Heritage Information

Unique Id:

BGD-60.58.2023.00060

Section-1: Identification of the element

Heritage Location

Division

Sylhet

District

Moulvibazar

Upazila

Details Address

Geolocation(Latitude)

Geolocation(Longitude)

Community Category

Small Ethnic Groups

Community

Manipuri

Name of the Heritage, (as used by the community or group concerned)

Manipuri Maharaslila

Short title of the Heritage, (preferably within 200 words)

Ma?ipuri Maharaslila is a spiritual festival of the Manipuris to celebrate the Divine Love of Lord Krs?a and his devotee Radha, which includes performances and village fairs, thus falling under all the ICH domains.

Concerned Community(ies)/Group(s), (who recognize the element as part of their cultural heritage)

Physical location(s) of the element/how often it is practiced

The festival is organised mainly in Madhabpur Union in Kamolganj sub-district of Moulvibazar District in Sylhet, during full moon days of the Bengali month of Kartik (October-November).

Short description of the Heritage, (preferably within 350 words)

'Manipuri Maharaslila Utshob' (festival) is celebrated by the Manipuri Community, residing in the greater Sylhet region, especially in Moulvibazar. The festival lasts for one and a half days and is organized at the time of the full moon of the Bengali month of Kartik (at the end of October or early November). The festival has three distinctive different parts - Rakhal (literally, shepherd) Nach, a dance of boys, performed in the afternoon; Raslila dance, representing the Dance of

Divine Love between Lord Krisna and his devotee Radha. It is performed by young dancers dressed as a group of 'Gopi' and 'Krishna', following the dance form created by in 1779 by Ningthou Ching-Thang Khomba, also known as Rajarshi Bhagya Chandra, a 18th century Meitei monarch. The festival, which is held all night long, includes the third component of a village fair (Mela) for all local customers and outsiders. Historically, this festival has been arranged by the Manipuris for 172 years in Madhobpur region in Kamolganj sub-district of Moulvibazar, These days, the fair is also observed at Tetaigaon in Adampur of Moulvibazar District and Jayashree in Habigonj District. A similar celebration is at the same time in Assam (India), but not as significant as the traditional Raslila Festival. The term "Raslila" roughly means Dance of Divine Love. The dance form tells the story of Lord Krishna, Radha and the Gopis, and is considered as Krishna's favorite past-time. The Ramlila is an important part of the traditional Manipuri culture. When the dancers perform the Raslila, it symbolises the spiritual love for Lord Krishna. It is one of the most important part of Manipuri classical Indian dance. The Manipuri Raslila is unique, not only in terms of character but also costume. The look is indigenous, and the costume consists of embroidered stiff skirt, light muslin garment on top, white veil and traditional Manipuri jewelry.

Domains of the Heritage (applicable fields)

- [x] Oral Traditions and Expressions
- [x] Performing Arts
- [x] Social Customs and Traditions
- [x] Knowledge and Practices related to Nature and Universe
- [x] Traditional Craftsmanship
- [ ] Food

Section-2: Characteristics of the element

Practitioners(s)/performer(s) directly involved in the representation or practice of the Heritage (including roles, name, age, gender, social status, and/or professional category etc.)

Practitioners and Performers : Manipuri Community Roles : Gopal, Bokasur, Oja, Doiala (in Rakhal Nach); Gopi, Raasdhari (in Raas) and Sutrodhari, Dakhula in both dances. Age : All ages regarding their roles Gender : Both male and female Social Status : Community people of all stages Professional Category : N/A

Other tradition bearers (individuals/groups and their roles))

Mondoli Hajakura (decorators of dancing place), Baar Hongkorekura (artists of costumes), Daak Hongkorekura (Artists who make Mridanga) etc.

Language(s), register(s), speech level(s) involved

Language: Bishnupriya Manipuri, Brajabuli and Bangla

Associated tangible elements used (if any)

Mondoli (dancing ground); Fijet (costumes) alike cylindrical shaped skirt, blouse, translucent veil etc. for women performers, and white/ purple-coloured feisum (dhuti), chura and some other special ornaments for men performers; Horir Luut (people's devoting with sweets in the performance); Kortal and Dhak as musical instruments.

How are women and people of other genders associated with this Heritage?

Only women can become the Radhika and Gopis (female performers in Raas) in the night perfomance. The Sutrodhari (lead singer) and and other singers are usually female, as their vocal tones can be raised in higher ranges. People who help to dress the performers are also female. In fact, there is no such gender discrimination in Manipuri community yet.

Division of labour during the practice of this Heritage

The rituals of the Festival are performed by Brahman priests, while the entire community participates in the performances, preparation of food at the Mandops (temples), arrangement of the fair etc.

Elements to which other customary practices or practices may be connected or accessed in any respect of the heritage (if any)

Only Manipuris can join in the practice of dances and songs. But in the fair, anyone can be buyer or seller. The practice of adorning the Mondoli is continued by local practitioners of all communities irrespective of gender and religion.

Modes of transmission to others in the community

Dance and Songs are through Oja (Guru or Teachers), and the craftsmanship are hereditary. Presently craftsmanship are not practised by young generations.

Organizations concerned (non-governmental organizations and others)

Manipuri Ras Committee (semi-formally), MAATRA (research based organization)

Section-3: State of the element (viability)

Threats to the enactment

Enactment Threats Description

1. Diversification of livelihoods and income sources 2. Less benefitted by traditional practices 3. Diversification of young minds 4. Less interest of the marginalized people to bear the tradition

Threats to the transmission (if any)

1. Most of the tradition bearers are from middle-income and marginalized families 2. As holding the mode of ancient songs are oral, young generation are less interested to learn it as disciples 3. Using media and outsider instruments to popularize the songs among the youth might hamper the uniqueness of traditional singing for the long run.

Threat to associated tangible elements and resources (if any)

1. People associated with traditional costume makers are very rare nowadays 2. People associated with preparing Dhak (Mridanga) are rarely found

Viability of associated intangible elements (if any)

Very few of the young generation are interested to hold the viability of intangible elements. In the performance, electronic lights and sounds are collected locally and therefore, the sound quality are not always people-friendly always.

Have been taken any safeguarding measures to preserve this Heritage practices? (if any)

1. Widen the scope of viewing of performance through livestream measures (as lots of viewers gather in a very narrow place) 2. Strengthen the scope of security measures (as the festival happens through whole night and local volunteers cannot control the whole security)

Section-4: Data gathering/documentation, Consent and preparation of inventory entries

Consent of community/group/individuals concerned for data collection with a view to inventorying

Individual consent is collected from the people of the Manipuri community.

Restrictions on use of collected data, (if any)

N/A

Section-5: Resource Person

Data provider/Resource person (persons/groups, community representatives)

1. Uzzal Singha, Architect 2. Surajit Singha, Dakula (traditional percussionist) 3. Krishnakumari Sinha, Rasdhari

Date of data collection

05-07-2020

Place(s) of data collection

Madhobpur (Kamalganj, Moulvibazar) and Dhaka

Section-6: Safeguarding techniques

Existing safeguarding techniques adopted by the community for the safeguarding of the Heritage

Guru parampara (trainer-disciple relationship), voluntary services during the festival and taking contributions from per house of the locality.

Suggestions for safeguarding of the Heritage from the community

1. A regular monitoring of the festival's threats and weaknesses with local research organizations 2. Taking proper measures to broaden the festival area (tangibly and intangibly) 3. Patronizing the volunteers (security and others) of the festival 4. Helping the community by restricting outsiders with logistics support

Section-7: References to literature, discography, audiovisual materials or archives

References to/in literature

https://www.outlookindia.com/outlooktraveller/explore/story/69061/manipuri-raas-leela-and-things-you-need-to-know-about-it

Audiovisual materials or archives

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Br0cis6-wE https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEi5bTAxN0M
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ix-spaQjjIE

Discography or archives

https://www.flickr.com/photos/32230414@N05/with/3017783044/

Section-8: Modalities for updating the information contained in the inventory entry

Data Compiler (persons/groups, including community representatives, who compiled the information)

Sukanta Singha, ss.du.ais@gmail.com Surajit Singha

Date of Community Consent

Consent of community/group/individuals concerned for data collection with a view to inventorying

Uzzal Singha

Present Condition of Heritage

Threatened with extinction

Brief description of Present condition of the Heritage, (if any)

Threatened with extinction

Section-9: Community suggestions

Brief description of suggestions for safeguarding of the element by community members/experts/holders, (if any)

1. Monitoring should be based on local community informants and resource persons 2. It should be kept in mind that the ritual practices of Manipuris associated with the festival should not be interrupted 3. In every seminar or outside

workshops, acknowledged community persons should be presented for ensuring relevance and reliability.

Restrictions on use of collected data, (if any).

Time constraints and the COVID19 pandemic constrained collection of information, otherwise people are very amiable and friendly.

Section-10: Upload Document

Consent Document

PDF

Heritage Details Document

PDF

Heritage Images

