



Social and Cultural Identities of Lois and Yaithibi in Manipur: A Scheduled Caste of Manipur

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the social and cultural identities of the Lois and Yaithibi, two historically marginalized communities associated with the Scheduled Caste population of Manipur. The study asks how historical processes of exclusion, ritual ranking, spatial separation, and religious change shaped the social location of these communities and how they maintained continuity in kinship, ritual, and collective identity. Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative documentary approach based on historical accounts, monographs, journal articles, census materials, and secondary scholarship on caste, Meitei society, and social exclusion in Manipur. The analysis shows that the Lois and Yaithibi cannot be understood only through the language of deprivation. They were certainly subjected to stigma, unequal incorporation, and forms of symbolic and social distancing, especially after the strengthening of caste boundaries in the valley. At the same time, they sustained resilient institutions of marriage, ritual, religious practice, and community memory. The article argues that the social history of Manipur remains incomplete unless these communities are brought from the margins to the centre of analysis. Their histories illuminate not only caste and exclusion, but also adaptation, resilience, and the cultural persistence of subordinate groups in a region more often discussed through ethnicity and tribe than caste.

Keywords: Lois, Yaithibi, Manipur, Scheduled Castes, Social exclusion

Introduction

The study of caste in Manipur occupies an uneasy place in the regional social-science literature. In the broader Indian context, caste has long been understood not only as a division of labour and status, but as a system of graded inequality and social distance with durable effects on access, dignity, and recognition (Ambedkar, 1917). Much of the scholarship on the state has focused on ethnicity, kingship, religion, insurgency, colonial transformation, and hill-valley relations. These are important themes, but they have often overshadowed another major dimension of valley society: the existence of internally ranked and stigmatized groups that later came to be recognized under the Scheduled Caste category. Among these groups, the Lois and the Yaithibi are especially significant. Their histories help explain how social inequality in Manipur was produced not only through political domination or ethnic difference, but also through graded status, ritual separation, and unequal incorporation into the social order of the valley (Brown, 1975; Hodson, 1975; Loktongbam, 2017).

The Lois occupies a distinctive position in the historical memory of Manipur. In older accounts the word "Loi" is associated with tributary or exiled communities placed outside the normative social core of Meitei society. Later scholarship shows that the Lois cannot be understood as a single homogeneous population. Rather, the category referred to several historically subordinated settlements and groups whose political relation to the Meitei kingdom, ritual status, and cultural practices differed across place and time (Bino, 2002; Ningthoujam, 2016). Yet this diversity did not prevent the category from acquiring a strong stigma. By the time caste markers became more clearly embedded in the valley, the Lois had come to signify populations associated with degraded rank, distance from the social centre, and a lower place in the status order.

The Yaithibi were positioned even more harshly in certain social narratives. Regional accounts describe them as a stigmatized community associated with exile, service labour, and untouchability-like restrictions in the older order of the valley (Brown, 1975; Loktongbam, 2017). Even when Yaithibi households shared many

cultural practices with the broader Meitei world, they were marked off through powerful social boundaries. Their case is therefore analytically valuable because it demonstrates that exclusion in Manipur did not always operate through complete cultural difference. It could also operate through selective denial of status to communities otherwise deeply entangled with the social and religious life of the valley.

This article argues that the Lois and Yaithibi should not be studied merely as passive victims of stigma. A narrow focus on oppression misses the ways in which these communities maintained collective life, adapted to religious and political change, and reproduced meaningful institutions of kinship, ritual, and identity. The article therefore seeks to balance two analytical concerns. The first is the history of exclusion: how these communities became associated with subordinate rank, pollution, tribute, exile, or social distance. The second is the history of continuity: how they sustained ritual, marriage systems, village institutions, and cultural memory under conditions not of their own choosing (Indira, 2004; Bino, 2002).

This paper is especially relevant because the contemporary social-science vocabulary applied to Northeast India often privileges tribe, ethnicity, conflict, and indigeneity. These concepts are important, but they can obscure caste-like hierarchies within the valley and lead to an incomplete understanding of social differentiation in Manipur. A closer examination of the Lois and Yaithibi restores caste, stigma, and local hierarchy to the centre of regional analysis. It also contributes to a broader Indian debate on how subordinate groups preserve culture while negotiating unequal recognition.

The discussion proceeds in seven parts. After reviewing the literature, the article states its objectives and research questions and explains its documentary methodology. It then examines the historical location of the Lois and Yaithibi in relation to the social order of Manipur, followed by thematic discussion of kinship, marriage, ritual practice, religion, and cultural continuity. The paper concludes by arguing that the histories of the Lois and Yaithibi are indispensable to any serious understanding of the social formation of Manipur.

Literature Review

The documentary record on the Lois and Yaithibi is uneven, scattered, and methodologically mixed. Early colonial and quasi-ethnographic works tended to classify communities within the valley according to occupation, ritual standing, and relation to the polity. Brown's *Statistical Account of Manipur* remains one of the key historical sources for this broader structure. Although framed in the language of nineteenth-century ethnology, Brown's account is still useful because it documents how the political economy of Manipur was tied to graded forms of service, tribute, labour, and ranked population categories (Brown, 1975). Hodson's *The Meithei*, though similarly shaped by the assumptions of its time, adds detail on Meitei social organization and on the transformations associated with Hindu influence in the valley (Hodson, 1975). These sources are indispensable, but they must be read critically because they often generalize from elite or official perspectives. A second cluster of writings consists of regional historical works that place the evolution of caste and social ranking within a longer narrative of Manipur's political and religious history. The historical writing is especially important for tracing broader political transformations, the role of kingship, and the long arc of cultural change in the valley (Singh, 1965). Such works do not always focus directly on the Lois and Yaithibi, but they provide the historical scaffolding within which subordinate communities were reclassified and governed.

A third cluster is made up of community-focused studies. The Lois of Manipur is one of the most valuable sustained monographs on the subject. It documents the historical position of selected Loi communities while also treating marriage, social organization, ritual practice, and local tradition in significant detail (Bino, 2002). Indira's doctoral work on social organization and religion among the Lois is equally important because it demonstrates how deeply ritual and everyday social life are integrated. Together, these studies shift attention away from abstract caste labels and toward actual community institutions (Indira, 2004).

A fourth area of literature foregrounds exclusion more explicitly. Ningthoujam's historical study of the social exclusion of the Lois is notable for showing how the advent and entrenchment of caste distinctions intensified marginalization in the valley. The paper highlights restrictions, second-class standing, and the preservation of cultural distinction under long-term exclusion (Ningthoujam, 2016). Loktongbam's essay on religion as a marker of caste in Meitei society is also helpful because it links religious change - especially the consolidation of Vaishnav influence—to the sharper demarcation of pure and impure social categories (Loktongbam, 2017). Although not all of this literature is methodologically uniform, it helps explain how social hierarchy became embedded in lived practice.

A fifth source base comes from the census and administrative record. Official tables do not capture cultural life in a thick ethnographic sense, but they confirm the continuing presence of Scheduled Caste categories in Manipur and show that the category "Lois" remains administratively salient in the state's social demography (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011). This does not solve the historical question of community identity, but it does show that the administrative life of these categories persists into the present.

The literature is valuable but leaves several gaps. First, many sources are descriptive rather than analytical. They identify customs, rank, and origin narratives but do not always theorize how social stigma is reproduced. Second, the Lois receive more sustained treatment than the Yaithibi. The documentary references to the Yaithibi are often dispersed across broader discussions of caste, pollution, exile, or labour, and full-length focused studies are comparatively rare. Third, the existing scholarship is fragmented by genre: colonial

description, regional history, thesis work, census tables, and scattered essays do not easily speak to one another. Fourth, the literature frequently emphasizes deprivation while giving less sustained attention to resilience, continuity, and institutional adaptation.

This article addresses those gaps by reading the existing materials together within a single analytical frame. It does not claim to replace ethnography or archival deep history. Rather, it aims to provide a structured historical-sociological interpretation of the Lois and Yaithibi that places social exclusion and cultural continuity in the same field of analysis.

Objectives

This article has four objectives. First, it examines the historical and social background of the Lois and Yaithibi in Manipur. Second, it analyses how caste ranking, exile, tribute, and religious change shaped their location in the valley's social order. Third, it interprets their institutions of marriage, kinship, ritual, and religion as mechanisms of continuity rather than as mere survivals from the past. Fourth, it situates these communities within broader debates on caste, social exclusion, and cultural resilience in Northeast India.

The article is guided by four research questions. What historical processes contributed to the marginalized position of the Lois and Yaithibi in Manipur? How were social boundaries between these communities and the dominant Meitei order produced and sustained? In what ways did the Lois and Yaithibi preserve continuity in kinship, ritual, and religion despite long-term stigma? Finally, what does the study of these communities add to wider debates on caste and social hierarchy in a region more commonly interpreted through the language of ethnicity and tribe?

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative documentary method. It is based on published historical accounts, monographs, articles, doctoral research, and official census materials related to caste, religion, social organization, and exclusion in Manipur. The method is interpretive rather than ethnographic. It does not present new field interviews, participant observation, or primary archival discoveries. Its purpose is to synthesize and critically organize the existing source base so that the Lois and Yaithibi can be examined within a coherent analytical framework.

Documentary materials were selected according to four criteria. First, a source had to bear directly on the social organization, ritual life, historical location, or caste position of the Lois and/or Yaithibi. Second, works that did not focus specifically on the communities but provided historically important context for the social order of the valley were also included. Third, preference was given to sources that supplied interpretable detail rather than merely naming communities in passing. Fourth, a balance was sought between classic historical writings and more recent interpretive studies, so that changes in description, emphasis, and terminology could be observed.

The documents were read thematically and grouped into five analytic clusters: historical location, caste and exclusion, kinship and marriage, religion and ritual life, and continuity under change. The analysis then moved from description to interpretation. For example, when a source referred to tribute, exile, or service labour, the study asked how these practices positioned communities in relation to political authority and ritual status. When sources described marriage, village organization, or ritual observance, the study asked how these practices reproduced social cohesion and cultural memory. The aim was not to extract isolated facts, but to identify recurring patterns across texts.

The documentary method has several advantages for the present topic. First, the relevant literature is dispersed across older ethnographic accounts, regional history, doctoral research, and smaller essays. A documentary synthesis is therefore necessary before more advanced comparison can occur. Second, because the histories of the Lois and Yaithibi are often embedded in wider accounts of Manipur, close reading across genres helps reveal connections that a single-source approach would miss. Third, the method is appropriate for a study concerned with social representation as much as with social fact. The way communities were described—subordinate, tributary, impure, exiled, peripheral—is itself part of the story of hierarchy.

At the same time, the method has limitations. Documentary materials do not necessarily capture the full diversity of present-day community life. Older texts often carry elite, colonial, or external biases. The Yaithibi in particular are underrepresented in the source base when compared with the Lois. Furthermore, documentary interpretation cannot substitute for contemporary fieldwork among villages and households. The findings of this article should therefore be read as historically grounded and analytically suggestive rather than exhaustive. They establish a stronger foundation for future ethnographic and comparative work rather than claiming to be the final word on the subject.

Historical Location of the Lois and Yaithibi

The historical location of the Lois must be understood in relation to the political formation of the Manipur valley and the gradual hardening of status distinctions within it. Earlier accounts suggest that the category "Loi" was associated with populations placed under tribute, subordinated to the ruling order, or relegated to specific settlements outside the social core (Brown, 1975). The term carried more than one meaning as it could refer to tribute-paying communities, to those expelled or exiled to designated settlements, or more broadly to

populations placed in a lower status relation to dominant Meitei society (Bino, 2002). This ambiguity is itself instructive. It indicates that the status of the Lois emerged through a mixture of political subordination, territorial separation, and ritual degradation rather than through a single event.

What is striking in the literature is that the Lois were never wholly outside the social world of Manipur. They were subordinated, but they were also incorporated. Their settlements were tied to the valley economy; their labour and presence were known to the polity; and their customs remained entangled with wider Meitei religious and social patterns. This is why the Lois should not be viewed simply as an external or alien group. They were historically internal to the valley order, but internal in a graded and subordinated way. It shows how long-term exclusion did not eliminate the Lois from the social fabric; instead, it fixed them within it as dependent and inferior (Ningthoujam, 2016).

The entrenchment of Hindu influence in the valley intensified these distinctions. Several writers indicate that the consolidation of ritual purity and impurity sharpened the demarcation between communities, especially once a more recognizable caste vocabulary became locally meaningful (Hodson, 1975; Loktongbam, 2017). The process was not merely theological. It had social consequences: it helped normalize restrictions on contact, hierarchy in commensality, and differentiated recognition. Thus, the marginality of the Lois should not be seen only as a remnant of pre-Hindu political classification; it was also reworked through religiously inflected status ordering.

Yaithibi are also group of community of Meiteis who were exiled and sent to live in a village name Waithou which situated near the present village Thoubal Khunou in Thoubal District. Yaithibi cultural pattern are similar with the Meitei community and the Meitei believed that Yaithibi also once belong to them. The term Yaithibi literal meaning is 'bad luck' which Yai means luck and thiba means bad (Shah, 1994). They were driven out and relocated to Waithou, which is close to Thoubal Khunou. They were Meitei who had fled after transgressing the rules of property or robbing the royal family of their possessions while engaged in combat. Yaithibi are exile people and they used toper form scavengers' job in the palace for the royal family (Brown, 1975). They are distance to live in isolation and are term as "Untouchables" (Ambedkar, 2014).

During ancient rules the Yaithibis were treated as untouchables and are not allowed to move freely on the roads or streets. Even their shadows were also treated as untouchables. In order to identify easily they have to wear blue colour cloth and turban (higok machu phi and turban) (Shah, 1994). In general most of them are engaged as sweeper during the olden days and other lowest occupation. The Meitei, Loi, Yaithibi, Brahmin, Bishnupriya, and Pangan (Manipuri Muslim) are the six ethnic groups that inhabit the Manipur valley.

The Yaithibi appear in the literature as an especially stigmatized group. Older descriptions associate them with exile, disgrace, or punitive removal, and later accounts present them as a highly marginalized service community within the valley (Brown, 1975; Loktongbam, 2017). Although details vary across texts, the recurring theme is that the Yaithibi were treated not merely as low in rank but as socially contaminating. In some accounts they were required to maintain visible distance and were marked off in ways that made their subordinate location instantly legible in public life. Even if such details must be treated with care because of the limits of the source base, the larger point is clear: the Yaithibi occupied a place near the extreme end of social stigma in the older order of the valley.

Importantly, the Yaithibi case also shows that exclusion did not depend on complete civilizational separation. Documentary materials repeatedly note their cultural similarities with the Meitei world: similar rites, similar cycles of domestic ritual, and similar participation in wider valley patterns of belief. Yet similarity did not guarantee acceptance. On the contrary, it could coexist with exclusion. This is analytically important because it reveals a specific form of caste-like hierarchy: a community may share language, region, and ritual environment with the dominant society and still be denied equal recognition within it.

The history of both the Lois and the Yaithibi therefore points to the same larger conclusion. Social hierarchy in Manipur was not reducible to a simple binary of ruler and outsider, valley and hill, or indigenous and migrant. It also involved ranked relations within the valley itself. Tribute, service, exile, ritual boundary, and stigmatized incorporation formed a distinct layer of social ordering, and the Lois and Yaithibi stood at its centre.

Kinship, Marriage, and Social Organization

One of the most important correctives to a purely deprivation-oriented reading of subordinate communities is attention to their internal social organization. The Lois and Yaithibi were not simply labels imposed from outside; they were communities with their own institutions of marriage, descent, household formation, and intergenerational regulation. This does not erase the violence of their stigmatized status, but it does show that social continuity was preserved through organized forms of life rather than through mere passive endurance.

Loi communities, marriage are both a familial and a social institution. It is not only a relationship between two individuals but also a mechanism through which alliances, reputation, and continuity are reproduced (Bino, 2002). Marriage practices therefore provide an especially useful window into the structure of community life. They reveal how kinship was organized, how status was negotiated, and how households reproduced themselves over time. Indira similarly demonstrates that among the Lois, social organization and religion are deeply interwoven; kinship relations cannot be understood apart from ritual cycles, household obligations, and village authority (Indira, 2004).

The documentary materials suggest that village endogamy, clan considerations, and norms regarding blood relation were historically important. Yet these systems were not rigidly frozen. Community regulation coexisted with practical adaptation, and over time new influences—education, Christianity, mobility, and changing aspirations—began to reshape how families approached marriage. This is true particularly where bride-price practices, local authority over divorce, and expectations of post-marital residence came under pressure from economic strain or religious conversion. What matters analytically is that such change occurred within an already structured social field; it did not emerge from social emptiness.

The Yaithibi materials preserved in the uploaded manuscript and echoed in related regional commentary are especially revealing on this point. They describe a society in which marriage could take place by negotiation or elopement, where clan and blood relation mattered in mate selection, where divorce required social approval, and where widow or divorce remarriage could be permitted without elaborate ritual. Even if every detail cannot be independently confirmed across multiple published sources, the broader sociological picture is persuasive: the Yaithibi maintained recognizable and regulated institutions of family life. This again challenges any simplistic assumption that stigma destroys social organization. More often, it compels communities to preserve it all the more carefully.

Family structure also deserves attention. Nuclear households appear to be common, but this did not imply social atomization. Respect for elders, obligations across generations, and patterned forms of authority remained strong in community life. This point matters because the discourse of subordination often focuses only on what communities lack—land, rank, education, state power—while ignoring the internal institutions that allow them to endure across time. In the case of the Lois and Yaithibi, kinship and family were not peripheral cultural details; they were central mechanisms of social reproduction.

Gender roles within these systems should also be taken seriously. The documentary materials suggest that women played crucial roles in the preparation and performance of marriage rites, domestic ritual, and household continuity. The gendered organization of marriage work, feast preparation, and ritual practice indicates that women were indispensable to the symbolic and social reproduction of the community. At the same time, the emergence of education, new religious affiliations, and modern discourse on consent and choice have begun to alter traditional expectations. The evidence does not point to the disappearance of tradition, but to negotiation within it.

The study of kinship and marriage reveals a core point of this paper: the Lois and Yaithibi were historically subordinated, but they were not socially formless. Their institutions enabled collective continuity, regulated community life, and preserved the conditions under which identity could survive.

Ritual Life, Religion, and Cultural Continuity

Ritual practice is perhaps the strongest domain in which the cultural resilience of the Lois becomes visible. Community studies repeatedly show that ritual among the Lois is not an isolated sphere of belief; it is woven into everyday social organization, agricultural rhythm, kinship life, and moral order (Indira, 2004; Bino, 2002). This is especially important because communities subjected to long-term stigma are often represented as culturally deficient. The documentary record suggests the opposite. The Lois possesses elaborate ritual systems that organize the relation between the household, the village, the ancestors, and local deities.

The connection between ritual and agriculture is especially notable. In many accounts, ritual observance regulates both the agricultural cycle and community solidarity. This does not mean that ritual should be romanticized as timeless tradition. Rather, it should be understood as a practical and symbolic institution. It structures time, affirms belonging, and situates households within a shared moral world. Such functions become even more important where communities confront social distance from a dominant order. Ritual becomes one of the means by which dignity is preserved.

Lai Haraoba occupies a central place in this field of continuity. Although most closely associated with the wider Meitei religious world, the festival is also deeply significant for communities such as the Lois because it sustains a ritual universe that predates or exists alongside later caste codifications. In ritual dance, music, reenactment, and narrative performance, Lai Haraoba preserves cosmological memory and community participation. Its significance is not exhausted by theology. It is equally a performance of continuity. The point for the present article is that participation in such ritual life complicates any reading of subordinate communities as merely marginal appendages of the social order. They are also carriers of deeply rooted cultural forms.

The history of religion in Manipur is inseparable from the transformation of caste and social rank. Several sources point to the role of Vaishnav influence in sharpening distinctions between pure and impure, touchable and untouchable, central and peripheral (Hodson, 1975; Loktongbam, 2017). Yet the effects of this process were not uniform. Communities did not simply abandon older beliefs and adopt newer ones in a neat sequence. Instead, layered forms of religious life emerged in which indigenous Meitei practice, Vaishnav devotion, and later Christianity intersected in different ways.

The Yaithibi case is particularly instructive in this regard. Documentary materials suggest that their religious life has never been reducible to a single affiliation. Older stigmas included claims that they had no proper religion or stood outside recognized religious order, but such claims themselves were part of the logic of exclusion. In practice, the Yaithibi appear to have participated in ritual cycles similar to those of surrounding Meitei communities and, over time, some also moved into Vaishnav or Christian frameworks. The significance of Christianity, as even the original manuscript noted, lay partly in its educational and social effects. Yet

religious conversion also created internal differentiation and new lines of identity. The result was not cultural disappearance but layered transformation.

The religion of Manipur is useful here because it shows that Meitei religious life has historically been plural, internally dynamic, and open to reform, revival, and reinterpretation (Parratt, 1980). When this insight is placed alongside Loktongbam's argument about religion as a marker of caste, a more complex picture emerges. Religion in Manipur functioned both as a field of continuity and as a medium of hierarchy. The same broad religious world that sustained shared symbolic forms also enabled social ranking. For communities like the Lois and Yaithibi, participation in ritual life therefore involved both belonging and exclusion.

This double condition helps explain the remarkable resilience of these communities. They did not preserve tradition because they were untouched by history; they preserved it while being subjected to history. Their ritual worlds adapted, absorbed new influences, and yet retained core structures of memory and meaning. That is why ritual life should not be read as ornamentation at the margins of the social. It is one of the central sites where subordinate communities reproduce themselves.

Social Exclusion, Recognition, and Resilience

The concepts of exclusion and resilience are both necessary for interpreting the Lois and Yaithibi, but neither is adequate on its own. Exclusion captures the historical facts of graded inferiority, stigma, distance, denial of recognition, and unequal participation in the social order. Resilience captures the capacity of communities to preserve institutions, cultural memory, and social continuity under those conditions. The error in much writing on subordinate groups is to choose one term at the expense of the other. A complete analysis requires both.

The Lois experienced long-term marginalization and were often treated as second-class subjects in the historical order of the valley (Ningthoujam, 2016). It further analysis and explain how this social location was tied to the moral language of purity and pollution, especially once caste distinctions became more explicit within Meitei society (Loktongbam, 2017). The point is not merely that the Lois and Yaithibi were poor or educationally disadvantaged; it is that their disadvantage was structured by durable status meanings. They were not simply at the bottom of an economic ladder. They were placed within a social imagination that normalized distance.

Yet the communities' response to this condition was not cultural surrender. In different ways, that ritual observance, family organization, village life, and religion enabled continuity among the Lois (Bino, 2002; Indira, 2004). These were not accidental survivals. They were institutional resources. Through them, communities reproduced moral order and collective memory. Even the persistence of stigmatized identity categories sometimes contributed paradoxically to the survival of group boundaries and practices. Marginalization could intensify the internal importance of culture.

The Yaithibi present an especially sharp illustration of the politics of recognition. Because they appear in the literature as culturally similar to the Meitei yet socially rejected, they reveal that exclusion can operate through denial of status rather than absolute otherness. This is a crucial sociological insight. Communities can be close to the dominant centre in language, everyday practice, and regional location, but still be refused equal recognition because of narratives of origin, ritual impurity, service labour, or disgrace. The Yaithibi therefore expose the symbolic dimension of hierarchy in an unusually clear form.

Resilience, however, should not be romanticized. It is not a moral reward bestowed on oppressed communities, nor does it mean that structural injustice is somehow compensated by cultural richness. Rather, resilience should be understood in modest and historically grounded terms: the capacity to preserve meaningful institutions despite unequal conditions. In the case of the Lois and Yaithibi, resilience appears in the maintenance of kinship systems, ritual cycles, religious adaptation, and collective memory. It does not cancel exclusion, but it does prevent exclusion from becoming the only story.

This combined frame has wider implications for the study of Manipur and Northeast India. The region is often narrated through binaries of tribe and non-tribe, valley and hill, centre and margin, majority and minority. Those binaries matter, but they do not exhaust the internal stratifications of the valley. The histories of the Lois and Yaithibi show that hierarchy was also built through internal ranking, social degradation, and restricted recognition. In that sense, the study of these communities expands the analytical map of the region. Their history also carries a contemporary lesson. Recognition in scholarship matters. When communities are mentioned only as degraded remnants or administrative categories, the record of their institutional life disappears. A more adequate social science must treat them as historical actors embedded in complex worlds of labour, religion, kinship, and adaptation. That is precisely what the documentary record, read carefully, makes possible.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the social and cultural identities of the Lois and Yaithibi is central, not peripheral, to the understanding of Manipur's social history. The documentary record shows that both communities were historically located within a graded social order shaped by tribute, exclusion, ritual ranking, and unequal incorporation into valley society. The Lois were associated with subordinate and often tributary or exiled settlements, while the Yaithibi were remembered in especially stigmatized terms tied to social distance and

service labour. These histories cannot be separated from the wider transformations of kingship, religious change, and caste consolidation in Manipur.

At the same time, the article has shown that subordination did not erase social organization. The Lois and Yaithibi preserved institutions of kinship, marriage, village regulation, ritual life, and religious practice that enabled continuity across generations. Their histories therefore demand a dual analytical language: exclusion to describe the reality of stigma and unequal status, and resilience to describe the preservation of meaningful collective life under those conditions.

The study also makes a broader conceptual point. In Northeast India, caste has often been overshadowed by discussions of ethnicity, tribe, and insurgency. Bringing the Lois and Yaithibi into focus corrects that imbalance. It reveals that hierarchy within the valley was historically significant and that cultural continuity among subordinate groups is an essential part of the regional record.

Because this article is documentary rather than ethnographic, it should be read as a foundation for further research. Future field-based work can deepen understanding of contemporary change, intergenerational mobility, religious transition, and the politics of recognition among these communities. Even so, the existing documentary record already makes one point unmistakable: the histories of the Lois and Yaithibi are indispensable to the social and cultural history of Manipur.

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