Heritage Information

Unique Id:

BGD-60.58.2024.00118

Section-1: Identification of the element

Heritage Location

Division

Sylhet

District

Moulvibazar

Upazila

Kamalganj

Details Address

Manipuri cultural complex

Geolocation(Latitude)

24.280441

Geolocation(Longitude)

91.861173

Community Category

Others

Community

Meitei

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

Lai Haraoba

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

Lai Haraoba is a traditional Manipuri (Meitei) festival celebrated in Meitei communities within the greater Sylhet division of Bangladesh. This knowledge and practice of Lai Haraoba falls primarily in the domain of social customs and traditions, rituals and festive events, performing arts and secondarily in the traditional craftsmanship.

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

All Manipuri (Meitei) people recognize "Lai Haraoba" as part of their cultural heritage.

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

Lai Haraoba is a vibrant traditional festival practiced annually by the Manipuri (Meitei) people within the greater Sylhet division of Bangladesh.

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

Lai-Haraoba which literally means divine rejoicing or festivities stands for a rich and variegated ensemble or combine of rituals, prayers, music dances all woven around traditional deities of Manipur usually celebrated annually or according to fixed frequencies which differ from deity in and around the temple in which the deities are worshipped. These deities

about three hundred and sixty one in numbers are spread over the length and breadth of the Manipur valley and their locations and jurisdictions are subject matters of centuries old Manipur tradition well recorded and specified in all authentic scriptures which in their turn run into several numbers. As these deities are usually kept and worshipped outside homestead lands and the places of such worship are in the midst of thick and green groves of trees and natural vegetation, the deities are popularly known as "Umang Lais" in Manipuri. There are various kind of rites and ritual presenting course of long process in the "Lai-Haraoba". Presentation of Solo or Duet or group dances, as separate items of the festival, covers the appearance of kings and queens, husbands and wives, boys and girls in an undeclared competition, as mentioned above. But the most essential part of Lai-Haraoba is the enactment of the drama of the entire creation, in the open arena by the vast congregation, through the medium of dances and music. Traditional Lai-Haraoba of Manipuri (Meitei) viewed the idea of being oneness of the whole world. To have an in-depth study of this Art is nothing but to keep our body and mind on the highest level.

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.)

Maibi: These are female ritual specialists who play a central role in the festival. They can be of any age but typically undergo extensive training to learn the rituals, dances, and music associated with Lai Haraoba. Social status doesn't necessarily dictate who becomes a Maibi, but traditionally, the knowledge and skills were passed down through families. Maiba: This is the male counterpart to a Maibi. Maiba might assist with rituals, play instruments, or participate in specific ceremonies. Non-Maibi Participants: In addition to the Maibis, other members of the Meitei community can also participate in the festival. This includes: Male Dancers: They perform alongside the Maibis and may represent specific deities or mythological figures. Musicians: They provide musical accompaniment using traditional instruments like the pena and cymbals. General Audience: The entire community is encouraged to attend and participate in the festivities.

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

Besides the Maibi (female ritual specialists) and Maiba (male counterparts), Lai Haraoba involves several other tradition bearers who contribute to the vibrant celebration: Pena Khongba, literally translated as "Pena player" in Meitei language, refers to a specific role within the Lai Haraoba tradition. Artisans: Skilled craftspeople create the elaborate costumes, headgear, and masks used by the performers. These traditional artisans ensure the visual splendor of Lai Haraoba remains alive. Community Members: The active participation of the entire Meitei community is essential for Lai Haraoba. They contribute through volunteer work, donations, and simply by attending the celebrations, keeping the tradition alive and vibrant.

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

Lai Haraoba involves a fascinating interplay of languages, registers, and speech levels: Languages: Meitei Mayek: This is the primary language used during Lai Haraoba. It's an indigenous language of the Meitei people with its own script. The Maibis chant prayers, recite narratives, and sing hymns in Meitei Mayek. Registers: Formal Register: This is used for prayers, chants, and hymns recited by the Maibis. The language is respectful and adheres to established forms of address when invoking deities or reciting sacred texts. Informal Register: This might be used for explanations, announcements, or casual interactions between participants during the festival. Speech Levels: Elevated Speech: The Maibis often use an elevated speech level when delivering prayers or narratives. This adds a sense of solemnity and reverence to the occasion. Normal Speech: This level is used for informal communication among participants or explanations provided to the audience. Overall, Lai Haraoba utilizes a rich tapestry of language depending on the specific function and desired effect. The formal registers and elevated speech levels in Meitei Mayek emphasize the sacred nature of the rituals, while informal communication ensures community participation and understanding.

Associated tangible elements used (if any)

Lai Haraoba is a vibrant festival rich in tangible elements that contribute to its visual and ritualistic significance. Here are some key aspects: Costumes: The Maibis and dancers wear elaborate costumes specific to their roles and the deities

being honored. These costumes are often colorful and intricately decorated with symbolic motifs. Fabrics like silk and brocade are commonly used. Headwear can include elaborate crowns, feathered helmets, or specific headpieces associated with particular deities. Masks: Certain dances may involve the use of masks depicting specific deities or mythological creatures. These masks are often made of wood or papier-mâché and painted with vibrant colors. Shrines: Lai Haraoba celebrations take place at local shrines dedicated to the umanglai (deities). These shrines can vary in size and complexity, but they often feature specific altars or designated spaces for offerings and rituals. Instruments: Music plays a vital role in Lai Haraoba. Traditional instruments like the pena. Pena is a mono string instrument falling in the lute category. The Pena, one of the oldest traditional Meitei musical instruments.

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

Women play a central and powerful role in Lai Haraoba. Here's how: Maibi: The core figures of Lai Haraoba are the Maibis, who are exclusively female ritual specialists. They lead the performances, singing, chanting, dancing, and playing instruments. Their knowledge and skill are essential for the proper execution of the rituals. Limited Role for Men: While men participate in Lai Haraoba, their roles are generally secondary to the Maibis. They can be: Maiba: These are male counterparts to the Maibis, but their participation is less prominent. They might assist with rituals, play instruments, or participate in specific ceremonies. Dancers: Male dancers perform alongside the Maibis, often representing deities or mythological figures. Musicians: Men play traditional instruments like the pena and cymbals. Community Participation: Women and people of other genders can also participate in the broader Lai Haraoba celebrations beyond the core roles. This might involve: Volunteer work: Helping with preparations, setting up the shrine, or assisting with offerings. Donations: Contributing financially or with materials to support the festival. Audience: Everyone in the community is encouraged to attend and participate as observers, experiencing the rich cultural heritage of Lai Haraoba.

Division of labour during the practice of this Heritage

Lai Haraoba thrives on a collaborative spirit, with a clear division of labor ensuring the smooth running of the festival. Here's a breakdown of the key roles and their contributions: Maibi (Female Leaders): Core figures leading dances, chants, music, and rituals. Maiba (Male Supporters): Assist Maibis, play instruments, and participate in ceremonies. Hereditary Specialists: Families ensure specific rituals and knowledge are passed down. Drummers: Provide rhythmic foundation with symbolic meaning. Artisans: Create elaborate costumes, headgear, and masks. Oral Historians: Share stories and significance behind rituals. Community: Volunteers, donates, and attends, preserving the tradition. This structure empowers women and ensures everyone contributes to this enduring cultural expression.

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

Lai Haraoba is deeply connected to various aspects of Meitei culture and practices, forming a rich tapestry of traditions. Here's how it intersects with other customary practices: Mythology and Creation Stories: The dances and rituals of Lai Haraoba often depict stories from Meitei mythology. These stories explain the creation of the universe, the origin of deities, and the relationship between humans and the divine realm. Understanding these myths is crucial to appreciating the deeper meaning behind Lai Haraoba practices. Sanamahi Religion: Influences Lai Haraoba rituals and deities. Meitei Mayek Language: Maibis chant prayers in this endangered language. Crafts: Artisans create elaborate costumes and masks. Community Life: Strengthens bonds through social gatherings. This tapestry of traditions celebrates Meitei heritage.

Modes of transmission to others in the community

Lai Haraoba's transmission within the Meitei community relies on a fascinating blend of traditional and contemporary methods: Traditionally: Maibis train apprentices, families share knowledge, and community members learn by participating. Modernly: Performances are documented for wider sharing and future learning.

Organizations concerned (non-governmental organizations and others)

While there isn't a single, dominant organization overseeing Lai Haraoba, several entities contribute to its preservation and promotion: Community-based Organizations: Local Meitei Community Groups: These local organizations play a crucial role in organizing and sustaining Lai Haraoba celebrations within their communities. They might raise funds, manage logistics, and encourage participation.

Section-3: State of the element (viability)

Threats to the enactment

Urgent Safeguard Needed

Enactment Threats Description

While Lai Haraoba is traditional ritual festival within the Meitei community, it does face some challenges that threaten its continued enactment: Endangered Language: The primary language used in Lai Haraoba, Meitei Mayek, is facing endangerment. With fewer speakers, the tradition risks losing its unique linguistic connection. Urbanization and Modernization: As Meitei communities experience urbanization and the influence of modern lifestyles, the traditional way of life that nurtured Lai Haraoba might be weakened. Younger generations may have less exposure to the practice. Limited Resources: Financial constraints and lack of adequate resources can hinder the ability to organize Lai Haraoba celebrations at the desired scale, impacting the transmission and visibility of the tradition. Loss of Knowledge: The intricate knowledge and skills associated with Lai Haraoba, particularly those passed down through oral traditions and hereditary families, face the risk of being lost if not actively documented and transmitted to future generations.

Threats to the transmission (if any)

The challenges to Lai Haraoba transmission in Bangladeshi Meitei communities: Limited Practitioners: The scarcity of Maibi and Maiba with the necessary skills restricts the practice, potentially leading to simplified forms or symbolic observances. This lack of practitioners creates a dependence on Manipur for the knowledge and resources necessary to sustain Lai Haraoba in Bangladesh.

Threat to associated tangible elements and resources (if any)

Limited Lai Haraoba practice in Bangladesh threatens associated elements: Costumes, masks & crafts: Limited Availability: Skilled artisans who traditionally create the elaborate costumes, headgear, and masks is scarce in Bangladesh. This could lead to a decline in the quality or authenticity of these visual elements. instruments: The traditional instruments used in Lai Haraoba, like the pena and cymbals, is difficult to obtain or maintain in Bangladesh if skilled craftspeople are not readily available. Dependence on Imports: The communities might have to rely on importing these items from Manipur, which can be expensive and inconvenient.

Viability of associated intangible elements (if any)

The viability of Lai Haraoba's associated intangible elements in Bangladesh faces challenges due to the limited practice compared to Manipur. Here's a breakdown: Intangible Elements: Knowledge and Skills: Potential Loss: With fewer practitioners (Maibi and Maiba), the intricate knowledge and skills for performing rituals, chanting, and playing instruments are at risk of being lost if not actively transmitted. Oral Traditions : Limited Transmission: The dependence on elders for oral transmission of stories and knowledge becomes critical. Without a wider pool of learners, these traditions might weaken.

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

Community-based efforts: Meitei communities in Bangladesh hold Lai Haraoba celebrations on a limited scale, passing down knowledge and traditions within their families or social circles.

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

Restrictions on use of collected data, (if any)

There are no restrictions on the use of data collection. Visitors and audiences are always welcomed in the Manipuri community

Section-5: Resource Person

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

Hamom Tonu Babu Singha (73) Gender: Male Address: Village: chhongaon, Union: Adampur District:MoulviBazar

Date of data collection

16-02-2023

Place(s) of data collection

Chauba Memorial Manipuri Intellectual Property Museum

Section-6: Safeguarding techniques

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

With fewer practitioners and resources, Lai Haraoba is at risk of becoming extinct in Bangladesh. However, the Manipuri community's limited celebrations are helping keep the tradition alive and providing valuable learning opportunities .

Suggestions for safeguarding of the Heritage from the community

Supporting Lai Haraoba's Future in Bangladesh Limited practitioners and resources pose challenges to Lai Haraoba's continued practice in Bangladesh. To ensure its survival, consider initiatives like: Community-Based Programs: Encourage apprenticeship programs, workshops, and wider community engagement to transmit knowledge and foster interest. Documentation Projects: Record rituals, knowledge, and variations specific to the Bangladeshi context for future generations. Financial and Resource Support: Provide financial aid to practitioners and support local artisans who create Lai Haraoba elements. Raising Awareness: Organize public performances and integrate Lai Haraoba into cultural events to generate interest and appreciation. By implementing such initiatives and fostering collaboration between communities, researchers, and cultural organizations, Lai Haraoba's unique expression in Bangladesh can be preserved for future generations.

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

References to/in literature

Parratt, Saroj Nalini Arambam (2005). The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa, Volume 1 Parratt, S.N. 1980. The Religion of Manipur. Calcutta: Firma KLM (Pvt.) Limited. Parratt, S.N. and J. Parratt. 1997. The Pleasing of the Gods: Meitei Lai Haraoba. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. Sanajaoba, N. (ed.). 1991. Manipur: Past and present – the ordeals of and heritage of a civilization, Vol. 2. New Delhi: Mittal Publications. Shakespeare, J. 1913. 'The Pleasing of the God Thangjing'. Man. XIII.1:112. Singh, E.Nilakanta. 1982. Aspects of Indian Culture. Imphal: Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy. Singh, E.N. 1997. Manipuri Dance. New Delhi: Omsons Publications.

Audiovisual materials or archives

YouTube: There are a limited number of Lai Haraoba performances available on Youtube. While the quality might vary, they can offer a glimpse into the tradition. Search for "Lai Haraoba performance" to see available videos. Documentaries: Some documentaries have explored the cultural heritage of Manipur and might include segments on Lai Haraoba. Look for documentaries on Manipuri culture or dance traditions.

Discography or archives

Field Recordings: Researchers or organizations focused on preserving Manipuri culture might have conducted field recordings of Lai Haraoba rituals. These recordings would likely capture the chanting, hymns, and instrumental music used in the ceremonies. Checking with universities with South Asian studies programs or folklore archives in Manipur might lead to such recordings. Folklore Recordings: Recordings of Manipuri folk music might contain elements or instruments used in Lai Haraoba. These recordings might not be solely focused on Lai Haraoba but could offer insights into the musical traditions associated with it.

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

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

As a cultural activist and freelancer, I, Oinam Lanthoy Singha, volunteered with the Manipuri community for the Cultural Heritage Inventory of Bangladesh (CHIB). This role involved documenting various cultural elements. I'm grateful to Rabi Kiron Singha (also known as Maisnam Rajesh) for his assistance in compiling this specific inventory entry.

Date of Community Consent

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

With consent from the Manipuri Cultural Complex, a community organization and member of the ICH-pedia Bangladesh Consortium.

Present Condition of Heritage

Threatened with extinction

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

Lai Haraoba in Bangladesh faces challenges due to limited practice, but there are efforts to preserve this cultural heritage through community engagement and potential documentation initiatives. The future of Lai Haraoba in Bangladesh depends on supporting these efforts and ensuring its continued transmission to younger generations.

Section-9: Community suggestions

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

Due to the limited practice of Lai Haraoba in Bangladesh compared to Manipur, documented suggestions from community members within Bangladesh might be scarce. However, based on the challenges identified, here are some general recommendations that could be aligned with the concerns of experts and practitioners: Community Engagement: Encourage Participation: Organize workshops or gatherings focused on Lai Haraoba to rekindle interest and encourage younger generations to participate. Intergenerational Knowledge Sharing: Facilitate knowledge transmission by pairing experienced practitioners with younger community members for learning and mentorship. Documentation and Archiving: Record Rituals: Document Lai Haraoba performances, rituals, and oral histories to preserve knowledge and variations specific to Bangladeshi communities. Create Educational Materials: Develop resources like booklets or online content that explain the significance and practices of Lai Haraoba for wider awareness. Resource Mobilization and Support: Seek Funding: Collaborate with cultural organizations or government bodies to secure funding for workshops, documentation projects, and supporting local artisans who create Lai Haraoba costumes and instruments. Promote Collaboration: Explore partnerships with institutions or practitioners in Manipur for knowledge exchange or resource sharing to benefit Lai Haraoba in Bangladesh. Raising Awareness: Public Performances: Organize public presentations of Lai Haraoba to generate interest and showcase the beauty of this cultural tradition. Media Outreach: Collaborate with media outlets to feature stories about Lai Haraoba and its significance in Bangladesh, raising public awareness and appreciation.

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

There were no such restrictions on the use of data collected.

Section-10: Upload Document

Heritage Details Document

PDF

Heritage Images











Heritage Video

Download/ডাউনলোড