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LAIPOU AND ITS PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract : This paper focuses on the "Laipou" a ritual event that is performed in the evening session of "Laiharaoba" a ritualistic festival of the Meetei community which is celebrated every year. In this ritual event, Maibis are dancing in fine hand movements depicting various themes like the creation of elements of the earth, the creation of a child and its development from birth, growth, building a house, cultivation, weaving, and other activities. This ritual mirrors the entire culture and tradition of humankind since the beginning of this earth. Every community on this earth has its own culture, tradition, way of living and origin. Thus, Laipou also images the origin of life, culture and tradition of Meetei community on this earth. It is in fact the combination of religious recitation, traditional music of dance, traditional values and ancient cultural aspects. It narrates a series of various events which is occurred in the course of lives of human being. Hence, this paper is written on focusing on such views.

Index Terms – Laipou, Laipou Philosophy, Laiharaoba, religious recitation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Every human group and each civilization have a set of philosophically and characteristically distinct cultural system which is much influenced by its geographical and environmental conditions. Within such a distinct cultural system, there exists an arena which provides socio-cultural education to the general public which is deeply rooted and much celebrated. Among the Meetei community of Manipur, the annual festival of *Lai Haraoba*¹ is celebrated in a grand way but within a strict norm. In the Meetei believe system, the origin of *Lai Haraoba* derives from the event of the creation of the universe by the supreme god and man started its celebration from the very existence of mankind. *Lai Haraoba* (in which *Lai* means God and Goddesses, *Haraoba* means celebration) is one of the oldest, most important and biggest cultural festival among the *Meetei* (also called as *Meetei*) community of Manipur. In the Meetei believe system, the definition and origin of *Lai Haraoba* traces back to the time where the supreme God '*Kuru*' created the tangible world and all its inhabitants from the 'space'. It is celebrated annually as one of the most important cultural ritual and also as a festival among *Meetei*. So, the annual ritual of *Lai Haraoba* celebrates the greatness of the supreme one by narrating how the physical/tangible world, as exist, was created and also all the living beings inhabiting in it by the supreme one. Besides, it also narrates the *Meetei* way of life, basic social system, the life world and process of human civilization to the general public through hymn, song and dance sequences².

So, among the *Meetei*, *Lai Haraoba* celebration serves not only as a ritual to please the Gods and Goddesses for growth, development and betterment of the mankind, but also provides a social space in which education is imparted regarding the universe, origin of mankind, livelihood and worldly affair, does and don't through various tangible and intangible symbolic representation, physical movement, dance and song sequences etc. Different God and Goddesses of the *Meetei* has a different but specific month and characteristics of celebrating *Lai Haraoba* in a year.

In Manipur, a village is composed by numerous hamlets or sections and each hamlet inhibits by different Clans. Here, the ritual of *Lai Haraoba* is celebrated in the level of – Clan, hamlet, village and Nation-state (in Manipuri:

¹Annual ritual to please the Gods and Goddesses

²Chandrasekhar, Khulem. (1996). Pg.28

leipak-kiharaoba). However, keeping the level base differences in one side, the variations in the form of *Lai Haraoba* is made on the basis of certain distinctive features and characteristics. So, different thinkers classified the types of Lai Haroba as of 3, 4, 5 or 7 types. However, generally it is accepted that Lai Haraoba is of 3 types namely, *KangleiHaraoba*, *MoirangHaraoba* and *Chakpa Haraoba*³. In each of the classified types of *Lai Haraoba*, the afternoon session of the *Nongma-giThouram* is mainly composed by *Laipou*. It entails the origin and universe of *Meetei* belief system through various song, body movement and hand gesture which is known as *Laipou Sathek* and is numbered as 364. However, amongst the types classified *Kanglei Haraoba* is considered as the most elaborate and biggest form and the *Laipou of Kanglei Haraoba*.

Lai Haraoba is an annual religious festival that is closely related to the culture and tradition of the Meitei community. In this festival, the livelihood and traditional images of the Meitei is clearly shown. The creation of the earth and other living beings by the almighty is depicted in forms of dance, songs, and rituals.

According to the book “Lai Haraoba” by the order of Guru, Ashiba has created the earth and with further instruction to create living beings to stay in his creation, Ashiba was baffled to create other living beings. During this time the guru open his mouth and showed Asiba all the forms living beings which made Ashiba so overwhelm and he brings all the living beings by shouting ‘hoi’ which is known as “Lai Hoi Laoba”. This act is imitated by humans and it is known as Lai Haraoba.

Ancestor worshipper Meitei people call their ancestors Umang Lai and sculptures of Lainingthou and lairembi are created. This worshipping later on comes to be known as Lai Haraoba. Since, Lai Haraoba is celebrated by different sections in different places there are diverse form of Lai Haraoba. Among many forms of Lai Haraoba, 4 forms are generally agreed by the people. ‘Laibou’ is one of the elements of Lai Haraoba which is important and its different images are well constructed. Because of its importance Laibou is included in almost Lai Haraoba. The sub elements of Laibou include Laithou Tinthou, rules and regulations (Chatna Kanglon), dance performance and other entertainment.

II. LAIPOU

Laibou is generally held in the afternoon. The ritual of Laithou Tinthou is displayed in the form of dance. The original term of Laibou is Laipou but due to generations of using the term now, it is commonly said as Laibou. With reference to this topic, a seminar paper is written by Moirangthem Macha Chaoreikanba under the title ‘Laipou Khuthek 364 gi Neinaba Warol Khara’ says,

“The word laibou is derived from the word laipou. The letter "p" was replaced by the letter " b". Laipou which is known as laibou by the new generations was originally derived from "Lai Apouba" (Laipou in fused word) which means the great shining sun above.”⁴

“laibou haiba wahei asi laipou haiba waheidagi theitharakpa (derivation word) wahei amani. “pa” haiba mayek asi “ba” na shinkhibani, laipoubu anouba mirolna laibou haina khangnari. Laibou haiba waheisigee wahanthokpu isham shaman lai apouba haibadagi laipou koukhibani, lai apouba haibadi thakta ngalliba numit asibuni”.

From the book written by Elam Indra “Lai Haraobagee Wakhalon Paring” says,

“In this, we can acknowledge the relation between The maker of the universe and the celebrated deities. Like the sun constantly shines through the universe.”⁵

Tengbanba shemba mapuga haraoriba laiga anigi leinkhraba maribu matang asida ningthina khanghanba ngammi. Numitki magungumna langna mayada nganthoiduna lengdana leibani.

Other than this, on the book written by Yumnam Tamphajao “Meitei Lai Haraobagi Wangoolon” also stated that,

“Laipou means God/ deity who is great/large and whom can be seen by our eyes. The god whom we can see or the sun god yoimayai toudanba lailen toulo_ lai koilou ayengba wabangba ningthou panchunba is called laipou. Therefore laipou la denotes the sun.”⁶

³Kulachandra Singh, Ngariyanbam. (1975). Pg.24

⁴Moirangthem Macha Chaoreikanba, (Laipou Khuthek 364 Neina Waron Khara,. (2018). Pg.1

⁵Elam Indira, Lai Haraoba Wakhalon Pareng, (1997). Pg 63

⁶Yumnam Tamphajao, Meitei Lai Haraobagi Wangulon. (1972). Pg.4

Laipou haibadi apouba mitna oubalai haibani. Meetna oubalai haibadi yoimayai taodalaba lailen taoloi – lai koilou ayengba wangba ningthou panchumba numit kouba laibu loibou kou. Maram aduna laipou la aduna numitki saktamni.

From these definitions and words from the respected personalities, we have the knowledge of the relations between the mother earth and the sun.

Some elements which are needed in the Laipou Chongba are, the god, Senpot Laipot of the deity, temple of the deity (Laishang), a ground (Haraobung), Laipoula, Maibi, Penna Khongba, people who take part in the Laipou, orchestra and other organizer.

Different episodes of Laipou includes Laiching Dance, Hakchang Saba (making of human body), Nunglao dance, Yumsarol dance, Panthoibi dance, Khunjao Leichao dance, Long Khonba, Paton dance. After this the Laipoula is uprooted and accompanied by Phibun dance and the Laipou is concluded. Some of the experts opine that Khunjao Laichao dance is not a part of Laipou and some discuss without the Laiching dance. Different opinions are given in all the 364 types of Laipou dance. But the main concern of this paper is based on the philosophy.

III. THE UNDERLYING CHARACTER OF LAIPOU

When the beginning of Laipou Khuthek, the Maibi stands in the front. By folding their hands, they turn around three times in front of the Laibung. They also pray to the four corners of the Laibung. Most of the Laipou are mainly based on the Khuthek i.e. JAGOI. Many teachers give different opinion and philosophy regarding the Khuthek (JAGOI).

Shri Thambal Sharma mentioned only 133 Khuthek but Oja R.K. Achoubisana said there are 364 khuthek. According to many Scholars/Teachers all the Dance and Song from the beginning of “LAI KABA” is the part of the Laipou. The inner role and its ideology are related. The philosophy of Khuthek and the time teller are quietly related to one another.

Later, the seminar paper of Oja Moirangthem Macha Chaoreikanba said,

“There is a 64 dance step of developing a human including the creation of a child in the mother's wombs, its development, birth, growth, etc. It has a close relationship with the continuous looming march of Time that depicts the Creator and his blessing to accomplish every task of Life.”⁷

Hakchang shabagi khut-thek 64 siga yamna naknana leiba wafamda meetei pung (matam) gi khongchat mashing paba khangba amasung madubu puriba lai amadi shinthatupagi kanglonda yamma nakna maree leinei.

From his seminar paper we know the traditionally enriched reading of time is related to the Laipou Khuthek.

In the book so called “Meitei Lai Haraoba Wangulon”, the Laipou Jagoi and the journey of time are described as

“The essence/creation of the Universe revolving around the sun is consider as “Laipou Khuthek. In Meitei Mythology the deity of time (Chakoi) is refer as ‘chat’ The Universe is revolving around the Chat. And the movement of Malem Leima (Mother Goddess of creation) around Chakpu is called ‘Chakoi (Dance). Therefore, Malem Leima Performed with her adorable slow and gentle motion of dance when She revolved around the sun so when the Universe revolved around the sun. Malem Leima her Perform with movements or gestures of hand with rejoices is refer as chakoi khuthek.”⁸

“malem leimana numitpu koibulai chakoi kou-ee. Chakoi haibadi matam kouba laibu “chat” kou-ee. “chak” kouba chagoda malem leimana koi. Maram aduna leimana chakpu koi haibagi chakoi (jagoi) kou-ee. Aduna malem leimana numitpu koiba matamda masha leina-leina koi. Malem leimana leina leina koiba khongthang amasung sathek aduna chakoi khuthek kou-ye.

The institution of the study of such Khuthek of Laiphou that studies the periods of the Mother Earth (MALEM EMA) revoke around the sun (NUMIT) is known as “Geography”. From this we can see that such beautiful Culture and further identity are highly placed.

People participating in *Laipou* as well as those who are attending in the *Laibung* usually stay within the *Haraobung* till the end of this episode. Otherwise, it is considered to have a bad impact upon the dependents of those who are not fulfilling it. But after the *Hakchang Saba* incident, such a thought is not applied.

⁷Moirangthem Macha Chaoreikanba, (Laipou Khuthek 364 Neina Waron Khara, . (2018). Pg.1, 2

⁸Yumnam Tamphajao, Meitei Lai Haraobagi Wangulon. (1972). Pg.7

Nunglao dance follows the episode of Hakchang Saba. Externally, it depicts the formation, growth and development of a child inside the womb of a mother. However, philosophically, it narrates the modes and style of counting the days and months until the birth of a child.

According to Changambam Amar: -

"The male sexual organs are ready, gets matured and seeds of life are blessed by the Almighty to the organ of the male. The month in which this preparation is made to form a child and plant the seed of life to the male/father is called the Sachiphu (Sajibu). With the development of the child's body, different body parts and organs of the body are made. Thus, the month in which the development of the physical part of the child is known as Kalen tha."⁹

Panthou mapada sinnabire. Panthu mapagi kayatnunnda taibang mapugi, sana ilik athoibabu chinghat thanggattuna thamle. Taibanggi hak oigadouriba sha achibabu chingkhatal haibaggi thaja adugi mamingbu sachifu (sajibu) tha haina koure. Taibang mapuna taibang lang-on-ge haina khalliba sana ilik to nouwa adugi kayat kalen yatle. Ka 12 (taranithoi) yatle. Leithak leikha tuna thonglon 18 nungpan naina hakchang kayat thong 9 (9), yatle kalen tha kou-a.

(khuya Lukhum, Page 115,116)

Literally, the above quotation means that the seed for the formation of a child is endowed to the body of a to-be-father by the supreme one. Such a counting goes along with the formation of a child's body and from it derives the name of the months in Manipuri. Along with the development of a child's physical parts and maturity thus derives the name of the remaining months.

It is also the fact that human lives along with the days and with the weeks. The derivation and importance of each day can be understood if the components of *Laipou* are study minutely and extensively. So, externally and philosophically, the *Laipou* in a *Lai Haraoba* teaches the culture, livelihood and way of life among the Meeteis for its betterment and development.

IV. CONCLUSION

Lai Haraoba is a ritualistic festival of Meeteis observing from ancient times. During *Lai Haraoba* there include one important event which we called '*LAIPOU*'. It meant our forefather had been guiding us regarding our traditions, cultures and the very laws of life. Such as high philosophical thoughts, ideas, believes, notions etc. It is considered to be highly needed and had been lingered as a part of *Lai Haraoba* since them.

According to the ritual in '*LAIPOU*'. We are clearly conceptualized that how humans are appears and brought up into the surface of the earth i.e., the Creator of the human can be clearly seen on top of this, we had been guiding, instructing the norms of traditions and culture from the very beginning till the end. So, we can clearly conclude that '*LAIPOU*' the ritualistic event of *Lai Haraoba* includes many important infinite numbers of philosophical thoughts, idea and believed.

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