

Initiatory Experiences of *Amaibi*: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

Amaibis are priestesses and healers of the *Meitei*, one of the ethnic groups of Manipur, India. In the present paper, narratives of two *Amaibis* were subjected to an adaptation of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to explore and make sense of the experiences that constitute their life-world. Sickness and initiatory crises; dreams and altered states of consciousness; attempts to shield the initiate; heeding the call and search for “*Ema Guru*”; training and initiation of vocation; and adherence of rules and restrictions were found to be the six super ordinate themes which encapsulate the participants’ journey of shamanic initiation and ordeals towards the path of *Amaibihood*.

Keywords: *Amaibis*, *Initiatory*; *Shamanic*

An *Amaibi* is an individual who possesses the ability to communicate with *Lais* (deities) through their dreams, visions and trance. For this reason, they are first and foremost principal religious functionaries of indigenous *Meitei* religion and in addition, perform the role of a healer as well. Known as *Amaibi* or simply as *Maibi* among the *Meiteis*, however if we look at the primitive cultures around the globe, they fit right into the category of shamans as a shaman is the one who can voluntarily enter altered states of consciousness to experience themselves or their spirits, travel to other realms at will, and interact with other entities in order to serve their community (Walsh, 1990). According to Parratt and Parratt (1997) “*Maibis* are priestesses, invoking the *lais* (deities) and making offerings to them; mediums, receiving oracles from the *lais* (deities) and giving them out to the people; and, as expert singers and dancers, they are the preservers of the oral religious traditions” (p. 33).

Phenomenological Psychology regards that man’s awareness of “a being in the world” is intertwined and interdependent on his immediate environment—natural, social and man-made. Man and his world co-constitute one another and if considered as independent entities, they lose their meaningfulness. The purpose of any empirical phenomenological research is to articulate the underlying lived-structure of any meaningful experiences on the level of conceptual

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Initiatory Experiences of *Amaibi*: A Phenomenological Study

awareness (Valle, 1998), i.e. to get as close as possible to the participant's world, or to try to get, in Conrad's (1987) words, an insider's perspective.

METHODOLOGY

Objective:

To explore the life-world of *Amaibi* for a fuller understanding of shamanic experiences.

Sample:

Two case studies of a 50 years old female *Amaibi* and a 55 years old male *Amaibi* belonging to Imphal, Manipur.

Research Tool:

Narrative data was collected using semi-structured interview method.

Data analysis was conducted using an adaptation of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, IPA (Smith and Osborn, 2003).

Procedure:

To collect the data, the *Amaibis* were approached one at a time at Imphal, Manipur. After briefing them about my research aim, they were requested to participate in the study and thereby consent was taken for sharing experiences and events significant to their "*Amaibihood*". They were informed that confidentiality will be maintained and that they will not be identified by name in final document of this study. Consent was also taken to audio-tape the entire interview. With the help of a semi structured interview schedule, the narrative data was collected. Since the audio taped data was in the form of *Meitei* language, the next step was to transcribe the same in English language. Care was taken in the translation to retain the experiences expressed in *Meitei* language. After finalizing the translation, the narrative data was subjected to an adaptation of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In the first step, broad themes— significant words, phrases, sentences— were extracted from the transcript.

Then it was followed by transformation of the initial notes into concise phrases to form "emergent themes" which captures the significant experiences found in the narrative. The emergent themes for Case 1 and Case 2 are listed down to look for connections between the themes:

CASE 1:

Sickness and poor health in childhood

Loss of appetite

Initiatory Experiences of *Amaibi*: A Phenomenological Study

Fever along with shivering, teeth biting
No doctor consulted
Inadequate sleep due to frightening dreams
Recurrent dreams involving birds and humans intending to restrain her
Felt helpless on being chased
Wish to be rescued
Physical exhaustion due to the frightening dreams
Fear of being captured
Distressing dreams of being pursued by old man and woman to take her away
No allopathic medication, only herbs used
Sleep trouble, self-conversations
Family against becoming an *Amaibi*
Desire for a normal life
Performed rituals to appease the deity
Protection from the goddess's desire to take her as a medium
Ill health resulted from obstructing the deity's wishes
Effectiveness of appeasement ritual wears off
Recurrence of frightening dreams involving birds and old man/woman
Leaving games with friends with no conscious awareness
Unconscious/unintended visits to *Laipham* (sacred sites of deities)
Lured and summoned by the deities/spirits
Reappearance of self-conversation during sickness
Dreams and auditory hallucination involving goddess *Panthoibi*
Heaviness in the head
Full body ache
Dizziness
Severe stomach ache
Hallucinations of travelling together with goddess *Panthoibi*
Auditory hallucination of a woman telling her to find *Ema Guru*
Search for *Ema Guru* in trance state
Was found unconscious away from home
Auditory hallucinations of goddess *Panthoibi* giving her certain tasks
Trance, often along with unintelligible speech
Body trembling and shaking preceded and accompanied the trance
Amaibi was consulted as she became uncontrollable
Fear of goddess's wrath if not attended to the demands
Training under *Ema Guru* for rituals performances, chants, dance
Participation in *Lai Haraoba* under *Ema Guru*'s supervision
Adolescent years spent mostly with *Ema Guru*
Stopped *Amaibi* related activities after marriage

Initiatory Experiences of *Amaibi*: A Phenomenological Study

Ate food cooked with *Tairen* (*Toona Ciliata*) leaves to prevent relapse
Went into trance few hours after first child birth
Aggressive; violent and uncontrollable
Tried to calm her down with medications
Uneasy in the hospital environment
Pressure/heaviness in her chest
Difficulty breathing
Extreme brightness in vision
Hair tangled into a mass from being bed ridden for a long time
Second and third child were given birth at home to prevent visit to hospital
Turning point in life after birth of the third child
Severely sick and bed ridden for a long time
Unable to care for children
Thin, emaciated and severely dry skin
Trance often but not always followed by delivery of *Laibao* (prophecy)
Perform prayers and offering
Participates in *Lai Haraoba* independently
Strictly follow rules on food, dress, and ritual performances
Certain days of the week allowed to copulate with husband

CASE 2:

Sickly and had to watch his diet during his childhood
Followed a bland diet of boiled rice and vegetables
Stomachache coupled with burning sensation was common
Did not enjoy others company and playing with other children
Quiet
Thin and emaciated after a long bout of fever during toddlerhood
Treated by an *Amaiba* with medicinal dried herb and performances of prayers
Was told by *Amaiba* that he appeared unusual and different from the rest and will be well known by others
In his dream he was advised to stop performing in dramas
Slowly became disinterested in dramas
Isolation
Disinterest in his surroundings
Lost in thoughts
Overwhelmed and confused
Withdrew himself from interacting with his parents
Spent days in inactivity
Delivered *laibao* (prophecy), under trance state, in a different accent
Mostly incomprehensible words were spoken during trance state

Initiatory Experiences of *Amaibi*: A Phenomenological Study

Family started suspecting his illness as the initial period of becoming an *Amaibi*
Leave home under state of trance in search for *Epa guru*
Loss of hunger and thirst
Went missing for two days
Body trembling and shaking preceded the trance states, followed by *laibao* (prophecy)
Sickness continued for about four months
Continued his search for *Epa guru* without having any whereabouts of him
His dreams and auditory hallucinations provided descriptions of *Epa guru*
Meeting with *Epa guru* in a disheveled condition
Epa guru washed, dressed and fed him
Cleaned and combed his long tangled hair
Training on ritual performances, songs and dance
Conducted offerings and ritual ceremonies after training period
Body ache and heaviness, restlessness, worry and anxiousness disappeared during the training
Violent shaking and trembling during trance states also stopped
The deity *Khoriphaba* appeared in the form of a human – as a middle aged man holding a walking stick or a boy playing by himself
Appeared as bright light and snakes before his training period
Highly sensitive to auditory stimuli - sound of musical instruments at religious or non-religious ceremonies used to excite him or put him in trance or would him make emotional
Follow strict rules and norms
Conducts and performs *Lai Haraoba* and *Apokpa Khuramba*
Performs offerings and prayers for treatment of illness, and prevention of misfortune
Restriction on food habits
Consumption of prohibited food item by accident either results in itchiness, swellings, and changes in mood – easily irritable or frightened
Strength increased during trance states, 3-4 people were required to prevent him from getting hurt during the frenzied trance
Bitten his lips and tongue, broke his toenails during trance
Pain and exhaustion were felt after trance states
Initially unskilled in subsiding or withholding extreme excitement or anger
Uneasiness, detection of strong odour, body ache, heaviness, trembling preceded trance
Chewing *Ciliata Toona* leaves calm him down and prevent going into trance
Learnt chants/hymns for religious ceremonies and daily rules to be followed with regard to dress, food, sleep, manner of talking
Treated skin irritation, swelling of hands/legs, general physical discomfort, and prevented frequent sickness or injuries or accidents from further occurrence
Learnt how to use *Sarik*, the brass hand bell, under his *Epa guru*'s supervision

Initiatory Experiences of *Amaibi*: A Phenomenological Study

Based on the connection between the themes, theme clusters are formed:

Case 1

Sickness and poor health in childhood
Loss of appetite
Fever along with shivering, teeth biting
No doctor consulted
No allopathic medication, only herbs used
Sleep trouble, self-conversations
Ill health resulted from obstructing the deity's wishes
Leaving games with friends with no conscious awareness
Unconscious/unintended visits to *Laipham* (sacred sites of deities)
Lured and summoned by the deities/spirits
Reappearance of self-conversation during sickness
Heaviness in the head
Full body ache
Dizziness
Severe stomach ache
Body trembling and shaking preceded and accompanied the trance
Amaibi was consulted as she became uncontrollable
Ate food cooked with *Tairen* (*Toona Ciliata*) leaves to prevent relapse
Went into trance few hours after first child birth
Aggressive; violent and uncontrollable
Tried to calm her down with medications
Uneasy in the hospital environment
Pressure/heaviness in her chest
Difficulty breathing
Extreme brightness in vision
Hair tangled into a mass from being bed ridden for a long time
Severely sick and bed ridden for a long time after birth of the third child
Unable to care for children
Thin, emaciated and severely dry skin

Inadequate sleep due to frightening dreams
Recurrent dreams involving birds and humans intending to restrain her
Felt helpless on being chased
Wish to be rescued
Physical exhaustion due to the frightening dreams
Fear of being captured
Distressing dreams of being pursued by old man and woman to take her away
Recurrence of frightening dreams involving birds and old man/woman

Initiatory Experiences of *Amaibi*: A Phenomenological Study

Dreams and auditory hallucination involving goddess *Panthoibi*
Hallucinations of travelling together with goddess *Panthoibi*
Auditory hallucination of a woman telling her to find *Ema Guru*
Auditory hallucinations of goddess *Panthoibi* giving her certain tasks
Trance, often along with unintelligible speech
Trance often but not always followed by delivery of *Laibao* (prophecy)

Family against becoming an *Amaibi*
Desire for a normal life
Performed rituals to appease the goddess
Protection from the goddess's desire to take her as a medium
Effectiveness of appeasement ritual wears off
Fear of goddess's wrath if not attended to the demands

Search for *Ema Guru* in trance states
Was found unconscious away from home
Illness made her return to *Amaibihood* after birth of third child
Turning point in life after birth of the third child

Training under *Ema Guru* for rituals performances, chants, dance
Participation in *Lai Haraoba* under *Ema Guru*'s supervision
Adolescent years spent mostly with *Ema Guru*
Perform prayers and offering
Participates in *Lai Haraoba* independently

Strictly follow rules on food, dress, and ritual performances
Certain days of the week allowed to copulate with husband

Case 2

Sickly and had to watch his diet during his childhood
Followed a bland diet of boiled rice and vegetables
Stomachache coupled with burning sensation was common
Did not enjoy others company and playing with other children
Quiet
Thin and emaciated after a long bout of fever during toddlerhood
Treated by an *Amaiba* with medicinal dried herb and performances of prayers
Slowly became disinterested in dramas
Isolation
Disinterest in his surroundings
Lost in thoughts
Overwhelmed and confused

Initiatory Experiences of *Amaibi*: A Phenomenological Study

Withdrew himself from interacting with his parents
Spent days in inactivity
Loss of hunger and thirst
Body trembling and shaking preceded the trance states, followed by *Laibao* (prophecy)
Sickness continued for about four months
Highly sensitive to auditory stimuli - sound of musical instruments at religious or non-religious ceremonies used to excite him or put him in trance or would make him emotional
Strength increased during trance states, 3-4 people were required to prevent him from getting hurt during the frenzied trance
Bitten his lips and tongue, broke his toenails during trance
Pain and exhaustion were felt after trance states
Uneasiness, detection of strong odour, body ache, heaviness, trembling preceded trance
Chewing *Ciliata Toona* leaves calm him down and prevent going into trance
Family started suspecting his illness as the initial period of becoming an *Amaibi*

In his dream he was advised to stop performing in dramas
Delivered *Laibao* (prophecy), under trance state, in a different accent
Mostly incomprehensible words were spoken during trance state
The deity *Khoriphaba* appeared in the form of a human – as a middle aged man holding a walking stick or a boy playing by himself
Appeared as bright light and snakes before his training period
His dreams and auditory hallucinations provided descriptions of *Epa guru*

Leave home under state of trance in search for *Epa guru*
Went missing for two days
Continued his search for *Epa guru* without having any whereabouts of him
Meeting with *Epa guru* in a disheveled condition
Epa guru washed, dressed and fed him
Cleaned and combed his long tangled hair

Training on ritual performances, songs and dance
Conducted offerings and ritual ceremonies after training period
Initially unskilled in subsiding or withholding extreme excitement or anger
Body ache and heaviness, restlessness, worry and anxiousness disappeared during the training
Violent shaking and trembling during trance states also stopped
Conducts and performs *Lai Haraoba* and *Apokpa Khuramba*
Performs offerings and prayers for treatment of illness, and prevention of misfortune
Learnt how to use *Sarik*, the brass hand bell, under his *Epa guru*'s supervision
Treated skin irritation, swelling of hands/legs, general physical discomfort, and prevented frequent sickness or injuries or accidents from further occurrence

Follow strict rules and norms

Learnt chants/hymns for religious ceremonies and daily rules to be followed with regard to dress, food, sleep, manner of talking

Restriction on food habits

Consumption of prohibited food item by accident either results in itchiness, swellings, and changes in mood – easily irritable or frightened

Finally, super ordinate themes are assigned to each cluster as follows:

SICKNESS AND INITIATORY CRISES

Case 1

Sickness and poor health in childhood

Loss of appetite

Fever along with shivering, teeth biting

No allopathic medication, only herbs used

Sleep trouble, self-conversations

Ill health resulted from obstructing the deity's wishes

Leaving games with friends with no conscious awareness

Unconscious/unintended visits to *Laipham* (sacred sites of deities)

Lured and summoned by the deities/spirits

Reappearance of self-conversation during sickness

Heaviness in the head

Full body ache

Dizziness

Severe stomach ache

Body trembling and shaking preceded and accompanied the trance

Amaibi was consulted as she became uncontrollable

Ate food cooked with *Tairen* (*Cedrela Toona*) leaves to prevent relapse

Went into trance few hours after first child birth

Aggressive; violent and uncontrollable

Tried to calm her down with medications

Uneasy in the hospital environment

Pressure/heaviness in her chest

Difficulty breathing

Extreme brightness in vision

Hair tangled into a mass from being bed ridden for a long time

Severely sick and bed ridden for a long time after birth of the third child

Unable to care for children

Thin, emaciated with severely dry skin

Case 2

Followed a bland diet of boiled rice and vegetables
Sickly and had to watch his diet during his childhood
Stomachache coupled with burning sensation was common
Did not enjoy others company and playing with other children
Quiet
Thin and emaciated after a long bout of fever during toddlerhood
Treated by an *Amaiba* with medicinal dried herb and performances of prayers
Slowly became disinterested in dramas
Isolation
Disinterest in his surroundings
Lost in thoughts
Overwhelmed and confused
Withdrew himself from interacting with his parents
Spent days in inactivity
Loss of hunger and thirst
Body trembling and shaking preceded the trance states, followed by *Laibao* (prophecy)
Sickness continued for about four months
Highly sensitive to auditory stimuli - sound of musical instruments at religious or non-religious ceremonies used to excite him or put him in trance or would him make emotional
Strength increased during trance states, 3-4 people were required to prevent him from getting hurt during the frenzied trance
Bitten his lips and tongue, broke his toenails during trance
Pain and exhaustion were felt after trance states
Uneasiness, detection of strong odour, body ache, heaviness, trembling preceded trance
Chewing *Tairen* (*Cedrela Toona*) leaves calm him down and prevent going into trance
Family started suspecting his illness as the initial period of becoming an *Amaibi*

DREAMS AND ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Case 1

Inadequate sleep due to frightening dreams
Recurrent dreams involving birds and humans intending to restrain her
Felt helpless on being chased
Wish to be rescued
Physical exhaustion due to the frightening dreams
Fear of being captured
Distressing dreams of being pursued by old man and woman to take her away
Recurrence of frightening dreams involving birds and old man/woman
Dreams and auditory hallucination involving goddess *Panthoibi*
Hallucinations of travelling together with goddess *Panthoibi*

Initiatory Experiences of *Amaibi*: A Phenomenological Study

Auditory hallucination of a woman telling her to find *Ema Guru*

Auditory hallucinations of goddess *Panthoibi* giving her certain tasks

Trance, often along with unintelligible speech

Trance often but not always followed by delivery of *Laibao* (prophecy)

Case 2

In his dream he was advised to stop performing in dramas

Delivered *Laibao* (prophecy), under trance state, in a different accent

Mostly incomprehensible words were spoken during trance state

The deity *Khoriphaba* appeared in the form of a human – as a middle aged man holding a walking stick or a boy playing by himself

Appeared as bright light and snakes before his training period

His dreams and auditory hallucinations provided descriptions of *Epa guru*

SHIELDING THE INITIATE

Case 1

Family against becoming an *Amaibi*

Desire for a normal life

Performed rituals to appease the goddess

Protection from the goddess's desire to take her as a medium

Effectiveness of appeasement ritual wears off

Fear of goddess's wrath if not attended to the demands

HEEDING THE CALL AND SEARCH FOR EMA GURU

Case 1

Search for *Ema Guru* in trance states

Was found unconscious away from home

Illness made her return to *Amaibihood* after birth of third child

Turning point in life after birth of the third child

Case 2

Leave home under state of trance in search for *Epa guru*

Went missing for two days

Continued his search for *Epa guru* without having any whereabouts of him

Meeting with *Epa guru* in a disheveled condition

Epa guru washed, dressed and fed him

Cleaned and combed his long tangled hair

TRAINING AND INITIATION OF VOCATION

Case 1

Training under *Ema Guru* for rituals performances, chants, dance

Participation in *Lai Haraoba* under *Ema Guru*'s supervision

Adolescent years spent mostly with *Ema Guru*

Perform prayers and offering

Participates in *Lai Haraoba* independently

Case 2

Training on ritual performances, songs and dance

Conducted offerings and ritual ceremonies after training period

Initially unskilled in subsiding or withholding extreme excitement or anger

Body ache and heaviness, restlessness, worry and anxiousness disappeared during the training

Violent shaking and trembling during trance states also stopped

Conducts and performs *Lai Haraoba* and *Apokpa Khuramba*

Performs offerings and prayers for treatment of illness, and prevention of misfortune

Learnt how to use *Sarik*, the brass hand bell, under his *Epa guru*'s supervision

Treated skin irritation, swelling of hands/legs, general physical discomfort, and prevented frequent sickness or injuries or accidents from further occurrence

ADHERENCE OF RULES AND RESTRICTIONS

Case 1

Strictly follow rules on food, dress, and ritual performances

Certain days of the week allowed to copulate with husband

Case 2

Follow strict rules and norms

Learnt chants/hymns for religious ceremonies and daily rules to be followed with regard to dress, food, sleep, manner of talking

Restriction on food habits

Consumption of prohibited food item by accident either results in itchiness, swellings, and changes in mood – easily irritable or frightened

DISCUSSION

The first super ordinate theme of “Sickness and Initiatory Crises” indicates the remote preparation for vocation which begins with sickness as the journey to become cured and to cure. Case 1 clearly had a childhood which was interrupted by frequent illness. Both in childhood and after marriage, she experienced dissociation as evidenced by the occurrence of self-conversations, discontinuity in awareness and trance states. Similarly, Case 2 went through bouts of illness during the period from infancy to toddlerhood. During middle childhood, he was

withdrawn, and quiet. During trance states, he exhibited considerable strength resulting in a state of frenzy and physical injury if not contained by others. Ray (2004) found that when an *Amaibi* is possessed by the *lai* (deity), she acquires incredible strength and cannot be controlled even by a number of persons. She also pointed out that during their illness the *Amaibis* develop some kind of lump in their abdomen which surgeons are unable to locate. Furthermore, both the cases used *Tairen* (*Cedrela toona*) leaves and *Langthrei* (*Eupatorium birmanicum*) to prevent recurrence of their symptoms. *Tairen* leaves is known for its medicinal properties especially in skin diseases and poxes and the young shoots and leaves of *Langthrei* are used for epilepsy (Laishangthem & Sharma, 2014). From the two cases, it can be discerned that when the illness is at its peak, manifesting acute symptoms, it may appear to be a case of neurotic, stress related and somatoform disorders according to ICD-10 or culture bound syndrome according to the DSM disorders. However, the resolution of the lingering illness without pharmacological and psychotherapeutic interventions is worth to be studied and understood because not only both the cases became symptom free and at peace from their prolonged suffering but also became well integrated with society.

The – second super ordinate theme of “Dreams and Altered States of Consciousness” also indicates the preparation for vocation and mental ordeal that an initiate goes through. In the modern times, dreams are given less significance and are generally forgotten as irrelevant or irrational psychic product. However, if we look at primitive cultures or even the Greek civilization, dream interpretation was employed for purpose of healing by acknowledging and accommodating the unconscious expressions. For Case 1, the dreams were nothing short of nightmares. The chase by a big, black crow like bird and persuasion by old woman and man were fear provoking and being chased by these figures indicates the resistance of consciousness to submit to or be overwhelmed by the unconscious. The dreams, however, are essentially beneficial for the initiate as they unconsciously expose her to hardships akin to the difficulties one must go through to become an *Amaibi* and in this manner the dreams mentally prepare the initiate for the experiences she will soon encounter. Further, as the days progressed, the dreams and hallucinations involving goddess *Panthoibi* became more realistic and assertive, the participant grew responsive towards the call. She began to heed her auditory hallucinations which instructed her to find her trainer *Amaibi*, locally addressed as *Ema Guru*. She also went into trance states and delivered prophecies, *Laibao*, in a different accent. The trance experience of Case 1 can be described as mediumistic trance wherein the shaman or medium invites another spirit or entity to take full control of their body in order to communicate or perform some other valuable function such as healing (Daniels, 2002). Mediumistic trance occurs in a forceful, sometimes violent manner among the *Amaibi* initiates. It however becomes less frenzied and controlled once an initiate is trained. This form of is commonly experienced by the *Amaibis*. With respect to Case 2, his initial dreams gave clues about the impending changes. When, in his dreams, he was advised to stop performing in dramas, it left him perturbed because at that point of time, he was still very passionate about being an artiste. However, in a short period of time, he

grew disinterested in dramas without any apparent reason. It was a time of confusion, he withdrew himself from public life and spent time alone, mostly in deep thoughts but nothing made sense to him. Soon, he started going into trance states, speaking either incomprehensible words or in a different accent. As the initiation progressed, he had dreams and visions of his deity/spirit-guide in different forms – as middle-aged man, young boy, serpent, and as bright light. He also had auditory hallucinations providing him descriptions of his trainer *Amaibi*. It is said that for a shaman, inspiration comes mainly through dreams. According to Jung (as cited in Ryan, 2002) all the lions, bulls, dogs and snakes that populate our dreams represent an undifferentiated and as yet untamed libido, known as the *anthropoid psyche*, which is a part of the human personality. Jung added that this same psyche contains images of divine beings, therianthropic (both human and animal) creatures representing man in his potential “wholeness” – the totality of being, which is rooted in animal nature, yet capable of reaching out beyond the merely human towards the divine. He continued, the guise in which figures appear depends on the attitude of the conscious mind; if it is negative towards the unconscious, the theriomorphic (animal) figures will be frightening; if positive, they appear as the helpful animal of fairytale and legend. With increased insight, the symbols of transformation which initially appears threatening and frightening ultimately become sources of inner wisdom and unconscious forces which previously enorge the shaman now becomes his guides (Ryan, 2002).

The third super ordinate theme of “Shielding the Initiate” denotes the refusal and opposition of senior members of initiate’s family to allow the initiate to submit to the spiritual calling. This was seen only in the case of Case 1 because she was very young, only 10 years old when the sickness first started. A ritual, *Yeisinba*, was performed in order to appease the deity and leave the initiate for a few more months or years. However, after 2 years the sickness returned back. The ritual could no longer protect her. Her elders began to fear for her deteriorating health and survival. It is believed among the *Meiteis* that once *Yeisinba* starts to fail, further attempts to prevent the deity can result in death of the initiate or any of his/her family members. During the *Yeisinba* period lasting about 2 years, the initiate’s grandfather, a key participant in the ritual conduction, fell ill and died. He was healthy, and physically agile so his death was a surprise to all family members and they associated it with deity’s wrath for performing *Yeisinba*. The family members did not want to risk losing another life. They therefore decided not to obstruct the deity any further and allow the initiate to join *Amaibihood*. Similarly, Eliade (1970) found among the Siberian, Central Asian and Native American shamans that a person is usually reluctant to become a shaman and assumes his power and follows the spirits’ bidding only when he is told by other shamans that otherwise death will result. Among the *Meities* it is observed that when all attempts to shield the initiate fails i.e., when no allopathic or homeopathic or religious rituals fails to cure the sickness, the initiate is advised to embrace the path of *Amaibihood*. It is considered as the last resort to alleviate the sickness.

Initiatory Experiences of *Amaibi*: A Phenomenological Study

The fourth super ordinate theme of “Heeding the Call and Search for Ema Guru” reveals the suggestiveness and responsiveness of the initiates to their visions and hallucinations of locating the “*Ema/Epa guru*”—the trainee *Amaibi* who will care and guide the initiates into becoming a full-fledged *Amaibi*. With regard to Case 1, due to deterioration in her physical and mental state, an *Amaibi* was consulted to facilitate the search for the “*Ema Guru*” although the initiate herself also went searching for the “*Ema Guru*” in her trance states but her searches were unsuccessful and was often found in unconscious states. Further, Case 2 also left home many a times during his trance states to search for his chosen “*Epa guru*”. He was persistent in his search, went missing from home for days and though successful in locating his “*Epa guru*” the search left him disheveled and close to emaciation. Though during the time of sickness, ample sympathy and empathy are provided by others, they cannot really help. The “*Ema/Epa guru*” is needed for extraordinary help. One looks for spiritual help because there is no social and medical consolation available. This theme reflects the initiates’ yearning to eliminate the psychic chaos and confusion, which Jung (1975) termed as *soul loss*, by finding and uniting with their “*Ema/Epa guru*”. Jung understood that severing of ties, and losing contact with the deep structures of our psyche results in the soul’s sickness, neurosis and it is that which psychotherapy attempts to treat by aiming at psychic integration.

The fifth super ordinate theme of “Training and Initiation of Vocation” represents the experience of being born again i.e. the end of the sickly self and the beginning of a new life characterized by vigor as opposed to pathological symptoms, control over one’s mind and body and service of community by attending to others sickness and performing religious rituals. Both the cases were looked after by their *Ema/Epa guru*. Prayers were conducted for their health and medicinal plants, commonly *Langthrei* and *Tairen* (*Cedrela Toona*) were used. After physical and mental health stabilized, they were trained on conduct of ritual performances, chants, dance, about various spirits/deities, how to attained voluntary, controlled trance and use of *Sarik* (brass handbell) as a means to facilitate attainment of trance and connect with the spirit-guide (deities). Similarly, in other shamanic cultures, song, dance, drum and rattle are used for inducing trance. All the symptoms of illness, both physical and mental are believed to be curable with the help of skills imparted during training and through *lairen puba* i.e. purification process conducted at completion of training (Brara, 1998). Both the cases were also trained on conduct rituals of *Apokpa Khuramba* (annual prayer and offering given to ancestral/ clan deity), and *Lai Haraoba*, annual religious festival of *Meiteis* which is centered around re-creation and renewal of earth and mankind.

The sixth super ordinate theme of “Adherence of Rules and Restrictions” indicates that the an *Amaibi* has to follow certain rules in his/her daily life to maintain ties with the spiritual realm. These rules include dietary restrictions (e.g. to avoid catfish and eels), days to perform religious rituals and offerings, days allowed to copulate with spouse, daily and ceremonial dress, and avoiding lies and deceptions. Both the cases follow the rules stringently to avoid ill health,

misfortune to self and family. The allegiance to these rules also explains the importance and value they assigned to their relationship with the divine.

CONCLUSION

The use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has made it possible to consolidate the experiences and make sense of the seemingly unusual life-world of the participant *Amaibis*. As it is a case study of only two *Amaibis*, the onset, intensity, variety and period of the crises experiences cannot be generalized to the entire *Amaibi* population in Manipur. However, the structure of experience represented by the six superordinate themes can facilitate the readers to understand and appreciate shamanic initiation and *Amaibihood*. It would be worth to study the rituals conducted before and during the becoming of a full-fledged *Amaibi* as it has the potential to reveal primitive-cultural beliefs of the *Meiteis* in the area of sickness, healing and renewal. Another fertile area of study would be the training period of initiates as it can bring to light the gradual transition from sickness to health and the methods imparted to attain mediumistic trance and deliver oracles.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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Initiatory Experiences of *Amaibi*: A Phenomenological Study

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