



মি কান্লেই মিম থিয়েটার রিপের্টরি

The Kanglei Mime Theatre Repertory

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To

Shri Amit Saxena Intangible Cultural Heritage Section.
Sangeet Natak Akademi New Delhi

Subject: **Re -Work and Re-Submission** of 1st progress Report for the project on **"Intangible cultural tradition of Meitei womenfolk in the Laiharaoba of Manipur"** under the scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India.

Sir,

In response to your letter no.28-6/ICH-Scheme/30/2014-15/12733 dated 12th March 2015, I have the honour to furnish the **Re -Work and Re-Submission** of 1st Progress Report on **"Intangible cultural tradition of Meitei womenfolk in the Laiharaoba of Manipur"** for your kind perusal and necessary action.

This first report - containing of :

- Write -up on research project
- Documentation materials Photos and video

***Note - vedio is sending by post because the size can not upload.**

Enclosed: as above

Yours Faithfully

Y. Sadananda Singh

Secretary,

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Moirangkhom Makha Yumnam Leikai,
Imphal -795001 Manipur

Introduction

Lai Haraoba is the biggest traditional Manipuri festival which probably is the most authentically Meitei of all the religious rituals of the Manipuri people. This festival closely preserves the ancient culture of the Manipuri people. It, besides being one of the most powerful organs in the preservation of Meitei culture, affords the opportunity for young children to learn the different traditional Manipuri folk dance forms, the Manipuri folk song, the Manipuri thang-ta, the folklore etc.

The Lai Haraoba ritual exists in five main forms:

- 1) the Kanglei (Imphal) Haraoba
- 2) the Chakpa Haraoba
- 3) the Andro Haraoba
- 4) the Moirang Haraoba
- 5) the Kakching Haraoba

Though there are some significant differences between them, the basic structure of the Lai Haraoba is common to all five.

Basic structure of the Lai Haraoba:

At the beginning of the festival the deities are invoked from the water by the Maibis and ceremonially taken in procession to the shrine (Lai higaba). In some cases the deities are invoked from land and tree. At the evening the deities are sung to sleep by the penakhongba playing 'naosum'. Each morning the deities are greeted with a 'yaikairo!'. On the central days of the festival the deities are symbolically brought out into the courtyard by the maibis dancing the 'Laiching Jagoi' to witness the ritual (Laibou la thaba). 'Saroi Khangba' is yet another feature of the festival which is performed with great care. It is performed on every odd days during the festival. Literally Saroi means followers of the main deity which the Meiteis believe are evil spirits and 'khangba' means to offer. To safeguard the efficacy of the festival and protect the participants Saroi Khangba is conducted by offering food (Heibi Mana Singju) to the Sarois. The opening rite of *leirai yukhangba* at the Lai Ikouba is a phenomenon of Saroi Khangba which originally may have been done to appease the Sarois.

On the last day of the festival besides the rituals, two phenomenal theatrical exhibitions are performed. The first is Lai Nupi Thiba which is based on the myth of Khorifaba the son of God Soraren. It is believed that Khorifaba came down to earth in search of his mother. In the course he came across Lai Haraoba and wanted to join. Unfortunately he was forbidden as he was not yet married. To join Haraoba he must find a wife. In some cases this performance is conducted on the last but one day of the festival. The second is the Tangkhul Nurabi which is based on the Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi. At the end of the festival the deities return to heaven by means of a boat (Hijing Hirao).

To this main structure other interludes are added. In fact the structure of Lai Haraoba is so complex for easy formulation. The question at present is the role of Meitei women folk in Kanglei Lai Haraoba. To what extent do women contribute? Womenfolk is as essential as that of the religious functionaries; Penakhongba, Maiba, and Maibi in all the five forms of Laiharaoba. In fact womenfolk play more prominent role than menfolk in:

- i) the organisation'
- ii) performances
- iii) making Costume
- iv) preserving cultural heritage of Manipur
- v) disseminating Manipuri culture both in urban and rural area

vi) benefit themselves through participation/performances

A thorough study is done with photo illustration.

Women in Organisation

are the main initiators of Lai Haraoba. At the outset they would consult the Meitei astrologer for fixing the auspicious date and time of the festival. In earlier days they served as runners giving information/invitation to all the villagers. These women are known as thougalois (devotees). In the over- arching structure of the Lai Haraoba the contribution of these thougalois is remarkable. They are the chief consultants next to the religious functionaries - maiba, maibi, penakhongba in the festival.

Lai Ikouba

Necessarily all the ritual objects for Lai Ikouba and the possessions of the deities - fans, khudeisel kaosel, ornamental mirrors etc. are carried by women in the procession from the shrine to the embarkation place. A strict order is observed. The bearer of the Isaifu (Leimaren Chafu= the pot symbolizing the deity) is strictly a woman. She holds an honourable place the whole process of Lai Ikouba.

Thougal (service to the deity)

Right from the second day of the festival the village womenfolk come to the Laibung (shrine) for prayer. They bring fruit, flowers, vegetable, rice, candle, and incense stick - offering to the deities. These offerings are received and arranged by the women thouglis at the Laibung and thus help the Lai Sellungba. Interestingly these women take great pleasure in their devotional service - arranging the heiruk, making garlands for the deities, singing the devotional song and dance with the maibis. Life at this period is a joy forever!

Jagoi Asangbi/Thougal Jaogi:

Jagoi Asangbi is an interlude in the festival. It is performed daily before Laibou; a beautiful Thougal Jagoi devoted to the deities. Women of all ages - married, unmarried and girls participate in this dance as a prayer and humble service to the deities. It is here children find opportunity to learn dance in their preliminaries before they go to schools for formal education. Khangembam ongbi Binodini at the Lai Puthiba Haraobung, Langthabal Mongsangei states, "It gives me joy to dance before the deities. I forget all the anxieties of life. It gives me strength dancing Jagoi Asangbi is bliss!"

Saroi Khangba

Women play an indispensable role in Saroi Khangba which is performed on the third, fifth, seventh..... (odd days) of the festival. On these days village womenfolk would bring vegetable, rice, fruit, flowers, dry fish, chilly, salt, candle etc. to the laibung. For those who can't come to the laibung the women thougalois would go to their houses to collect the offerings. These thougalois prepare the offerings for the saroi - heibi mana singju, vegetable, rice, fruit, flowers, dry fish, chilly, salt etc.. When the preparation is complete the village womenfolk either five or seven in number follow the maiba and maibi doing the rite of saroi khangba.

Khullang Taret

As stated by maibi Sumati (Chief priestess) at Poloi Leima Haraobung, Sanjenbam, Khullang Taret are Panthoibi and her friends in the Tangkhul Nurabi episode on the lairoi (last day) of the festival. The role of Tangkhul and Nurabi are played by the professional maiba and maibi. However the six friends (khullang) are played by common village womenfolk. This episode is a theatrical representation of the romance in the myth of Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi.

Phi Saba (Making costume)

The weavers and traditional crafts artists are mainly women. These artists besides their physical participation in the Haraoba -devoting prayers and offering to the deities, dancing in Jagoi Asangbi etc. are also contributing to the Haraoba through their profession of weaving, stitching, and crafts. Remarkably 80% of the traditional dresses and costumes for both male and female participants in the Laiharaoba are made by Meitei women. Directly or indirectly Haraoba enhances the economy of Manipur to a great extent.

Lai Lam Thokpa

Literally this means 'going out to visit'. Traditionally it took place on the 5th , 9th, 11th day of the Haraoba. By this time the villagers are all in festive mood. Clad beautifully in traditional dresses the villagers, men and women, boys and girls participate in Lai Lam Thokpa. A great procession indeed! The contribution or participation of womenfolk in Lai Lam Thokpa is remarkable. They are the sole bearers of all the rituals objects though the possessions of the deities - fans, lai thang, khudeisel kaosel etc. are borne jointly by boys and girls.

Conclusion (for 1st Report)

We are conscious that many research works have been done on Lai Haraoba of Manipur. However, much remain to be done especially on the intangible cultural tradition of Meitei womenfolk without whose contribution the efficacy of the Haraoba is vague. These women mirror the Meitei culture and tradition both in their dress and costume and in their participation in the intangible performances like Saroi Khangba, Thougai Jagoi, Khullang Taret and many more, thus preserving the cultural heritage of Manipur. Since time immemorial the Manipuri Meitei women have been taking part in Lai Haraoba both in rural and urban areas of Manipur and

outside (Tripura and Assam); A phenomenon witnessed in Aithanpot Kaba. Women from neighbouring villages would bring offerings to the deities during Haraoba and join the devotional prayers, song and dances. In fact women play a great role in the preservation and dissemination of Manipuri culture.

Lai Haraoba, the heart of Meitei culture is in many ways a great platform for recreation and communal harmony. It is an event of joy. An elderly woman participant at Lai Puthiba Haraobung at Langthabal Mongsangei says " time has changed so much, law and order is so bad in country..... however when Haraoba comes it is such a relief. We forget all the worries of life..... no tension.... no anxiety.... only joy.... Haraoba is a joy forever a pilgrimage where we purify our heart all our service, song or dances are devoted to Ima (the mother) and Ipa (the father) we find no pain..... we gain strength.

Lai Ikouba



Lourembam Tamphaton Haraoba dt. 20-4-2015, ready to go for Lai Ikouba



Lourembam Tamphaton Haraoba dt. 20-4-2015, ready to go for Lai Ikouba, women in the picture are participation from the community and not professional dancer like Maibis. We can't organise Laiharaoba without their participation.



She is carrying the Ishaifu (water pot).
A picture from Lourembam
Tamphaton Haraoba on 20th April 2015



Lai Ikouba Ritual Procession Yumjao Lairembi Haraoba inside the Kangla on 21st May 2015



Performing *Lai Ikouba* Ritual of Yumjao Lairembi Haraoba inside the pond of Kangla on 21st May 2015. Maiba, Maibi, Pena Khongba and members from the community of the Haraoba Area Yumnam Leikai, Imphal



Ready to back *Lai Ikouba* Ritual of Yumjao Lairembi Haraoba from Kangla

"Lai Ikouba" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba



Lai Ikouba Ritual of the Yujao Lairembi of Yumnam Leikai procession start from the Laibung to Kangla (old capital of Manipur)
 [*Lai Ikouba*= taking lai from the water and transporting the lai to the shrine]



Lai Ikouba Ritual of the Yujao Lairembi of Yumnam Leikai procession to Kangla (old capital of Manipur)
 date 21st May 2015

"Lai IKouba" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba

LAI IKOUBA

YUMJAO LAIREMBI HARAoba: This Lai (god)'s Haraobung (shrine) is situated at heart of the city, Moirangkhom Makha Yumnam Leikai, Imphal west, Manipur. The research team visited to this Haraobung from the 21st to 30th May 2015 and took research related still photos videos. Some still photos are given below.



YUMJAO LAIREMBI, Photographed on 21st May 2015



Day one of the Yumjao Lairembi Haraoba, dated the 21st May 2015, Yumnam Leikai Imphal
Local people including women gathering for *Lai Ikouba* Ritual Procession to Kangla.

"Lai Ikouba" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba

LAI IKOUBA

IMA CHINGJROIBI HARAOBUNG: This Haraobung is situated at Khurai Heikrumakhong Chingjroibi Leirak, Imphal East, Manipur. The research team visited to this Haraobung on the 23rd April 2015 and took research related still photos and videos. Some still photos are given below.



Ima Chingjroibi Haraoba, Khurai Heikrumakhong Chingjroibi Leirak Imphal, Manipur
Back from Lai Ikouba, community participation in the Ikouba Ritual.



Ritual of Welcome - the participants of Lai Ikouba at the shrine



Ima Chingjroibi Haraobaung (shrine), *Mei Okpa* (mei = fire) the fire is regarded as a purification from defilement. Khurai Heikrumakhong Chingjroibi Leirak, Imphal

"Lai Ikouba" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba

Thougal Jagoi

(Jagoi Ashangbi)



"Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba





Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba



Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" and audience - Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagol Asangbi" and audience - Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" and audience - Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba



4) **KAKWA LAIREMBI IREIMA HARAوبا**: This Haraobung is situated at Singjamei Kakwa, Imphal west, Manipur. The research team visited to this Haraobung on the 7th May 2015 and took research related still photos. Some still photos are given below.



Gate of the Kakwa Lairembi Ireima Haraoba



Kakwa Lairembi Ireima Haraoba, Singjamei Kakwa Imphal West

Women from the community are taking part in the *Thougal Jagoi* or *Jagoi Ashangbi*, they are not professional dancers but they imitated from Maibis, Maibas, Penakhongba and perform. They are not showing their skill but they offer dance to the god. This is the main philosophy of the women and other devotees. photographed on 7th May 2015

"Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" in *Kakwa* Lai Haraoba



This is **Kakching Haraoba** tradition from Kakchig around 45 km from Imphal City, women are participating in the **IBHDHOU MARONGKHONG CHINGDRENSANA PAKHANGBA HARAoba** and showing their Kakching Haraoba tradition, particular dance and singing action is back from Lai Ikouba on 12th June 2015 at Palace Gate Imphal East, Manipur



This is also **Kakching Haraoba** tradition from Kakchig around 45 km from Imphal City, showing their Kakching Haraoba tradition in the **IBHDHOU MARONGKHONG CHINGDRENSANA PAKHANGBA HARAoba**, particular ritual dance and singing action is **Ngaprum Tanba** on 12th June 2015 at Palace Gate Imphal East, Manipur

"Thougal Jagoi" and "Lai Ngaprum Tanba" in Kakching Lai Haraoba



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Women from Andro, 25 Km distance from Imphal City are participating in the **IBHDHOU MARONGKHONG CHINGDRENSANA PAKHANGBA HARAoba** and showing their Andro Chakpa Haraoba tradition on 12th June 2015 at Palace Gate Imphal East

"Thougal Jagoi" or "Jagoi Asangbi" in Andro Lai Haraoba

Saroi Khangba

Saroi Khangba



Women from the community are taking part in the Laiharaoba, preparation of vegetable for "Saroi Khangba Rituals" (offering food for evil spirits). The rite of Saroi Khangba placates the spirits, and they are ceremonially 'swept away' from the sacred area of the Laiharaobung



Women from the community are taking part in the Laiharaoba, ready to take part in rite of Saroi Khangba to placate evil spirits from the Laiharaobung (Haraoba complex)

"Saroi Khangba" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba



Women from the community are taking part in the Laiharaoba, ready to take part in rite of Saroi Khangba to placate evil spirits from the Laiharaobung (Haraoba complex)



Women from the community are taking part in the Laiharaoba, ready to take part in rite of Saroi Khangba to placate evil spirits from the Laiharaobung (Haraoba complex)

"Saroi Khangba" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba



Women from the community are taking part in the Saroi Khangba ritual of
of Ibhudou Khana Chaoba Wangbren Laiharaoba



Women from the community are taking part in the Saroi Khangba ritual of
of Ibhudou Khana Chaoba Wangbren Laiharaoba

"Saroi Khangba" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba



Saroi Khangba Ritual on the 3rd day of Lourembam Tamphaton Haraoba dt 22nd April 2015



Saroi Khangba Ritual on the 3rd day of Lourembam Tamphaton Haraoba dt 22nd April 2015.
In the Saroi Khangba Ritual, women from the community are taking part.

"Saroi Khangba" in Kanglei Lai Haraoba

Khulang Taret

Khulang Taret



Day 10, Lairoi day (last day of the Yumjao Lairembi Haraoba) midnight of 30th May 2015

Khulang Taret, wearing red colours (seven friends of Tangkhul Nurabi), they are purely non professional performers participating from community. Without them Lai Haraoba is impossible. So their role and contribution in the Lai Haraoba is quite commendable



Only the male performer Tangkhul Saram Pakhangba is the trained one. The other women performers are from the community (non trained). women is compulsory to take part on the last day of the Haraoba as role of Khulang Taret (seven friends of Nurabi)

Lai Lam Thokpa



"Lai Lam Thokpa" - Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Lai Lam Thokpa" - Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Lai Lam Thokpa" - Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Lai Lam Thokpa" - Kanglei Lai Haraoba





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"Lai Lam Thokpa" - Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Lai Lam Thokpa" - Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Lai Lam Thokpa" - Kanglei Lai Haraoba



Lai Nupi Thiba



"Lai Nupl Thiba" and Audience - Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Lai Nupi Thiba" - Kanglei Lai Haraoba





"Lai Nupi Thiba" - Kanglei Lai Haraoba



Laibou La Thaba



"Llaibou La Thaba" - Kanglei Lai Haraoba



Athenpot Kaba



"Athenpot Kaba" - Kanglei Lai Haraba, Poldi Leima Laibung (Shrine)



Phugarel Jagoi



"Fungarel Jagoi" (jagoi=dance) - Kanglei Lai Haraoba, Poloi Leima Laibung (Shrine)





"Fungarel Jagoi" (jagoi=dance) - Kanglei Lai Haraoba, Polo Leima Laibung (Shrino)





"Fungarel Jagoi" (jagoi=dance) - Kanglei Lai Haraoba, Polo Leima Laibung (Shrine)





"Fungarel Jagoi" (jagoi=dance) - Kanglei Lai Haraoba, Polo Leima Laibung (Shrine)



Maiba, Maibi & Penakhongba



"Thougal Jagoi "and "Hoi Laouba" - Kanglei Lai Haraoba, Poldi Leima Laibung (Shrine)





A Professional young Pena player and Maibi - Poloi Leima Laibung (Shrine)



Laibung (Shrine)



Yumjao Lairembi Shrine, Imphal



Sekpin (now call satra), Yumjao Lairembi Shrine, Imphal



Yumjao Lairembi Shrine, Imphal

Documentation team



Documentation Team - Kanglei Lai Haraoba



Others



"Anam Athou Kokpa" - Kanglei Lai Haraoba, Polo Leima Laibung (Shrine)





Mass Audience - Kanglei Lai Haraoba





A Professional young Maibei - Kanglei Lai Haraoba, Poloi Leima Laibung (Shrine)



An women non professional devtoee performer - Poloi Leima Laibung (Shrine)