

The Lore of Lai(ren): Of Archetypal Origins, Collective (Un)conscious, and the Pakhangba Tradition in Manipur

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Abstract

Pakhangba is considered to be one of the foremost deities in Meitei pantheon. This deity, especially in his *lairen* (serpentine dragon) form, is integral to the cultural sensibilities and rituals of the Meiteis in Manipur. Taking the centrality of Pakhangba in Meitei politico-cultural space into perspective, this paper presents a reading of (*Lai*)ren Pakhangba lore beyond the cosmological and cultural underpinnings. Simultaneously, it examines if the lore of *lairen* – ensconced in the collective ethos of the people – and the symbolic presence of this deity in both spiritual and secular space be explained as an expression of the 'collective unconscious'. This paper establishes Pakhangba and his lore as a psychocultural connective that binds and evokes the indigeneity and identity of the people. At the same time, it foregrounds the centrality of nurturing and promoting such psychocultural connective in – beyond evoking a shared ancestry and pasts – imagining a more viable and tangible polity that veers away from a single-ethnicity based or territory-oriented politics and polity that undermine the centuries-old politico-cultural history of Manipur.

Keywords: Pakhangba; Collective (Un)conscious; Folklore; Hill-Valley; Manipur.