

Ritual Festival for Appeasing Ancestral Gods: A Study of Kanglei Lai-haraoba Festival of Manipur

Nganbi Chanu

Lai Haraoba is one of the most important indigenous ritual festivals celebrated by the Meitei community of Manipur. It is celebrated to propitiate and please the ancestral deities to get their blessings in return. It depicts the act of creating universe and its objects, and unveils the endless journey of universe through its ritualistic performances. It is celebrated in Manipur since time immemorial and is being continued till today. The festival includes rituals, ceremonial, dance, music, oral literatures (through hymn and songs) etc. which are handed down from one generation to another. It is inseparably linked with the evolution of human beings, how they took to settlement by satisfying their universal basic needs of food, clothing and shelter by cultivating, building houses, wearing, etc. The paper shows the significance of the Lai Haraoba in Manipuri Society and discusses Kanglei Haraoba and its special features. The finding presents the festival's unique Pre-Vaisnavite (Hindu) worldview, which in its aesthetic sensitivity discusses the core of Manipuri culture.

Keywords: Lai Haraoba; Kanglei; Lainingthou; Lairembi; Amaiba; Amaibi; Penakhongba; Ekouba

Introduction

There are different interpretations regarding the etymology of the term *Lai-Haraoba*. Lai Haraoba literally means pleasing the Gods and the essence of the ritual is that it is performed to call up the Lais (Dieties) and carry out rituals which give them pleasure (Paratt, 1997: 18). It is defined as the merry-making of Gods and Goddessess (Singh, 1961: 30). Lai Haraoba also means the rejoicing of Gods (Hudson, 1975: 104) and 'Spirits' pleasure (Lightfoot, 1958: 12). Whatsoever definition it may be, one cannot deny its derivation of the term from the phrase 'Lai-Hoi-Laoba' (shouting of hoi) of the Leisemba (creation) myth. Once Atiya Guru Sidaba (son of God) after completing the creation of Earth, remained confused on how to create living beings that would inhabit the Earth. At

Nganbi Chanu is Ph. D. Scholar at the Department of Manipuri Dance, School of Humanities, Manipur University, Canchipur, Manipur, India.

this juncture, his father who is the Supreme God, Atingkok Sidaba, widely opened his mouth and showed the world of living beings. Atiya Guru Sidaba, being hinted by his father, was overjoyed and by entering himself inside his father's mouth, he drove all the living beings out. And all the beings at their excitement shouted hoi. Thus, shouting of hoi 'Lai-Hoi-Laoba' later came to be known as Lai-Haraoba (Kulachandra, 1963: 1). Once Atiya Guru Sidaba (son of God) after completing the creation of Earth, remained confused on how to create living beings that would inhabit the Earth. At this juncture, his father who is the Supreme God, Atingkok Sidaba, widely opened his mouth and showed the world of living beings. Atiya Guru Sidaba, being hinted by his father, was overjoyed and by entering himself inside his father's mouth, he drove all the living beings out. And all the beings at their excitement shouted hoi. Thus, shouting of hoi 'Lai-Hoi-Laoba' later came to be known as Lai-Haraoba (Kulachandra, 1963: 1). The traditional scholars, inspite of the drawbacks of the above theory, popularised it as the evolution of Lai-Haraoba was generally treated within a ritual and mythical framework of Meitei belief system. Thus, by observing all the definitions given by different scholars, Lai-Haraoba can be defined as the reenactment of creation through rituals, ceremonies, hymn, dances, songs, etc. to please the deities.

The texts of the Lai-Haraoba were rarely preserved in written forms as most of them were destroyed in war or religious persecution. Records were mostly based on the secondary information by taking bits and pieces from the surviving puyas in the form of manuscripts. In all these years the main three functionaries – Amaiba (Priest), Amaibi (Priestess) and Penakhongba/Pena Asheiba (Pena player/singer) were credited for preserving the oral tradition of Lai-Haraoba by handing down from generation to generation.

There are two views regarding the origin of Lai-Haraoba. The first group strongly puts forward the view that the festival first originated from Koubru hill (believed to be the earliest settlement area of the Meitei). However, when the celebration took place at Koubru, the main deities representing the Pa (Male) and the Pi (Female) principles i.e. Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi were not present and therefore regarded that the sequences in the performance of Lai Haraoba was incomplete.

The second group opines that the festival was first held at Langmai hill (now known as Nongmaiching hill) based on the text of 'Panthoibi Khongul' (Footsteps of Panthoibi) taking it, as the sole authority. It was translated from the ancient manuscript by Moirangthem Chandra Singh. He dated the first performance of Lai-Haraoba in pre-Christian, pre-Pakhangba period during the time of Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi. Pakhangba has both human and divine qualities in Meitei history and mythology. He can change in the form of a human and a serpent. As a man, he is regarded as the first king, whose reign according to the 'Cheitharaol Kumbaba' (The court chronicle of the king of Manipur) began in 33 AD.

Typology of Lai Haraoba

Inspite of the philosophical essence and main rituals of the Lai Haraoba being the same, there are some regional variations in the performances, say in dances, songs, hymns, rituals, sequences etc. It is divided into different types by different scholars. N.

Kulachandra (1972: 24) gives three types: Kanglei Haraoba, Moirang Haraoba and Chakpa Haraoba. According to W.L. Singh (1989: 1) and Sharma (2010: 66) are there four types which are Kanglei Haraoba, Moirang Haraoba, Chakpa Haraoba and Kakching Haraoba. N. Arambam (1985: 2) mentioned five types: Kanglei Haraoba, Moirang Haraoba, Kakching Haraoba, Andro Haraoba and Chakpa Haraoba. Joychandra Singh (2009: 742-743) presented seven types: Kanglei Haraoba, Moirang Haraoba, Kakching Haraoba, Chakpa Haraoba, Andro Haraoba, Phayeng Haraoba and Sekmai Haraoba.

There is however only four types of Lai-Haraoba recognised by Pundit Loishang (an institution of religious preachers/leaders) of Manipur. These are (i) Kanglei Haraoba (ii) Moirang Haraoba (iii) Chakpa Haraoba and (iv) Kakching Haraoba. The other forms like Andro, Phayeng, Sekmai, Leimaram, Khurkhul, Koutruk, Tairenpokpi, etc. are all grouped under Chakpa Haraoba.

(I) Kanglei Haraoba: Since this paper is mainly based on study of Kanglei Haraoba, it will be discussed in details later.

(II) Moirang Haraoba: This form of Haraoba is celebrated at Moirang (South West of the Imphal Valley, the state Capital). Moirang Haraoba is also called Moirang Thangjing Haraoba as it is carried out in honour of Lord Thangjing. It is divided into three forms: Khongchingba, Lamthokpa and Yumphamba (Sekho 1973: 5). The three forms are celebrated yearly one after another; say Khongchingba is performed in the first year, Lamthokpa in the second year and Yumphamba in the third year. The duration of Moirang Haraoba festival is generally long which goes up to one month compared to other types of Haraoba.

(III) Chakpa Haraoba: Though there are various opinions regarding the origin of Chakpa¹, it has been generally accepted that they are one of the earliest settlers of Manipur. Chakpa Haraoba includes the Haraoba of Andro, Phayeng, Khurkhul, Sekmai etc. as mentioned above. Various deities are being worshiped by the Chakpas. Some of the important deities are Panam Ningthou and Pureiromba of Andro, Ichum Lairembi of Khurkhul, Koubru and Loyarakpa of Sekmai, Phayeng and Leimaram etc. Animal sacrifice is prevalent in the Chakpa Haraoba which is not found in other forms of Haraoba. All the prayers, hymns and chants are done only though the language of Chakpa known as Chakparon (Kumar, 2001: 73). They somehow had a slight cultural difference with the mainstream Meities (Mangang, 2012: 45-47).

(IV) Kakching Haraoba- This form of Haraoba is celebrated in Kakching area (South East of Imphal Valley). It is carried out in honour of the deity Khamlangba. Some of the other deities are Khullen Khamlangba, Wairi Khamlangba (both of whom are village deities). Besides these deities, they also worshipped the five clan deities - Irum Ningthou, Ithai Ningthou, Naohal and Yengkhom Pakhangba. The ritual items known as Ngapurum Tanba is one of the significant features performed on the last day of Kakching Haraoba, which is not seen in other forms of Haraoba.

Materials and Methods

The methodology adopted in this study is based on an empirical understanding of Kanglei

Haraoba. Data was transcribed and codified from the field notes, audio-visual recorders thematically by the researcher. An in-depth interview and participation method (as a student of Manipur Dance) were also used as a qualitative method.

Manipur - The Study State

Manipur is situated in the north-eastern corner of India surrounded by nine curls of hills. Topographically, it lies between 23.50 degree to 25.41 degree north latitude to 93.03 degree and 94.47 degree in east longitudes (Singh, 2011: 1). It covers an area of 22,327 square kilometers. The present day state of Manipur, which has become a state of Indian Union since her merger on October 15, 1949, is bounded on the North by Nagaland, on the east by Burma (Myanmar) on the South by Mizoram and the Chin hill of Burma, on the West by the Cachar district of Assam (Kumar, 2001: 2). Being situated at the cross-road of South and South-East Asia, it comprises various ethnic groups of diverse culture. There are mainly three major ethnic groups in Manipur – (i) the Meitei of the Valley (ii) the Naga and (iii) the Kuki of the surrounding hills. In early times, Manipur had different indigenous names in different Chaks (Centuries). In the later ages of Konna (Langba) chak, it was popularly known as Kanglei Pungmayol, Kangleipak and Meitrabak (Bheigyachandra, 1987: 3). She was also known by a variety of names in the neighbouring areas. The Burmese called Kathe, Chacharis Magli, Assamese Moglai, Ahoms called her Makeli, the Shans and other tribes in the east of the river Chindwin knew her by the name of Kase (Dun, 1972: 12). ‘Manipur’ is a term given to this land after the declaration of Hinduism over Sanamahism as state religion during the time of King Garibaniwaz (1907-1948). The valley of Manipur which is the main study area is mainly inhabited by Meitei of seven Salais (Clan). These are: Ningthouja (Mangang), Luwang, Khuman, Khaba Nganba, Moirang, Angom and Sarang Leishangthem (Chenglei).

Kanglei Haraoba

Kanglei Haraoba, performed in the Imphal Valley (Capital of the State) of Manipur is largely drawn from the Lai-Haraoba as performed in the Royal a place (Laishram, 2009: 172). The Kanglei Haraoba festival commenced on an auspicious day which is decided by the Pandit Loisang according to the Lunar Calendar or the Thaban system of Manipur, say, on the odd days like 3rd, 5th, 7th and so on. The preliminaries of the festival are very much important. A prior discussion is held amongst the village/community elders and officials of the festivals. Formal invitation known as “Lai Barton” is sent to Amaiba, Amaibi and Penakhongba (the three main ritual functionaries). An invitation to the creator God and the ancestral spirits is offered the night before the festival. The ritualistic items required for the festival are also prepared one day ahead headed by Lai Selunbga (main official of the festival) and elder women of the village. Shrine and its courtyard are cleaned and beautified.

Lai Phi Setpa (dressing up the deities)

In the evening prior to the first day of the festival, the dressing up of the deities is completed by Amaibis. Two chakhrangpolang (a split bamboo closed basket shaped like a body) representing bodily images of Lainingthou (male deity) and Lairembi (female

deity) are dressed up and are covered with Komai (brass mask). They are then placed on the thrones inside the Shrine (Kulachandra, 1963: 1-2). The Meitei deities have no specific forms because they are believed to belong to the original being who is formless and boundless (Laishram, 2009: 172).

Day One: Lai Ekouba (Invocation of the Spirit of Deities)

The main part of the first day of the festival is the Lai Ekouba ritual. It is an act of invocation of the spirit of the deities from nearby water (a pond or a river). All the participants of the Lai Ekouba are lined up in a certain order. An auspicious time is set in the afternoon. It is held in a grand ceremonial and festive mood. The ritual objects from the shrine are brought out and each participant is given one object each to carry during the procession. The participants are dressed with proper traditional costumes. For the procession, the Eshaiphu (ritual earthen pitcher) bearer stood first then two thangphanba (sword bearers) stood in a row, followed by four girls – two carrying Shenkha (pan-box) and other two carrying Kaoselhumai (hand fan). Next stood two deity bearers holding one Eshaiphu (pitcher for carrying spirit of the deity). Followed by two chong (white umbrella with patterned fringes) bearers, two women carrying Phida (carpet) over their left shoulders and sumbal (rice pounder) in their right hands. People belonging to the village maintaining the order of age (with the elders leading and the youngsters following) followed the procession.² They formed two rows representing the Lainingthou and the Lairembi respectively.

After all the preparations, the Amaibi began the opening dance called Chumsa Jagoi i.e. Chumsa Dance (Maibi, 1988: 8). She danced to the tune of the Pena (a fiddle) played by penakhongba and along with the Maiba and other Maibi(s) lead the procession up to the Ekouba spot i.e. nearby water. The belief system of Meitei here emphasised on the association of water and life. Regarding this view, one noted scholar, A Lokendra (1996: n.d.) stated that “Water is life and life begin from water and life occurs in the mother’s womb and the universe is the mother”.

Reaching the Ekouba spot, Leirai Yukhangba (offering of rice wine) is performed to appease the deities. Meanwhile, Amaiba performed the Konyai-Hunba (act of offering one gold and silver piece into the water) by chanting Kontharol hymn. The gold and silver pieces symbolised the mother earth and father sky showing their inseparable ink. These two pieces should be thick otherwise they will float on water which is believed to be a bad omen.³ Maiba then performed the Khayom Lakpa (offering of Khayom). Khayom is a packet consisting of egg with silver & gold pieces inserted, 3 laangthrei (*Blumea balsamifera*) shoots, uncooked rice, wrapped carefully by plantain leaves tied by bamboo strips. Khayomlon lyric is chanted while immersing both the khayoms in the water simultaneously and released together. It is also called “Leithak – Leikha” Lakpa (binding of two forces i.e. earth and sky). The Khayom of male facing downward and that of female upward representing the act of giving and receiving, generating a process resulting to the production of life.⁴ The Amaibi then took the two Eshaiphus and danced holding that of Lainingthou in the right hand and that of Lairembi in the left. She danced in all the four directions – the Thangjing (of South west), the Marjing (of North-East), the Wangbren (South-East) and the Koubru (of North-west), who are believed to be the

guardian deities of 4 directions. This dance is called “Chuk-Pharol” Jagoi (Chukpharol Dance). It is performed in order to firmly fix the directions so as to ensure a strong stable state of equilibrium of the Cosmos (Maibi, 1988: 10).

After the completion of Chuk-pharol dance, the Amaibi then return the Eshaiphus to the respective deity bearers and took out the two hirilang (raw cotton thread) along with the Leiyom) which are contained in the Eshaiphus. Leiyom consists of 3 layers of plantain leaf that for Lainingthou facing downward containing 14 shoots of Laangthrei and the Lairembi facing upward containing 7 shoots. Here, numbers have their own significant meanings. Then the Amaibi performed the Lai-them-gat-pa calling up of the spirits by chanting ‘Leihourol’ hymn using the hirilang(s) and leiyom(s). The leiyom(s) after fetching the spirits are placed in the respective Eshaiphu(s). This invocation of the spirits from the water is known as Ekouba. After this, the deities are brought to the shrine and this journey is called Lai-Higaba (embarking of the deities). In the course of Lai-Higaba, a dance called Khunjao-Leichaojagoi (Khunjao-leichao dance) is performed. It is danced for the progress and prosperity of the community.⁵

On reaching the precincts of the shrine Mei-Okpa (greeting with fire) by burning khoiju herbs (plectranthus ternifolius) and other rituals are done and the procession walked towards the Shrine. Then the two deity bearers stepped ahead and two Leiyom(s) along with the Hirilang(s) are put together in the Eshaiphu carried by a woman. She, with the Eshaiphu headed towards the two deities which were seated on the throne the day before. Then the Amaiba and Amaibi separately took out the Lainingthou’s leiyom and lairembi’s leiyom respectively. They stood on the right and left side with 3 or 5 or 7 assistants i.e. women on the left and men on the right. Amaiba touched the leiyom to the navel of Lainingthou and Amaibi to the navel of Lairembi. This act of transmitting the spirits is known as Lai-Thawai-Haapa (Kulachandra, 1975: 7). The leiyom(s) are unfolded and the rituals of ‘Lei-Hunba’. It is the process of placing the Laangthrei shoots from the leiyom(s) to the respective deities. Then the ‘Luklen-Thaba’ (offering of uncooked food) is performed. The Amaiba then performed the Anam Athou Kokpa (rite of purification) and the Amaibi delivered oracle. The first day ritual ended with ‘Saroi-Khangba’ (feeding of evil spirits as a rite of appeasement) by the Amaibi.

Daily Rituals

Normally, the duration of Kanglei Haraoba is 1 to 15 days. Apart from the first and last day, the daily rituals during the festival are the same. Daily rituals of Kanglei Haraoba can be divided into morning and afternoon rituals.

(I) Morning ritual: The morning session started with ritual of ‘Lai Yakeiba’. At this, penakhongba played the pena as well as sing the lyric of Lai Yakeiba, a song to awake the deities. The villagers clad in pure dresses came and offered fruits, flowers, uncooked rice and Amaibi delivered oracles and predictions to the villagers. The morning session ended by offering meal to the deities.

(II) Afternoon ritual: In the afternoon, a series of rituals are performed by the Amaiba, Amaibi and Penakhongba with the community participation. The Amaibi initiated by performing the Laihou Jagoi (Laihou dance) in front of the shrine followed by ‘Lei-

Langba' (presentation of flowers). The flowers offered to the deities are replaced by the new ones. And the already offered flowers are presented to the villagers who came to watch and participate the festival. Strict rule is maintained while presenting the flowers. After this, the participating community/villagers beautifully clad in traditional costumes, both men and woman gathered along with Amaiba and performed the shouting of Hoi called 'Lai-Hoi-Laoba'.

Laibou La Thaba (Placing of Laibou La)

The Laibou La is prepared by placing three layers of plantain leaf signifying the virtue of creation. The three times folded white cloth is placed on it symbolising the supreme creator controlling over the three main elements - water, fire and air. It is placed at the centre of courtyard of the Shrine. The Meiteis conceived the universe as a unity but consisting of several layers or levels. The courtyard is a microcosm of the universe and is a sacred place for the duration of the festival which the deities are present (Paratt, 1997: 15). The placing of Laibou La is done by Amaibi and she along with other Amaibi(s) danced the Laiching dance. This dance has meaningful hand and body movements which show the step by step process of the cosmic creation of the earth. The space between the Laibou La and the Shrine is considered as a sacred after the former placement.

Laibou Dance

The most important and the most significant ritual of Lai Haraoba is the Laibou dance or Laibou Chongba which is initiated by singing 'Anoirol' lyric by penakhongba. And in the meantime the Amaibi performed and demonstrated the Hakchang-Saba (dance of formation of a body), Yumsarol (dance of constructing a house), panthoibi Jagoi (dance depicting the love episode of nongpok ningthou and panthoibi), pamyanton (dance of cultivation), phisharol (dance of weaving), Longkhonba (dance of fishing). After the Longkhonba portion, 'Padol Jagoi' is performed. It is a dance following the paphal (the meandering steps of a serpent believed to be the ancestral God Pakhangba). Padol Jagoi is followed by 'Chongkhong Jagoi' (dancing between and around the four Chong posts) and 'Yumjao Paphal' (a procession following the meandering steps of serpent).

The paphal, which is frequently used in the above performances, represents the coiling of the serpent. It unfolds the mystery of the endless cycle of birth and death of the human beings. This serpentine movement of the procession under the cover of the white cloth held in the four chong posts, is said to represent the sexual union of the divine father and divine mother. A serpent is a universal symbol of activities motivated by sexual passion. Regarding this, Wall (1979: 534) has commented that the serpent has been a symbol of sexual passion for thousands of years; when it is represented twinning around a rod of pillar, it means a lingam erect under the influence of sexual passion. Thus, the paphal symbolised the never ending creation method.

Then, Wakol Louba (shouting of Wakol) is sung at the end of Laibou process. The daylong celebration ended with the deities symbolically put to sleep until the next early morning to repeat the whole rituals again.

Apart from the above daily rituals, there are a few rituals to be performed on specific days in the Kanglei Haraoba. They are discussed below.

Kanglei Thokpa (Appearance of Kanglei)

Kanglei Thokpa is a peculiar feature of Kanglei Haraoba which is not performed in any other types of Haraoba. It is a ritual performance enacting the process of seeking a wife, by holding a Kangjei (a polo stick). It is also known as 'Lai Nupi Thiba' (searching Lord's consort). It refers to the myth in which Khoiriphaba, son of Lord Soraren (sky God) came down on Earth where he found the Gods celebrating Lai-Haraoba. After enquiring and consideration Khoiriphaba was given permission to participate the festival if he brought his consort. As an agreement, covering his face with a veil played a mukna (wrestling) and Kangjei (polo) between him and Loyarakpa (son of Lord Marjing) and at last hooked a girl from amidst the crowd with the hooked end of the stick thereby making her his consort (Maibi, 1988: 128-129).

This portion of 'Kanglei Thokpa' is performed by Amaibi believed to have been possessed by the spirit of Khoiriphaba during the ritual. She mimed the action of searching the direction of consort by placing the Kangjei on the right shoulder 'Kangle Thokpa' is performed on the 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th day and so on, of the festival. It is so significant that the name of 'Kanglei Haraoba' itself is derived from the word 'Kanglei' of 'Kanglei Thokpa' (Achoubisana, 1980: 19)

Lai Lam Thokpa (Outing of the Deities)

Like 'Kanglei Thokpa', 'Lai Lam Thokpa' is also performed on an auspicious day i.e., 3rd, 5th, 7th day and so on, of the festival. Kanglei Thokpa can be performed during 'Lai Lam Thokpa' but it is not necessary that the former should be performed on the day of the latter. It depends on the convenience of the community. On this 'Lai Lam Thokpa', the deities are placed in a decorated palanquin and carried by four men, went out to a selected area in a procession. The same daily ritual is done on the spot and after completion, came back to the shrine and did all the rituals of ending as well.

Lairoi (The Last Day of the Festival)

The morning ritual remained the same as that of the daily ritual. Elaborate arrangement of rituals items to be used in the evening session is all kept ready in front of the shrine. In the afternoon session, after the shouting of Hoi, 'Phungarel Jagoi' (phungarel dance) is performed by the selected husband and wife of the community, say Selungba and his wife. As usual, the 'Ladibou dance' of the daily rituals is performed. Then, some rituals are enhanced on this closing day of the festival. After the completion of Laibou, the ritual of "Thang Jagoi" (sword dance) is performed on all four directions and in the middle of the courtyard. Fire is kept burning during the ritual. This ritual symbolically signifies the driving away of the evil spirits.

Thangkhol Nurabi (love episode of Tangkhol and Nurabi)

It is a form of dance drama. It describes the meeting of Tangkhol representing Nongpok Ningthou and Nurabi representing panthoibi. They are clad in the costumes of Tangkhol Tribe (one of the ethnic tribes of Manipur). In this episode, they quarreled over a piece of land and then their final reconciliation. Exchanges of romantic words and riddles having sexual motifs are significant part of Lai-Haraoba. Here, the inclusion of Tangkhol indi-

cates the then good and pure relationship between the hill and valley people before advent of other religions.

Ougri Hangel

After the Tangkhul-Nurabi Episode, the ritual of Ougri Hangel is performed on this ritual, a rope is held in a circle by an equal number of men and women. Hand bell is tied on each of the two end of the rope. The ougri lyric is sung for the welfare and prosperity of the land and people of the locality. Ougri is followed by rituals like Huithi Yenthi Yeppa, Sarit, Litpa, Kencho, Paocha – which are all related with the creation of the universe and its being.

Hijin Hirao

This ritual symbolised the making of boats for the return of the presiding deities to the heavenly abode. The two lines of the procession as that of Ekouba, now ensembled at the courtyard. Those who do not hold any object are given the bamboo canes horizontally representing the forming of the boat. The Amaibi sang hijin-hirao lyric and everyone mimed the rowing of the boats. After this, all the ritual objects are collected and placed inside the shrine. The Amaibi entered the shrine and a cloth is spread out serving as a white curtain by chanting Nongarol (song of ascending deities to heaven). Then, “Lai Tethaba” and “Saroi Khangba” (dismantling and appeasing the deities) are performed and concluded the ritual of the last day of the festival. Regarding the “Nongaba”, there are some deities, whose spirits do not ascend to heaven but remain in the Shrine.

Mukna Lamjel (Indigenous games)

Indigenous games like Mukna (wrestling) Lamjel (race), Thouri Chingnabi (tug of war), Nung Langnabi (Stone throwing) etc. are performed with fun and pleasure. Lainingthou pana (group) and Lairembi pana are formed and the competitions were held between them. And in the evening the penakhongba performed “Keining Kumba” in the Laibung or in any house nearby. This is done to seek forgiveness for any unwanted errors committed during the festival.

Results and Discussion

Lai-Haraoba festival is based on the myths, legends and folklore which has been preserved through oral tradition. It also suggests that the Lai-Haraoba tradition has its roots in pre-literary Meitei society and is therefore older than the earliest examples of the archaic written Manipuri (main language of Manipur). Furthermore, it has been found out that the texts available as they stand now are only a part of that pre-literate oral tradition. This tradition includes praise hymns of the gods and also the songs included in the festival as well. We could also find that the four existing forms of Lai-Haraoba despite some significant differences, have the common basic structure and idea underlying beneath them.

The sequence of the festival is of the creation of cosmos, reproduced in the performing art – the way how the universe is created and how human beings took to settlement, agriculture, building house, establishment of family, biological continuity, etc. It

is also found that the Lai-Haoraoba encompasses the hypothesis of our world view in which the whole process is built through a complex system of interconnection, interdependence and inter-relationship of ideas and images, content and form. The Lai-Haraoba with the proper use of time, place and objects in a sacred ways gives the account of our traditional and ritualistic customs. From the view of gurus and scholars related in the field, Lai Haraoba will still be the sacred key to explore the culture and identity of Manipuri people.

Unfortunately this festival has stoutly faced the onslaught of the modern man with its materialistic views. Nowadays, the local committees organised and arranged the festival. Intrusion of modern-day politics has been witnessed in the festival by mobilising funds through donations, subscriptions, etc. Every house, every leikai (locality) has taken the liberty of constructing a shrine of its own resulting in the changes in the ritual of the festival. The main functionaries with the increase number of festivals become somehow commercialised. The rituals which are important parts of Lai Haraoba festival are speeded up and are corrupted due to varieties of programme which provide entertainment and amusement. However, a few organisation and scholars come up recently with the objective of prescribing the true aesthetic essence of Lai-Haraoba festival.

Conclusion

Lai-Haraoba is one of the most important ritualistic festivals of Manipur celebrated since time immemorial. It is celebrated to please the ancestral deities by enacting the creation of universe and its being, and in return receive the blessings from them. It presents how life originates after the cosmic creation of the universe. The union of Supreme Male (pa principle) and Supreme Female (pi principle) represented by Father Sky and mother Earth is performed in the daily rituals of the festival. The process of creation through sexual intercourse is significantly represented by different symbolically performances and objects. The daily rituals starting from the first day to the last day of the festival comprise of the development of universe, the growth of human beings and society, having images right from the beginning. It can be said that the chief and internal motivation of this so called festival “Lai-Haraoba” is procreation vitality, abundance and healthy community life.

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Notes

1. Chakpa is a group of people settling in the Andro, Phayeng, Khurkhul, Sekmai etc. It is also the name of one of the four forms of Lai-Haraoba festival which is named after

the group.

2. Interview with Amaibi Dhoni, 13th April, 2012.
3. Interview with Amaiba Kerani, 5th May, 2013.
4. Interview with R.K. Achoubisana, 7th October, 2012.
5. Interview with Shanglakpi Gulapmachu, 14th July, 2012.

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Laibou Procession



Amaibies (Priestess) Leading the Laibou Procession