* and *Mr.* and *Mrs. Wangkheimayum Chaoba Singh*, where *Wangkheimayum Chaoba Singh* is exclusively the husband's name. Such usage is still restricted mostly to invitation cards and seems to be at least partly due to the influence of Hindu culture and to westernization.

### ***Kinship terms***

Meitei kinship terms reveal the importance laid upon (1) the sex of ego, (2) sex of the person addressed or/and referred to and (3) the sex of the linking relative.

The sexual differentiation is more vividly revealed in the case of reference terms than with the address terms. This may be due to the fact address terms seem to undergo change more easily along with societal changes. Further, the terms which were earlier used as address and reference terms may be retained only for reference purposes. For example, the borrowed term *tadə* 'elder brother' is being used as an address term, while the native term *iyambə* 'elder brother' for a male ego and *ibuh* 'elder brother' for a female ego are used for reference purposes only.

(i) Sex of ego: Here some of the terms are used exclusively by men and others only by women so these terms reflect the ego's sex. Specifically, for all the terms belonging to ego's generation except the terms *ice* 'elder sister' and *dada* 'elder brother' and all the terms belonging to the first descending generation, the sex of the ego is distinguished. For

example, in order to refer to elder brother a male ego will use the term *iyambə* and a female ego will use *ibuh*. Similarly, for referring to a son-in-law, a male ego uses the term *imak* whereas, a female ego will use the term *iya*; and, for referring to younger brother a male ego will use the term *inao* while a female ego will use the term *ipəwa*. Note that we find the distinction of the sex of the ego only in reference terms of the generations mentioned.

(ii) Sex of the person addressed or referred to: Most terms specify the sex of kinsmen. In case of terms which do not do so, one can generally add words *nupa* for males and *nupi* for females and thereby remove the ambiguity. For example the term *ica* 'child' does not tell us the sex of the kin, however it can be made clear by adding these words, giving *ica-nupa* 'son' or *ica-nupi* 'daughter'.

(iii) Sex of the linking relative<sup>4</sup>: Some of the kin terms are so complicated in that we have to take into consideration not only the sex of the addressee and sex of the ego but also sex of the linking relative as well, since people are related differently through male and female links. Terms which involve sex of the linking relatives are confined to ego's generation, the first ascending and descending generations.

Terms in ego's generation:<sup>5</sup>

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4. Linking relatives are the relatives through which the relationship is traced for the person concerned, for example, in *ine* 'aunt' (father's sister) the relationship is traced through the father.

<u>Terms</u>	<u>Gloss</u>	<u>Linking relatives</u>
1. itáymə	E female Cr Co for male ego (Mo Br Da, Fa Si Da)	Mo Br, Fa Si
2. inómə	E female Cr Co for a female ego (Mo Br Da, Fa Si Da)	Mo Br, Fa Si
3. ibáy	E male Cr Co for a male ego (Mo Br So, Fa SiSo)	Mo Br, Fa Si
4. itáy	E male Cr Co for a female ego (Mo Br So, Fa Si So)	Mo Br, Fa Si
5. inàw -nupi	Y female CrCo for a male ego (MoBrDa, FaSiDa)	MoBr, FaSi
6. icən -nupi	Y female CrCo for a female ego (MoBrDa, FaSiDa)	MoBr, FaSi
7. isen	Y male CrCo for a male ego (MoBrSo, FaSiSo)	MoBr, FaSi
8. inàw	Y female CrCo for a female ego (MoBrSo, FaSiSo)	MoBr, FaSi

The same terms which are employed for siblings are also used for parallel cousins.

<u>Terms</u>	<u>Gloss</u>	<u>Linking relatives</u>
9. ice	E sister for both the egos (Fa Br Da, Mo Si Da)	Fa Br, Mo Si
10. inaw (-nupi)	Y sister for female ego (Fa Br Da, Mo Si Da)	Fa Br, Mo Si
11. icən	Y sister for male ego (Fa Br Da, Mo Si Da)	Fa Br, Mo Si
12. dəda	E brother for both the egos (Fa Br So, Mo Si So)	Fa Br, Mo Si

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5. Notes: 1. Mother = Mo, 2. Father = Fa, 3. Brother = Br, 4. Sister = Si, 5. Daughter = Da, 6. Son = so, 7. Wife = Wi, 8. Husband = Hu, 9. Younger = Y, 10. Elder = E, 11. Cross = Cr, 12. Cousin = Co, 13. Literally = Lit. 14. Low tone = à, 15. High tone = á, both illustrated with the vowel /a/.



13. iyámbe	E brother for a male ego (Fa Br So, Mo Si, So)	Fa Br Mo Si
14. ibuh	E Brother for a female ego (Fa Br So, Mo Si So)	Fa Br, Mo Si
15. ináw (-nupa)	Y brother for a male ego (Fa Br So, Mo Si So)	Fa Br, Mo Si
16. ipəwa (-nupa)	Y brother for a female ego (Fa Br So, Mo Si So)	Fa Br, Mo Si

### Terms in the first descending generation

<u>Term</u>	<u>Gloss</u>	<u>Linking relatives</u>
17. imak	'nephew' for a male ego (Si So)	Si
18. iyá	'nephew' for a female ego (Br So)	Br
19. imów	'niece' for a male ego (Si Da)	Si
20. imów	'niece' for a female ego (Br Da)	Br

Terms used for one's own children are being equated with collateral of the same sex as male ego's brothers' children and also a female ego's sisters' children.

<u>Terms</u>	<u>Gloss</u>	<u>Linking relatives</u>
21. icánupá	'son' for a male ego (Br So)	Br
22. icánupá	'son' for a female ego (Si Da)	Si
23. icánupĩ	'daughter' for a male ego (Br Da)	Br
24. icánupĩ	'daughter' for a female ego (Si Da)	Si

## Terms in the first ascending generation:

<u>Terms</u>	<u>Gloss</u>	<u>Linking relatives</u>
25. <i>ine</i>	'aunt' for both egos (Fa Si, Mo Br Wi)	Fa, Mo Br
26. <i>mamə</i>	'uncle' for both egos (MoBr, FaSi Hu)	Mo, FaSi
27. <i>indon</i>	'aunt' (younger than mother) for both egos (MoSi, FaBr Wi)	Mo, FaBr
28. <i>iton</i>	'uncle' (younger than father) for both egos (Fa, MoSi)	FaBr, MoSiHu
29. <i>imhal</i> ,	'aunt' (elder than mother) for both egos (MoSi, FaBrWi)	Mo, FaBr
30. <i>ipən</i>	'uncle' (elder than father) for both egos (MoSi, MoSiHu)	Fa, MoSi

The list of Meitei kin terms shows the importance of the sex of connecting relatives. In classification, relations where the sex of the relative is the same as the person addressed or referred to, collaterals tend to be merged; where the sex is opposite to that of the relative, the collaterals tend to be kept distinct. Thus a father's brother [numbers 30 and 28 i.e. *ipən* ( < *ipa-hən* father's elder brother) 'uncle' *iton* ( < *ipa* 'father' – *ton* 'younger') 'uncle'] are treated as father in the first ascending generation. Similarly, the terms 29 and 27 in the list i.e. *imhal* ( < *ima* 'mother' – *həl* 'elder' 'elder mother') 'aunt' and *indon* ( < *ima* 'mother' – *ton* 'younger' 'mother younger than mother') 'aunt' are treated and referred to as mother in the first ascending generation. The children of the kins who are treated as fathers and mothers are obviously considered brothers and sisters (as given in the list from 9 to 16). In contrast father's sister *ine* in number 25 is addressed as *ine*, the relative in question is father. For mother's brother in 26 the term *mam*˘ is

used; the connected relative is the mother. Notice that the relationship is traced through the father and mother respectively for father's sister and mother's brother who are of opposite sexes. The children of *ine* 'aunt' (paternal) are considered children and *mamə* 'uncle (maternal)' is treated as a cousins to those who are treated as brother's sisters in ego's generation.

The importance of the sex of linking relatives also applies to the first descending generation, where children of a brother for a female ego are referred to as *iya* 'nephews' and *iməw* 'nieces', while children of a sister for a female ego *icanupa* are 'sons' and *icanupi* 'daughters'. Similarly children of a sister of the male ego are referred to as *imak* nephews and '*iməw*' nieces in 17 and 19 in the list, while children of a brother of the same ego are referred to as sons and daughters. The distinction of terms based upon the sex of the linking relative is also reported for Seneca terms (Voget, 1953) and Dene kin terms (MacNeish, 1960). It is also worth noting that the terms which are distinguished by the sex of the linking relatives are directly related to the form of marriage (that is, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage) embedded in the Meitei kinship terminology which is also believed to have been the practice in the earlier period. This is evident from the fact that the terms, which are used for in-laws or affines, are the same as cross-cousins in ego's generation. The existence of cross-cousin marriage is also implicit in the terms for the generation above and below ego.

The Meiteis employ a terminology, as we have seen, that distinguishes sex within a sibling group, so that the group of sisters are con-

sidered in some way the same as each other and different from the other groups consisting of their brothers. For a boy or girl the mother's sisters are alternative mothers. If older than his mother, they are referred to as *imhan* 'big mother'; if younger *indon* (< *ima-ton*) 'little mother' (in 29 and 27 respectively in the list). In fact, one's sister's child is her child hence she calls the child *ica* 'child'. Similarly for a boy or girl, the father's brothers are alternative fathers. Their essential similarity to the father is pointed to by the term used *ipən* (< *ipa-hən*) 'big father' and *iton* (< *ipa-ton*) 'little father' (30 and 28 respectively). So one's brother's child is his child as he calls the child *ica*.

### *Asymmetry in Address Terms*

The non-reciprocity of address terms directed to women is a feature of many societies. In Meitei women direct more deferential speech to their husbands than the husbands direct to them. In Hindu-influenced Meitei custom a wife is not allowed to address her husband by his personal name but a husband can address his wife by her personal name; in fact, addressing one's husband by his personal name is taboo, according to Hindu scriptures (Masani, 1966:88). One consequence is that in Meitei, Hindi, Bengali, and Tamil, numerous devices are employed in order to avoid using the husband's name. Therefore, in order to avoid using the husband's name a wife usually uses teknononyms, that is, phrases such as the expression *məkhoy-bəba* 'their father' (taking their children as point of reference).

Another means very often used to attract his attention is the use of phrasal expression *tabiribra* 'do you hear me (honorific)?' The husband, in contrast, might use the expression *taribra* 'do you hear me?' without

the honorific marker *-bi-*. This non-reciprocal use of the honorific *-bi-* holds even for those husbands who are younger than their wives, a practice that indirectly reflects the wife's lower status. In the villages, the pattern is a bit different: Both husband and wife use the expression *taribra* 'do you hear me?' reciprocally, that is, with no honorific marker *-bi-* attached to it. However, this reciprocal use of such phrases by husband and wife is often viewed as crude, uncultured and unsophisticated speech behaviour. As discussed earlier the asymmetrical address form between husband and wife does not seem to be prevalent in the archaic form of Meiteiron. The asymmetry in address form reflects the asymmetry in social rights between the sexes.

Nowadays, under the influence of western education and culture, some educated women address their husbands using their personal names, but such behaviour is strongly disapproved of, particularly by many men who view the practice ill-mannered.

Another context that shows asymmetry in the uses of address terms is (1) when a friend's husband is older than the speaker versus (2) when a friend's wife is older than the speaker. In the first case, it is normal for her to address him as *tada* ~ *tāda*, *dāda* and *tamo* 'elder brother' since he is older. However, in the latter case, even though the friend's wife is older than the speaker, she will still not address him as *ice* 'elder sister'. If a women fails to follow this practice, she is likely to be seen as ill-mannered. However, this situation is made somewhat ambiguous by the fact that in Meitei custom older people should be addressed with appropriately respectfully address terms.

### ***Asymmetrical Address in Second Person Pronoun***

The asymmetrical relationship between husband and wife is reflected in the use of second person pronoun. The wife avoids it while talking to her husband, particularly in presence of others, whereas the husband is free to use it. However, they may use it reciprocally with each other when only the two of them are talking.

Respect for age is important in Meitei custom, so younger people second person pronoun are avoided when speaking to older people, as this would indicate a lack of respect. However, second person pronouns are quite often used by men talking to older women. In such cases, there is a conflict between gender and age. Further, when a male speaker uses a second person pronoun under these circumstances, it is often interpreted as affectionate and intimate, but when a female speaker does the same thing, it is often interpreted impolite.

The pronoun usage in the present context is quite complex with several other variables playing a significant role: particularly educational, economic, and political status. For example, with male or female officials who are of the same status and age group or women who are in a higher status but younger in age, men avoid the use of second person pronouns as their use would be quite impolite. Here the main factor is status, which supersedes gender as a determinant. In other instances where both sexes occupy comparably prestigious, women are addressed by second person pronouns by men but the pronouns are avoided by women talking to the same men. While this asymmetry suggests that women are viewed as subordinate, no matter what their professional attainment, we also come across people of both sexes who avoid the use

of such language, as they view avoidance of such usage as a mark of their cultural refinement.

### *Morphological Differences*

The male and female differences in Meiteiron also occur in morphologically suffixes. One set of verbal endings is found largely in the speech of females; the particles indicate the expression is emphatic:

- nehəy
- mi
- semi
- seba

All these particles occur in informal speech of women and can be illustrated by the following examples:

- |    |                 |                                 |
|----|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. | cák cáronəhəy   | 'take your meal' (insisting)    |
| 2. | táwrəkkəno-mi   | 'do not disturb me' (insisting) |
| 3. | táwrəkkəno-semi | 'do not disturb me' (insisting) |
| 4. | yaró-séba       | 'agree with me' (insisting)     |

The choice of particle depends on the social context. The particle -nehəy for example only occurs when a female is speaking to her juniors, for example, sons, daughters, sisters, and brothers. It is restricted to close members of the family who are younger than the speaker and also to a lesser extent to close friends. The remaining particles indicate intimacy and can be used not only to juniors, but also those of equal or even higher status and age.

Another asymmetry we could cite is when men omit particles, but females use them.

Neutral words	Gloss	Words used by women
1. ṅák-e-də	'Its wonderful(sarcastic)'	ṅákcə-re-də
2. pámk <sup>h</sup> rəboy	'You like it (sarcastic)'	pámjək <sup>h</sup> rəboy
3. páynĩṅkh <sup>h</sup> edə	'You want to play with it (disapproval)'	páyjəniṅkh <sup>h</sup> redə
4. utniṅkh <sup>h</sup> redə	'you want to show so much'	utcəniṅkh <sup>h</sup> redə
5. ṅák-e-də	'wonderful'	ṅákcəredə
6. tənkh <sup>h</sup> redə	'I do not approve it'	tənbik <sup>h</sup> redə
7. cáw-re də	'you are acting smart (sarcastic)'	cáwbi-re-də

Actually, the particles *cə* ~ *jə* and *pi* ~ *bi*<sup>6</sup> are respect markers as seen in the examples, *cət-cə-ge* 'I will go' (with respect) as opposed to *cət-ke* 'I will go (without any respect marker) and *haybi-yu* 'please tell (me)' as opposed to *hay-yu* 'tell (me)'.

When the particles are used by females, they have a negative connotation, that is, they are somewhat insulting. If these particles which

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6. -*jè*- ~ -*jè* , -*pi*- ~ -*bi*-<sup>9</sup> – The participle -*è*- ~ *jè*- is a verb root meaning 'make' which has been grammaticalized from the verb root *sa*- 'make' although the lexical meaning is altered in the context.

-*pi*- ~ -*bi*- This particle is also a verb root meaning 'give' which has been grammaticalized in the same manner from the corresponding verb root *pi* -'give' with its meaning altered. Chelliah (1997:213) remarks that the function of -*pi*- falls somewhere between a benefactive and a causative. The author has noted the polysemy of both the particles. They are also used as benefactive suffixes. At present the author is working on a paper on the concept of benefit of giving and benefit getting which is manifested in the grammar of this language. Both the particles need further investigation.



typically occur in female speech are found to occur in male speech, they are often ridiculed as being feminine or un-masculine.

These morphologically marked particles are also found to occur in the language of young children, because when they start acquiring language they have mainly the mother's speech as their model (Similar cases are reported in Japanese (Shibamoto, 1985)). However, the male children, later on, start switching over to male speech around the age of seven or eight. The female children continue it using such forms.

### ***Conclusion***

We have examined the differences between male and female speech in the archaic forms of Meiteiron. It has been argued from the evidence in the study that the speech of women was not considered to be inferior, apparently because women held high positions in ancient Meitei society. This is seen in the study of forms of address and term of reference, in social titles used for women, and in the word order of constituents. Regarding the forms of address, it is apparent that husband and wife used reciprocal terms to address each other, for example *isábi* 'beloved' and *isánáw* 'beloved'. Further, a wife could refer to her husband by his personal name. And, the study of terms of address suggests that the relationship between husband and wife was equalitarian in nature.

In regard to the social titles, the study only found social titles for addressing and referring to females. There were two kinds of titles: one referred to clan names and the other to family names.

In the study of the word order of compounds, we found that in archaic Meiteiron the female designation preceded the male. Even in present society examples of this still exist, but the majority of the modern terms have the male designation first.

More revealing than word order in modern usage are the instances in which women's language are considered inferior. The use of colour terms and exclamations are examples. If men use colour terms and exclamatory words which are overwhelmingly used by women, they are often ridiculed and made fun of.

There is also asymmetry in usage. Certain honorifics are used asymmetrically. In using certain phrasal expressions to get the husband's attention, women are found to use the honorific suffix *-bi*. But in no cases does the husband use this suffix to get his wife's attention. Thus, a wife is more respectful to her husband than vice-versa.

Asymmetry also occurs in the use of the second person pronouns: a wife does not use them to her husband in the presence of others, but a husband does use them addressing his wife. There is asymmetry in the use of abusive expressions (Phillip Smith, 1985); most of the abusive expressions refer to female sexual behavior, not male sexual behavior, an indication of males' dominant position in society.

Finally, as in other patrilineal societies, family names of the children come from the male line. Here, however, the fact that married women are found to retain their father's family name appears to be a trace of the earlier dominant position of women in society—in short, a remnant of the ancient higher status of Meitei women at an earlier time.

This study is not meant to be definitive, but exploratory. It has been limited to a few selected instances of male and female speech differ-

ences as these reflect social dominance patterns. It is possible that this study has overlooked other important topics of male and female differences, which may reveal themselves in phonology and syntax.

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