

Festival of Manipur

LAIHARA OBA – THE MOST IMPORTANT FESTIVAL (Merry Making of Umanglai)

By- N. Mangi Devi

Lai-Haraoba is celebrated in honour of the sylvan deities known as Umang-Lais, meaning deities of calm and quiet environment of beautiful forests. The festival represents the worship of traditional deities and ancestors of the Manipuri society. It is usually observed during the month of Kalen tha (summer season).

With the coming of warm and hot season, KALENTHA the famous and important festival of LAIHARA OBA has been celebrated at the sacred places of UMANG LAI of the Manipur valley. It is mainly observed by the Meitei society. Here it is desirable and suitable to note the importance and significance of the month of KALENTHA according to ancient Puya. In this month Nongda Lairen Pakhangba comes down to the peaceful and rare place, KANGLA and stays with all beings. At this time the whole earth and Rain God arrives and God for long life. All different kinds of flowers bloom in this month and people admire the beauty of the flowers that are distributed to the people of four Panas and offer them to God. With this idea of praying to God all the people start the observance and celebration of Laiharaoba at every locality where Umanglais are worshipped.

Four types of Lai Haraoba are prevalent in the Meitei society, namely, Kanglei Haraoba is performed in many parts of the valley of Manipur excepting Moirang, Kakching and those areas where Chakpa Haraoba are practised. Moirang Haraoba is only in Moirang, Kakching Haraoba is held in kakching and Chakpa Haraoba is celebrated at Andro, Phayeng, Sekmai, Koutruk, Khuukhul, Leimaram and Tairenpokpi.

The processes of the Laiharaoba Haraoba are:- In every locality or village where the LAIHARA OBA is observed there is a consultant group consisting of Lai Salungba, elders, Laroi Singloi, Leiloi, Choubon, Pakhanglakpa, Ningollakpa. The decision for the commencement of the festival of Lai-Haraoba has to be taken by this consultant group. It is the responsibility of Lai Selungba and Choubon to inform Amaibi, Amaiba and Penakhongba and arrange for the beginning of the festival. Now-a-days besides the said consultant group more or less permanent local committees are formed for the festival and the local committee has constructed pucca, semi-pucca shrine and instal images of Umanglais at every locality. Thus it makes easy and effective for the arrangement of the festival. All the items required for the festival must be prepared one day ahead by Lai Selungba and elder women of the village. In the morning of the festival day the shrine and its surroundings are cleaned with water. In the evening all the prepared items for the festival are readily placed at the shrine. Next is the



dressing and decoration of the deities, the images of which are made of either basket work or wood covered with masks made of brass. The dressing of deity is called Lai Phi Shetpa. After the dressing of both Lainingthou (male deity) and Larremma (female deity) are ceremoniously placed on their respective thrones inside the shrine. This is known as Phamdengba.

The ritual of the festival starts with the calling up of the spirit from the water (a pond or a river), this is known as Lai lchouba, the first step of the festival.

Both men and women, boys and girls dress with proper costumes participate at Lai lchouba led by Maibi. Two persons are selected as Laipuba to carry the deity on the two ihaiphus (earthen pitchers) which contain 'leiyum'. The Maibi (priestess) then wraps up ihaiphu containing hiri (a thread in a higoaphi (a kind of shawl) and tie then around the neck of Laipuba.

The Maibi then begins the opening dance Laihou Jagoi to the tune of Pena (a string musical instrument) alongwith the Maibas and the Pena singers, lead the procession to the river or the pond. The Maibi performs the ritual of Konyai Hunba by chanting the Konthabol, gold and silver coins (which are symbols of earth and sky) are thrown into the water. After this rite the Maiba or the Maibi performs the offering of Khayomlakpa. The Khayom of Lainingthou is known as Nongthak Khayom (sky or heaven) and that of Leirenma as Keikhagi khayom (the below or the earth). This is known as Leithak-Leikha lakpa (binding of heaven and earth together). During this rite prayer is chanted when it is over both Khayoms are thrown into the water at the same time.

After offering of Khayom is over the Maibi takes the two lekhouphus from the Laipuba holding that of Lainingthou in the right hand and that of Lairrimma in the left hand. She then starts dancing known as Chuk-Pharon Jagoi to please the lords of four directions viz, the Thangjing, the Maring, the Wangren and the Koubrub. The lekhouphu then returned to the Laipuba,

and the whole procession enters the court yard of the shrine and the Maiba and the Maibi hold the Hiri of the lchouphus simultaneously approach the thrones the naval of the Lainingthou and the Maibi that of the Lairemna. It is believed that at this moment the spirits of the deities are infused or transmitted into the images. This is known as Thawai Happa. The Maiba performs the purification rite known as Anam-Aha Kokpa and the Pena-singers sing Karakpa song in praise of the virtues and the chivalries of the deity. Later, the Maibi delivers the oracle (Laipao Chenba) she then performs the ritual of Saroi Khangba (feeding of evil spirits or rite of appeasement) to guard off disturbances and hurdles with observance of the festival. Thus comes the end of the most important and first step of Lai Haraoba Festival. Then the second step is the daily rituals in the morning. It starts with the singing of the Pena, to awaken the deity. This ritual is known as Yaikeiba or Yakaiba. This is followed by delivery of Laipao or oracles by the Maiba. Then the meal is served. In the afternoon a Maibi initiates the daily ritual with a dance known as Laihou Jagoi. This is followed by Lei-Langba offering of flowers by Leirol Hanjaba. Next comes the Hoi Hoi shouting by the Maiba, then comes up Laibou dance and singing of Anoirol or Naheiol. Then dances of individual or groups. All the willing persons old or young, male and female can join the dances. The duration of the festivals varies from place to place.

The third and the most important step of Lai Haraoba is the Laibou Dance that demonstrates the birth of a child, construction of a house, plantation of cotton, weaving of clothes and offering of the finished articles to the deity. The Laibou dance consisting of three hundred and sixty four (364) Khut-thek (hand movement) known as Laibou khut-thek. It

Depicts the formation of human anatomy and portraying the making of each part of a human body through dance is known as Hakchang saba. Likewise the Yumsharol

crowd with the hooked end of the stick. The girls has to come out and dance with the Maibi. This is known as Lai Nupi Thiba (search of consort for the deity). This part of ritual has been dropped out in the present days because of certain problems like affecting of necklaces, tearing of clothes etc.

On the last day of the festival in the evening the sword dance known as Thang-Ta-Khousaba is performed by two Maibis-then Thangkhl Thokpa (appearance of Thangkhl tribes). It is a dance dream describing the meeting of Nongpok Ningthou dresses in a Thangkhl costume and Panthoibi dresses as a Thangkhl girl and their quarred over a piece of land and their final reconciliation then the last ritual of Augri Hangel dance and singing. It is believed that the singing of "Augri" is for the welfare and prosperity of the land and people or village concerned. After it there follows the performance of the rituals such as Thawai Mi-Kouba (calling of soul/spirit), Hithi-Yenthi Yappa and Sharit-Litpa. Then comes Lai-Nong-Gaba (retreat of the deity to heaven). After this, the ritual of

Lai-Tin-Thaba (appeasement of the deity) and then follows of Saroi-Khangba (feeding of evil spirits). Herein ends the ritual of Lai-Haraoba. A day after Lai-Nong-Gaba, there are games and sports held at the courtyard of the shrine. On this day varieties of game like Mukna (Meitei wrestling) Kanglei (Meitei Hockey) Lamjel (Athletics) Sagol Kanglei (Meitei Polo game) Thourai Ching Naba (tug of war) etc. In the athletic game both men and women can participate but competitors are into two parties separately for male and female.

In the evening the Pena singer sings to seek forgiveness for any mistake inadvertently committed during the days of the festival. This is known as Keining Kumba.

These processes mentioned above are more or less similar to other three kinds of Lai Haraoba and Kakching Haraoba with some variations here and there. At present days the Lai-Lam-Thokpa (outing of the deities) of Chaka Haraoba is commonly seen in almost all Lai Haraoba Festivals as it becomes modern style of outing of the deities at the most crowded places like the market places. It is to suit the social change of the modern time. The details of the ritual parts are not elaborated in this book as it is not the purpose of this book.

Name changed

I, the undersigned, **Ningol Panmei** of Thangmeiband Tarung, Imphal West, Manipur do hereby declare that, I have wholly renounced, relinquished and abandoned the use of old name **Panmei Ningol Kenshi**, as I have assumed my new name **Ningol Panmei**.

Sd/-
Ningol Panmei

Classes for NCC pre annual training camp



Imphal, July 1

Tulihal Battalion of 9 Sector Assam Rifles under the aegis of HQ IGAR (South) along with National Cadet Corps (NCC) and Nambol Higher Secondary School organised weapon and drill classes at Nambol Higher Secondary School, Bishnupur district as part of Pre Annual Training Camp for the motivated NCC

Cadets of the School on 30 Jun 2018. A total of 44 students attended the camp and were acquainted with basics of weapon training and importance of drill. The School faculty and the NCC staff were extremely grateful to the unit for their earnest endeavor and requested for continued assistance in near future for benefit of the NCC Cadets.

Assam Rifles organises security meet



Imphal, July 1

A "Security Meet" was conducted by Mantripukhri Battalion of 9 Sector Assam Rifles under the aegis of HQ IGAR (South) at Hanuman Top Company Operating Base and Sawombung Company Operating Base, Imphal East District on 30 Jun 2018. The forum was attended by Zilla Parishad member, village heads of various villages, Meira Paibis and youth club members of the villages in the area of both Company

Operating Bases. Approximately 100 villagers of nearby villages of both the Company Operating Base attended the meeting. The attendees were briefed regarding the prevailing security situation and necessary cooperation required from the people to maintain peace in the area. The platform helped the locals to discuss the security perspective in the area and to allow them to come up with suggestions to improve synergy between Assam Rifles and the local populace.

Assam Rifles saves snake bite victim

Imphal, July 1

Phundrei Battalion of 9 Sector Assam Rifles under aegis of HQ IGAR (South) saved the life of one snake bite victim on 30 Jun 2018. The victim Mrs Keeshamm Tamu, aged 60 years, resident of village Yairpok Bishnunaha, Thoubal District was bitten by a snake

and was immediately rushed to the unit hospital. The victim was treated by the medical team under the Regimental Medical Officer and discharged after stabilisation of vital parameters. The timely action of Battalion medical team not only saved precious human life but also reinforced good faith among the locals.

Swagat Hospital conducts media OPD clinic

Guwahati, July 1

City based Swagat Hospital conducted the media OPD clinic at Guwahati Press Club on 30 June 2018 for the benefit of member-journalists along with their families. Gracing the weekly health camp, physicians Dr Bapan Devnath and Dr Sibashish Saha offered free consultations to over 30 participants. Nurses Sonmoni Begum & Trishna Deka assisted the physicians in the camp, where senior marketing executive of the hospital, Chandan Borgohain was also present. Besides consultations, the participants also got the opportunity to check their weight, blood sugar & pressure.



Till date, the GPC clinic has been supported by Down Town Hospitals, GNRC Hospitals, Apollo Hospitals, SIMS Hospital, Medanta Hospital, Manipal Hospital, Fortis Hospital, Dispur Hospital, GATE Hospital, Ayursundra Hospital, Excelcare Hospital, Health City Hospital, Narayana Hospitals, Barhakur Clinic, Sun Valley Hospital, Rahman Hospital etc.