

Scheme for "Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India"

Form for National Inventory Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage of India

A. Name of the State : **Manipur**

B. Name of the Element/Cultural Tradition (in English) : **Workshop cum documentation on SHIKAPLON and KHOUSABA on the Dead Ritual Ceremony of Phayeng Caste.**

B.1. Name of the element in the language and script of the community

Concerned, if applicable : (In Manipuri language) **Chakpa Phayenggee lai haraoba amasung sibada pangthokpa chatnalongi manungda SHIKAPLON amasung KHOUSABA thijinba amasung khomjinbagi thabaksing.**

C. Name of the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned (Identify clearly either of these concerned with the practice of the said element/cultural tradition) : **Chakpa Phayeng community of Manipur.**

D. Geographical location and range of the element/cultural tradition (Please write about the other states in which the said element/tradition is present **Chakpa Phayeng Khunjao, Imphal West, especially at the peripheral of the Manipur Valley.**

E. Identification and definition of the element/cultural tradition of the India

(Write "Yes" in one or more boxes to identify the domain(s) of intangible cultural heritage manifested by the element. If you tick 'others', specify the domain(s) in brackets.)

- i. (Yes) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage
- ii. (Yes) performing arts
- iii. (Yes) social practices, rituals and festive events
- iv. (Yes) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- v. (Yes) traditional craftsmanship
- vi. other(s) ()

F. Provide a brief summary description of the element that can introduce it to readers who have never seen or experienced it : **Chakpa Phayeng people of Manipur has a unique tradition which is associated at the time of interment. These are the Shikaplon, a style of requiem and a funeral march with martial movement known as Khousaba.**

G. Who are the bearers and practitioners of the element/Cultural Traditions? Are there any specific roles or categories of persons with special responsibilities for the practice and transmission of it? If yes, who are they

and what are their responsibilities? : **The bearers of the cultural tradition are the Chakpa Phayeng people. There are a very few surviving old practitioners in the village.**

- H. How are the knowledge and skills related to the element transmitted today? : **There is no question of transmitting the elements except perform it during a funeral only. The younger generations are discarding the tradition.**
- I. What social functions and cultural meanings do the element/cultural tradition have today for its community? : **Shikaplon, Khousesaba and Chakpa Lai Haraoba.**
- J. Is there any part of the element that is not compatible with existing international human rights instruments or with the requirement of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, or with sustainable development? I.e. describe any aspect of the element/cultural tradition that may be unacceptable to Law of the country or may be in opposition to practicing community's harmony with others. : **Does not arise.**
- K. Your Project's contribution to ensuring visibility, awareness and encouraging dialogue related to the element/cultural tradition : **This project is meant to sustain the living but intangible culture of a community as a whole.**
- L. Information about the safeguarding measures that may protect or promote the element/cultural tradition
- a. (Write "Yes" in one or more boxes to identify the safeguarding measures that have been and are currently being taken by the communities, groups or individuals concerned)
- (Yes) transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education
 - (Yes) identification, documentation, research
 - (Yes) preservation, protection
 - (Yes) promotion, enhancement
 - (Yes) revitalization
- b. Write about the measures taken at local, state and national level by the Authorities to safeguard the element/cultural tradition? **Not much measures are being taken up to safeguard the intangible elements of the Chakpa group. The present project being taken up is to document the relevant elements for future keeping.**
- M. Write about the threats, if any, to the element/cultural tradition related to its practice, visibility and future longevity. Give facts and relevant reasons based on the current scenario. : **Younger generations are neglecting these elements.**
- N. Safeguarding measures proposed
- (This section should identify and describe safeguarding measures to protect and promote the element/cultural tradition. Such measures should be concrete and can be implemented to formulate future cultural policy for

safeguarding and promoting the element/cultural tradition in the state): **Bring an awareness amongst the younger generations and to acquaint to them that the elements are their cultural identities. Up to some extent, all the performing traditions are to be documented.**

O. Community Participation

(Write about the participation of communities, groups and individuals related to the element/cultural tradition in formulation of your project): **The older generations of the Chakpa community who are all aware of the threat and few educated younger generations are much aware to sustain the elements. These few people take part in the interaction program with the Project Director.**

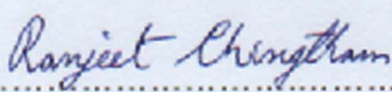
P. Concerned community organization(s) or representative(s)

(Provide detailed contact information for each community organization or representative or other non-governmental organization that is concerned with the element such as associations, organizations, clubs, guilds, steering committees, etc.)

- i. Name of the entity : **Chingtham Ranjeet Khuman**
- ii. Name and title of the contact person: **Chingtham Ranjeet Khuman**
- iii. Address: **Haobam Marak Irom Leikai, Imphal West District, Manipur**
- iv. Telephone number: **+91 9856115299 / 9402402562**
- v. E-mail: **ranjeetchingtham@rediffmail.com**
- vi. Other relevant information

Q. Give information of any Inventory, database or data creation centre (local/state/national) that you may be aware of or of any office, agency, organisation or body involved in the maintenance of the said inventory etc.:
Not available

R. Principal published references or documentation available on the element/cultural tradition
(Books, articles, audio-visual materials, names and addresses of reference libraries, museums, private endeavours of artistes/individuals for preservation of the said element, publications or websites) : **Some manuscripts in book form are available.**

Signature: 

Name & Designation: **Chingtham Ranjeet Khuman**.....

Individual Project Director (File No. 28-6/ICH-Scheme/2015-16/73).

Name of Institution (If applicable):

Address: **HAOBAM MARAK IROM LEIKAI, IMPHAL WEST, MANIPUR - 795001**

Workshop cum documentation on *SHIKAPLON* and *KHOUSABA* on the Dead Ritual Ceremony of Phayeng Caste

Blue Print of the project:

Shikaplon is a part of interment adopted by the Phayeng Chakpa, a caste people of Phayeng Chakpa Village of Manipur situated about 16 kms. West of the Imphal City. It is believed that, when a person dies, the person takes a journey to the netherworld, *Khamnung Sawa* as the Meiteis as well as the Chakpas believe, to meet and joint to his or her ancestors. It is a natural human feeling that the surviving members of the dead person have to lament and keen when somebody who was a beloved to the family died. Amongst these keening members one expert sings the *Shikaplon*, a form of requiem which describes instructions on the journey of the departed to the netherworld wherein the dead is to be united with the ancestors. The traditional musical instrument of Manipur, *pena*, a fiddling instrument accompanies the singer while singing the *Shikaplon*. The one who sings the *Shikaplon* usually is attired in simple white clothes with a turban on his head. However dressed in *Khamenchatpa* (dhoti designed with unique motif) is sanctioned in some cases. This tradition of the Phayeng Chakpa has been continuing since an ancient time and persisting in oral form only. There are no published or recorded documents connect to this ritual. Thus a very few amongst the older generation of the Phayeng Chakpa community has the dexterity of performing this practice. The lyric of the *Shikaplon* contains events such as how the world was created, how he was born and brought up by his parents and also acquainted to his surviving friends about the accomplishment of his duties as his life cease to live and the duties afterlife. Besides, the lamenting composition of the *Shikaplon* describes on how the journey to the netherworld is to be taken by the deceased.

Another tradition that accompanies the funeral procession is a very rare martial art form known as Yenpha Khousa. Yenpha Khousa, which is a form of Ta Khousaba is performed by very near and young relative of the deceased person. Yenpha Khousa is a martial art form which is performed with spear and shield. The responsibilities of the funeral is taken up by the son-in-law of the deceased. He is the one who is to bear the spear and the shield and perform the Khousaba. If the son-in-law is not able to perform even if he is an expert, another person who is an expert would perform on his behalf and the son-in-law has to carry the spear and the shield for name shake only. The near relatives and the son-in-law would offer emolument to the substitute.

All these rituals that were once an inseparable tradition has become intangible. Only a few people of older generation can perform these rare martial art form. Thus it will become difficult to describe even if these existed.

The purpose of the project thus taken up is to learn, preserve and invigorate the ritualized art form and the *Shikaplon* for the future generations.

Objective of the Project:

The objective of the project is wholly to document the performance tradition of the rare martial art form Yenpha Khousa. This art form was a tradition in vogue for the people of Phayeng, however with the progress of time the performance of Yenpha Khousa and the recital the *Shikaplon* has been abandoned and will soon be forgotten and become an extinct art. The only means to preserve these are to document the performance traditions in form of audio and video format. As there are very few persons who are expertise in these art forms, their performances and workout shall be recorded for future performance by the younger generations.

Implementation of the Project:

Since the performance tradition of the Chakpa Phayeng persist only in oral tradition, a holistic documentation of the performances of the Yenpha Khousa and the Shikaplon has to be done. For the purpose, it is required to meet the experts of the Chakpa community who still perform the art form and also the locality who has a good knowledge about the tradition. The guru or the teachers who can instruct the young generations in the urban area shall be invited to train the students as well as to conduct workshop in this regard. Videography of the performances and still photograph of the implements and weapons used by the Chakpa Phayeng people are to be taken as record for the implements have become obsolete. The documentation of Yenpha Khousa is a dire strait need. This will enable to recreate and re-enact the martial weapons as well as the martial movements with the assistance of experts who are skillful in martial workouts. For the implementation of the project, a team consisting videographer, photographers and locals who are well acquainted with the village shall visit and interact with the performers of the traditions.

As the performers are of advanced age, interaction with them are to be done at their abode, wherein all the possible recordings would be done.

Time frame of the project:

The project will take at least six months from its commencement. The main reason is because, the Chakpa Lai Haraoba is performed once a year during the Lai Haraoba season. Some of the martial art form is performed during the festival. The interaction with the expertise also will be possible only when the farming season is over as the Chakpa Phayeng people are mainly of agrarian society. Special appointment is to be taken as the availability of the experts.

**Specific areas of the respective state in which the art form (s) is practiced-
Geographical, typographical and other related aspects that the project may cover:**

The Chakpas are schedule cast group of people of Manipur as recognized by the government. In Manipuri term these people are known as *loi*. These Chakpas are inhabited in the peripheral areas of the Imphal valley. Some of the important villages of Chakpas are Andro, Awang Sekmai, Phayeng Kunjao and Chairan villages. The cultural assimilation of these people are similar in many ways. Thus the project may cover the areas inhabited by the Chakpas in order to find the roots of the aspects of culture and performance traditions.

Conclusion of the project as you have envisioned:

The State of Manipur is inhabited by different ethnic groups of people with different ethnicities. These include the Meiteis, Chakpas and other schedule tribes. These people had always preserved their ethnicity in one way or the other. However with the intrusion of new religion and belief in this small region, many has apostate their former beliefs resulting to the extinction of tradition and cultural performances. Once wipe out from the society, these cultural aspects will not revive again. The only possible means to keep intact these are to record the performances and to learn and disseminate the performances.

Chingtham Ranjeet Khuman
File No. 28-6/ICH-Scheme/2015-16/73

Workshop cum documentation on SHIKAPLON and KHOUSABA on the Dead Ritual Ceremony of Phayeng Caste

Introduction:

The Chakpas are a group of people who dwell at the periphery of the Manipur valley. These group of people are recognized as Schedule Caste though they were integrated within the Meitei ethnicity. Early Chakpa societies were incorporated into the Meitei social structure and at the same time Meitei clan and lineage groups entered into the Chakpa families as well through inter marriages. The important Chakpa groups of Manipur are Andro at the eastern foothill of the Nongmajing hill, Chakpa Phayeng village at the foothill of Kangchup hill and Awang Sekmai at the northern periphery of Imphal West District. Other important Chakpa Villages are Koutruk, Leimaram and Khurkhul etc. The spread of this ethnic group in different strategic peripheral regions is significant in the socio-economic organization of the state.

These Chakpa group possessed a ceramic culture. The main reason for their inhabiting at the foothills conjoining the valley and plain has many factors. One of the most important factor is the quality of clay used for making pottery and the availability of water for sustaining life. Another factor is that, the foothill served as the station of petty trade by these group of people as vegetable that are grown in the hill villages were exchangeable through their hands. Thus the Chakpa people served an important role in the socio economy condition of the then kingdom.

If we delve into the history of the State of Manipur, it was a tremendous efforts of many lineage of kingship of different clans to establish the principality of this small kingdom. One of the most advantageous reason for the Chakpa people were that, by the virtue of their inhabiting at the foothills, they had a good rapport with the hill dwellers as well as the plain dwellers. The kings of Manipur had the supremacy both at the valley and the hills as well. Though the Chakpa were not war like people not actively involved in the political affairs of Manipur. Being a peaceful community, they were not much keen on swordsmanship. However, their use of spear, bow and arrow was excellent. The Chakpa used these weapons for the purpose of self-defense only. Not only self-defense, these were used as a ritual during the *Lai Haraoba* festival and during a funeral. The use of spear along with the agile movements of the body is known as *Khousaba*.

The importance of Khousesaba (spear movement) in Phayeng culture:

The village of Phayeng at the foot of the Kangchup hills is surrounded by some Meitei villages – in the south by Tairenpokpi, in the north Kadangbal, at the west by Kangchup and in the east by Lairenkabi. The village Phayeng Khunjao is divided into four extended household settlements called Leikai. The Mamang Leikai (in the east), the Makha Leikai (in the south), the Awang Leikai (in the north) and the Umang Leikai (of the near forest lands where ancestral spirits were worshipped). The Chakpa Phayeng people has a distinctive culture and folklore. This place is regarded as the village where the rice-spirit Mother Phou-Oibi had rested from her descent from heaven to the earth. And she took refuge at night, through the help of an old man in the village. Next morning before she left, she gave a few paddy grains to the villager, who planted the seeds in this village. Since then the village Phayeng never experienced famine in their economic life. The place Phayeng was also derived its meaning from a place where spirit-mother stayed in her sojourn in the valley of Manipur.

Ancestral worship and fertility cult were the main religion of the Phayeng Chakpa groups. There the Haraoba systems along with indigenous rites fill the normal religious calendar of the people. These people still adopt the pre-Hindu system of religion. However there are official record of conversion to the Christian religion due to seer poverty. The ancestral God Sanamahi, is the high God in the Meitei pantheon. But the Chakpas do not worshipped Sanamahi as the Meitei do, with its appointed place in the south-west corner of the house as done in the central areas in the valley. Absolute importance is given at the worship of Mother-Goddess and the union of the Sky-father, the God *Soraren*. Other Gods and Goddess that the Chakpa worshipped are the God *Koubru*, his wife *Kounu* and their family and also the civilization giver *Nongpok Ningthou* and *Panthoibi*.

The significant of this research work is the martial and defense culture adopted by the Chakpa of the Phayeng Khunjao village. It is true that most people of the world used spears, bows and arrows as defensive weapon. Besides its application as weapons of war, these hurling weapons were used for the purpose of hunting too. In the context of Manipur, both the plain people who were constantly threatened by neighbouring foreign invasion and the hill people used these weapons for defense purpose and also for hunting. Thus the skill of using spears was developed far and wide within the principality.

But for the people of Chakpas, the role of the spear is most significantly associated in their ritual of the Koubru Haraoba. The spear is also used for certain other ritual purposes for the individual's desire for health, longevity and prosperity, and also collectively the spear is a very important weapon for the mortuary rites of the individual, since the spear and its potent movement provides significant meaning to the death rites. Likewise the use of bows and arrows is also very important in the Chakpa group. Thus the archers were important members within the community. Importantly, archery too is incorporated in the rituals involved in death rites and funerals. It is also a mandatory to perform the usages of spear and bow in the *Haraoba* festivals of the Chakpas.

Evidently, considering the importance of these archers, the Chakpa community created the post of *Tenloihitang*, a post hold by the important archer of this community. The meaning of *Tenloi* stands for a group of archer and *hitang* means one who manages the archers. During a funeral procession, the experts who has the dexterity of performing the martial arts of using spear, bow and arrow would accompany the deceased in the funeral march. Individuals from the age of 41 belonging to the group are reported as belonging to a group in the ranks of the community, and it is known as 'Fruchu'. These individuals are responsible for playing the drum, fiddles, flutes and also holding of the bow and arrow who move ahead of the funeral procession. The implicit idea involved in the procession is to protect and safeguard the departing soul from diabolic spirits and other scavenging entities.

Another interesting presentation during the funeral is the recital of a form of requiem known as the *Shikaplon*. An expert within the keeners would sing the *Shikaplon* with the accompaniment of a fiddling musical instrument known as *Pena*. The lyric or the text of *Shikaplon* is to instruct to the departed, how the journey to the netherworld is to be taken. The lyrics also contain other important events such as the creation of the universe, birth of a person, how he was raised and his association with the world during which his duties were performed and the termination of one's duty as he ceased to live. **Presently there is only one elderly man in the Phayeng Khunjao village who can sing the *Shikaplon*.**

The spear, the subject of our study, is an inimitable possession of the Chakpas. Normally it is too long for a person of average height. Sometimes it is prepared suitable to the body height of the user. But the Chakpas do not have the type of spears for the purpose of hunting big cats like the Meiteis do. The spear (Ta) and the shield (Chung) are important weapons for the protection of the body in battle and also used in the

funeral rites and ritual of the dead. The art of using the spear and its movements along with the movements of the performer is known as *Khousaba*. It is also a mandatory item to perform the *Khousaba* in front of the deities during the *Lai Haraoba*.

The spear movement termed *Yenpha Khousa* or *Ipa-lpuKhousa* (gesture of the fighting cock, or the father-grandfather spear art) is the most important item in the vocabulary of the spear movement of the *Chakpa Phayeng*. In the *Lai Haraoba*, this *Khousaba* is done ritualistically by the *Arrangba* (of management group) or the *Shanglen* (officials of the ritual procedures). Two or four members from each of these groups are compulsorily associated right from the summoning of the spirit (*Lai Ikouba*), till the *Lai Loiba* (concluding sessions of the end portion of the *Haraoba*). This spear movement precedes compulsorily the *Leishem Jagoi* (the dance of creation). The dress that is to be worn by these spear performers ritualistically are simple commoners clothing of white dhoti, white *Kha-on* or sash and girdle, and the *Koyet* or the turban or the head gear. At other times when the post holders or the noblemen like the *Khullakpa* (the controller of the village), *Luplakpa* (controller of the associations) and *Phamnaiba* – other post holders have to present this spear movement – they have to wear the *Khamen Chappa* (block printed cloth), white Sash and girdle and white or pink turbans.

Just after *Ikouba* (ritual involve in the summoning of the deity), the spear is used at the procession till the procession arrives the ancestral space or the arbour of the temple. The space is honoured with the performance of *Khousaba* by the group before the commencement of the *Haraoba*. And at the end of the *Haraoba* ritual or *Laibou* this *Khousaba* sums up the days ritual after which other secular programs could be offered to the deity.

During a funeral rites it is the son-in-law of the deceased, or any other sibling of the lineage who has to perform the *Khousaba* ahead of the procession of the dead body with his normal prayers to the deities. In the olden times the spear holders use to dance these steps till the body arrives at the funeral ground. Nowadays this culture had been abridged. If the son-in-law is not adept in the art, he must hold the shield and spear for namesake, and some other proficient individual could dance on his behalf. He shall offer the substitutes with something as emolument for having performed his tasks. This son-in-law is known as *Khoidou* or literally 'navel' for bodily symbols of the genetic continuity of the group.

The movements of the spear is accompanied by the sound of the *langte* drum. The notation of the beat of the drum has different sounds for the three different purposes

of ritual of *Lai Haraoba*, the funeral procession of the body and of the prayer for health, longevity and welfare of the individual and his family.

For one to become adept at the art of the spear, it is essential for the learner to gratify the teacher with an initial ritual known as '*Boriba*'. There must be a trust between the teacher and the disciple. It is believed that if the ritual of *Boriba* is not performed the disciple would not be blessed with full knowledge of the art.

The *Chung* or the shield is made of strong split bamboo pieces welded together by creepers and is a very significant personal weapon closely associated with the survival of the body and continuity of life. The height of the shield is normally between three and half to four feet in height, and its breadth is about two feet on the average. The making of the shield must be finished in one day. During the ancient times, the maker of this *Chung* or the shield must prepare in nude and alone. If he takes the help of others, both of them must be in the nude. This is a very important ethno-philosophy of the sacredness of the relationship of the body and its protective instrument. This is very important primordial belief in the sanctity and strength of the oneness of the body with the shield. Nowadays the custom has been modified. The maker should have the upper portion of his body bare, and if he wears a loin cloth the end of the loin that is tucked at the back must be removed.

It is quite a miserable state in the perpetuating of the art and practice of spear of the Chakpa Phayeng. There is lack of knowledge in the upcoming young generation of the Chakpas, and the elders who know and possess the art are on its last legs. This art has already disappeared at Andro, Leimaram, Khurkhul and other Chakpa areas. This is one of the saddest commentaries to the passing away of a meaningful ancient traditions of the Meitei community in general. Most of the martial art traditions one sees in the public sphere are only glittering forms of combat and exhibition, but the substance of ancient knowledge and practice are fast dying away.

In the next installment of this report, the *Shikaplon* as practiced by the Chakpa Phayeng shall be described in detail along with the documentation of the performances for future usages.

SOME PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE ELEMENT



Ranjeet Chingtham (Project Director) at Chakpa Phayeng Village



Members of the Project Tea



Asking for a *Shairong* (pallet bow) by the Project Director



Asking for a *Shairong* (pallet bow) by the Project Director



Attiring for the performance by the expert performer



Attiring for the performance by the expert performer



Attiring for the performance by the expert performer



Performing the Yenpha Khousa by the expert



Performing the Yenpha Khousa by the expert



Performing the Yenpha Khousa by the expert



Performing the Yenpha Khouisa by the expert



Performing the Yenpha Khouisa by the expert



Performing the Yenpha Khousa by the expert



Performing the Yenpha Khousa by the expert



Briefing by the expert to the Project Director just before the performance



Briefing by the expert to the Project Director just before the performance



Briefing by the expert to the Project Director just before the performance



Shield and spear use for the Yenpha Khousa



Khamenchatpa (motif printed on dhoti)



Training the movements of the Yenpha Khousa by expert Guru to the students of the urban area



Training the movements of the Yenpha Khousa by expert Guru to the students of the urban area



Training the movements of the Yenpha Khousa by expert Guru to the students of the urban area



Initiation of the students before the training to perform Yenpha Khousa and other martial arts



Initiation of the students before the training to perform Yenpha Khousa and other martial arts



Initiation of the students before the training to perform Yenpha Khousa and other martial arts



Demonstration cum training of the Yenpha Khousa to the students



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Demonstration cum training of the Yenpha Khousa to the students



Demonstration cum training of the Yenpha Khouxa to the students



Lecturing the students the theory and history of the Chakpa martial arts



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