

LAI-HARAOBA

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 Manipur.

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.

In the Lai-Haraoba festival also were instrumental for the promotion of sports and several athletic events. Mentioned may be made Polo, Mukna Kangjei (a kind of wrestling), Kang (a game played on the dry and smooth mud floor of big outhouses). This traditional game is very old and these mentioned are famous story of Khamba- Thoibi (Moirang) in Moirang Thangjing Lai-Haraoba.

Traditional Lai-Haraoba of Manipur (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.

"DANCES' OF LAI HARA OBA"

Lai Haraoba is a ritual mainly dominated by dance. The ancient book "Anoirol" is a valuable source of information on the origins and forms of Meitei (Manipuri) dances. "Dance" was known as "Noiba" in ancient Manipuri.

The chronicle Anoirol song sung by Pena Asheiba (Pena player) of Laibou Dance. It Rhythmic song depict the whole life span of a mortal being from birth to death, the creation of the universe, the sculpting of human body, imparting of knowledge to mortal life and the evolution of civilization and ending life (the soul merge to Almighty). How the details of Lai Haraoba dance were conceived and formed? We have "Lai Haraoba Laihou Dance" derived from the divine act of Sidaba mapu coming out of His trance on the space of water to begin the creation of the Universe. From Haraba's plan and attempt of destructing the universe created by Asiba derived a unique male dance called (Nupa Jagoi) dance of man. The act of the creation of "Nongthangleima" (Goddess of lightening) to guard the universe from Haraba by dancing give birth to the first form of female dance (Nupi Jagoi). "Leishee Dance" was derived from the act of Lainuras shaping the earth.

Then, from the creation of living beings on the earth by Asiba on the bidding of Sidaba Mapu. Conceived the 364 hand gesture movement Khuthek of the Laibou Jagoi: Atiya Yaibeeran Shidaba "Khayom Jagoi Khuttek(1)", "Lainingthou Yetki (right side) Khuthek(1)", "Lairembee Oigi (left side) Khuthek(1)", "Hakchang Saba (body creating dance) Khuthek(64)", "Nungngou Jagoi (child birth dance) Khuthek (55)", "Yumsarol (house constructing dance) Khuthek(40)", "Panthoibee Jagoi (Panthoibee dance) Khuthek(14)", "Pamyatlan Jagoi (Cultivating dance) Khuthek(37)", "Langnairol & Phisarol Jagoi (yarning and weaving dance) Khuthek(140)", "Longkhon Jagoi (fish catching dance/soul collection dance) Khuthek(11)". Then we have "Panthoibee Dance". In this dance, the Godness - incarnate Panthoibee is shown enacting varied roles of (a) a mad (e) a furious woman, (b) a deaf woman, (c) a dumb woman, (d) a hateful woman, woman, (f) an obstinate woman, (g) a lame woman, (h) an orphan woman, (i) a stubborn woman, (j) a prostitute woman, (k) a day-dreamer woman, (1) a fighter in the

battle woman, (m) a cook woman, (n) a wood cutter woman, (o) a fish monger woman, (p) a kind woman, (q) a cruel woman, so on and so forth. All these dances have conceived facial expression of Panthoibi Dance in the Lai-Haraoba.

All the dances of Lai-Haraoba may be brought under the name of "Thougal Jagoi" as these are all meant for invoking and appearing of deities. "Thougal" stands for prayer and service. The various dances of Lai-Haraoba like Thougal Jagoi; Phamdou Jagoi male group dance, Leimarel thougal Jagoi Female group dance, Phungarol Jagoi Male and Female Duet Dance. All the dances in Lai-Haraoba do have folk elements and origins. But, there are also some classical elements unavoidably. We can trace Classical strands like Laiching Jagoi. Traditional Lai Haraoba. Viewed from the artistic angle this traditional dance (Lai Haraoba) gives not only a pleasure to mankind but also can purify the souls within us. Besides, it can infuse the idea of being oneness of the whole world.

MAIBEE DANCE

In all Lai-Haraoba is performed under the holy participation and supervision of the Maibee. Broadly speaking, we may term the dances of Maibee as Maibee dance. One the first day of the Lai-Haraoba (likouba), the Maibee performs Laihou dance, Ihai dance, Lai-Okpa dance etc. On the second day in the evening, the main programme is Laiching Jagoi follow with Laibou dances performed with the Maibee in the lead. Laibou dances is comprised of three stages; bow (pray to God of four corners) rounded three times marching, slow movement dancing and jumping fast movement. These steps involve both slow and fast rhythms of movement. This main dance is followed by "Longkhon Jagoi" or "Mikon Jagoi". Then Paton Jagoi, Phibul Jagoi, Chongkhong Jagoi of Maibee etc.. The varied dances embody the spiritual and philosophical aspects of life and its existence on the earth. The programme of these dances continues besides other items till the final day of the "Lai- Haraoba" ceremony. On the final day, at the Lai Roi programmes, there is an additional of "Thang-Jagoi" (sword dance). An also item of choosing a bride for the deity is also performed i.e. Lai Nupithiba (consort

searching dance) by Maibee ritual dancing angel. The Loutarol of Tangkhul & Nurabi are performed in the accompaniment of folk song, rhythmic song. It is an episode of a beautiful drama with highly eternal romantic play of god and goddess.

The basic movements of "Maibee" dances involve the moving, falling and kicking of the feet. The hands dance raising and falling the arms with fingers spreading and snapping. The hands also dance folding and then rising and falling between the forehead and waistline. The feet creep, kick and jump. Different dances involve the varied forms and speeds of these hand foot movements.

LEIMA JAGOI (WOMEN GROUP DANCE)

When the human kind became fully matured in acquiring knowledge they (the human kind) till to-day imitate Lai-Haraoba which was kept and handed over them the Gods and Goddess. After a long lapse of time in comfort the human being once again take shelter at the feet of the Lainingthou (God head) and Lairembi (Goddess) with unstinted prayer to keep them alive to make themselves their (God & Goddess) disciple and for the prosperity on this earth.

All the dances of Lai-Haraoba may be brought under the name of "Thougal Jagoi" (prayer and service). This dance (Leima Jagoi) is prayer & invoking with song sing by the performers to appease the Godhead (Lainingthou) and Goddess (Lairembi) by beautifully clad lasses in simple dance ("Chumsha Jagoi") hand gesture movements. In the Lai-Haraoba Thougal Jagoi come into existence with serial by performance given first upon by Maibee's Lai-Okpa Jagoi, then Nupa Thogal Jagoi (Phamdou Jagoi), then Leima Thougal Jagoi compulsory performed as Group Dances. It is also Lai-Haraoba's dances offered to God & Goddess before the starting of the "Laibou" (Long process of ritual Maibeas lead and follow marching Group Dance). The lasses of colourfully robed and brightly ornamented.

KHAMBA- THOIBI JAGOI

The Khamba-Thoibi Jagoi or otherwise is known as the Phungarel Jagoi is a part of Lai-Haraoba dance which is performed on the closing day of the Lai-Haraoba. This dance represents the dual dancing of the Lainingthou and the Lairembi in expression of their ecstasies. The dance also depicts a glorious historical background in the happy union of the "Santreng" The Meitei King and his beloved the "Sanarembi" after a long years of separation and sufferings due to evil plans and trapes of the wicked Chaishra. This dance also connotes the glow of light from the darkness; the prevailing of the truth over the evils.

Indigenous Meitei Musical Instrument

PENA

"Pena" has been the main musical instrument for Meitei. It is an inseparable of their life and culture from pre-history. Pena is a musical organ but also associated with rites and rituals of the land (Manipur). The indigenous features of Meitei folk songs and folk dances become more apparent accompaniment of "Pena" player singer.

During the birth, marriage, death ceremony too Pena music is rendered when blessing of Almighty Lord are sought by reciting the stories of the creation of the earth. When a man is about to breath his last, the song "Nongarol" describing the soul. The mythology of Pena ethereal (Pena Meihourol).

According to the book "Pena Meihourol" (history of Pena), it is believed that this musical organ was first used by deities. In Moirang, Thangjing (deities) reigned for the long period (in memorable before BC) Lord Thangjing plucked the hairs of white horse, the royal mount of Lord Marjing on make Pena. Maru and Cheijing a bow, then played on the Pena enchantingly holding it with, His divine bands. Then first Pena minstrel of Panthoibee period was Wakhumang Panthong, then the first Pena player in the Panthoibi Lai-Haraoba of Khaba clan was Tamna Haorok (BC 200 above) Pena Meihourol.

Leinung Tharuk Asheiba (33 A.D.) the renowned Pena player and singer of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba reign is a name worth mentioned herewith reference to the origin and popularisation of this instrument.

-During the reign of Poireiton (Langba chak), the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, Nahabam Moirenjamba made the stud of Pena of bamboo offshoot and its bow of Ureirom (Bixa orellena) branch. Then "Takhel Khoma" used Coconut shell for the stud and horse tail for the low string. Poireiton also brought a number of social cultural upliftments during his reign.

Pena has two parts. The Pena Cheijing and the Pena Maru have also 9/9 name in different parts. The Cheijing and Maru means God Father and Goddess Mother. The left hand holds the stud balancing it on the left side above breast and right hand holds the bow, play on the stud. The sound is combination "R" and "U" in which "R" is the Leimaren Goddess and "U" is the Lainingthou (God)".

"Pena" is a divine instrument. The moon is the face of the Stud. The fig tree in the moon (the black spots) is the value. The book glorifies the philosophical significance of Pena and its origin. This story of Pena (Pena Meihourol) was received from Pena Asheiba Eminent Late Guru W. Thambalngou of Lamdeng (1918-2004).

In Lai-Haraoba, Pena plays a very important role in the dances of Lai-Haraoba "Pena" imparts the soul melody, it accompanies the prayers song and dances of Lai- Haraoba. It is believed that the hypnotising music of Pena helps the Maibeas in getting themselves possessed by divine spirit. There are nine popular cadences of Pena. There is one more Pena cadence which is considered sacred and heavenly Lairol Laiching Marol & Hepli or Helip Mapum, Hepli Pabot, Hepli Thangyei, Kalen Thangyei, Kalen Sheijing, Leimarel Sheisak, Ayangleima Sheisak, Nongthang Leima Sheisak, Panthoibi Sheisak, etc.

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