



## The Sacred Philosophy of Lai Haraoba



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### Abstract

*Lai Haraoba, means the merry-making of the gods, "is a traditional ritualistic festival celebrated by the Meitei community of Manipur. Deeply rooted in indigenous religious and cultural beliefs, the festival honors the Umang Lai (local forest deities) and celebrates for the safeguard of community according to Meitei cosmology. It is considered one of the oldest and most sacred festivals in the region, blending mythology, dance, music, and oral literature. The festival is marked by a series of elaborate rituals conducted by Maibas (priests) and Maibis (priestesses), who re-enact the creation myths through symbolic dances and songs. The Maibi Jagoi (dance of the priestess) is central to the festival, expressing philosophical and cosmological themes through graceful movements. Lai Haraoba festival is celebrated every year in the month of Kalen (April and June). Lai Haraoba is both a religious observance and a cultural expression. It enhances community bonds, preserves ancient traditions, and maintains the spiritual connection between the people and their deities. Lai Haraoba represents the living cultural heritage of the Meitei people and serves as a dynamic medium of historical continuity and identity. we have (i). kanglei haraoba, ii). Moirang haraoba, iii). Chakpa haraoba and iv). Kakching haraoba. This paper aim and objects the significance of the Lai Haraoba in Manipur society and mainly focus on kanglei haraoba and its unique feature.*

**Keywords:** Lai Haraoba, Umang Lai, Meitei cosmology, cultural heritage, ritual.

### Research Paper

#### Introduction

Lai Haraoba is one of the oldest and most important religious and cultural festivals of the Meitei people of Manipur. It is deeply connected to the traditional Sanamahi religion and reflects the community's ancient beliefs, rituals, stories, and customs from before the arrival of Vaishnavism. More than just a festival, Lai Haraoba shows the Meitei people's understanding of the universe, the origin of life, and the sacred bond between humans and gods. The festival centers on the worship of Umang Lai, or forest gods, who are believed to be the original guardians of the land and its people. Special rituals are performed by Maibis (priestesses) and Maibas (priests), who act as messengers between the human world and the spiritual world. Through dances, songs, chants, and symbolic actions, they tell stories of how the world was created, the importance of harmony and balance, and how human life came into being. These rituals show the profound spiritual values at the core of lai haraoba. Lai Haraoba developed from

its original form known as lai hoi laoba. The term comes from the word Lai Hoi Laoba (shouting of hoi) found in the leisemba creation myth. After creating the earth, Atiya Guru Sidaba, the son of God, was unsure how to create living beings. At that moment, his father, the supreme god Atinkok Sidaba, opened his mouth and revealed the world of the living creatures. Guided by this sign, Atiya Guru Sidaba entered his father's mouth and released all living beings onto the earth. In their joy, the beings shouted hoi, and this act later became known as Lai Haraoba. Lai haraoba expresses the Meitei understanding of the cosmos, the origin of life, and the sacred relationship between humans and gods.

#### Background of the Study

This paper is mainly based on the study of Kanglei haraoba. Kanglei haraoba performed in the valley of Manipur. However, the rituals of Lai Haraoba carry important spiritual and environmental messages that show a deep connection to nature and the cycle of life.

This study looks at Lai Haraoba not just as a cultural tradition, but as a rich philosophical system that existed before modern religions. By exploring its stories, rituals, and spiritual ideas, the study aims to understand how the Meitei people see the universe and how their ancient knowledge has survived through time, helping preserve their unique identity and way of life.

### Research Problem

Even though Lai Haraoba is an important and meaningful festival for the Meitei people, it is often seen only as a cultural event or a traditional dance performance. Many people do not understand or explore the deep spiritual meanings, beliefs, and messages hidden in its rituals and stories. Over time, modern religions, colonial thinking, and social changes have caused people to ignore or forget the original sacred philosophy behind Lai Haraoba.

Because of this, the true purpose and meaning of Lai Haraoba are at risk of being lost. This research aims to study Lai Haraoba not just as a festival, but as a traditional belief system that explains how the Meitei people see the world, nature, and the gods. It will look at how the dances, songs, and rituals show their ideas about creation, harmony, and human life. The study will also explore how these beliefs help the Meitei community keep their identity and values strong, even as the world around them changes.

### Objectives

1. To understand the philosophy of Lai Haraoba
2. To explore the daily rituals of the festival
3. To show the role of Lai Haraoba in protecting Meitei culture.

### Hypothesis

The sacred rituals and stories of Lai Haraoba reflect a unique indigenous philosophy that connects the Meitei community deeply with nature, the cosmos, and the divine. Understanding this philosophy will reveal how Lai Haraoba plays a crucial role in preserving the cultural identity and spiritual values of the Meitei people.

### Relevance of the study

This paper is important for both the subject of philosophy and for society because it helps us understand an ancient way of thinking that is still alive in the Lai Haraoba festival. In philosophy, we usually study big questions about life, creation, and the universe. Lai Haraoba offers answers to these questions through its rituals, dances,

and stories. By studying it, we learn about a traditional belief system that is different from modern religions but just as deep and meaningful.

For society, this paper helps protect and value the culture of the Meitei people. Many traditional practices are being forgotten or changed because of modern life and outside influences. This study shows that Lai Haraoba is not just a cultural event, but also a source of knowledge and identity for the community. It reminds people of their roots, their connection with nature, and the importance of keeping their traditions alive. It can also help others respect and learn from indigenous cultures that are often left out of mainstream education and discussions.

### Research Methodology

To study the sacred philosophy of Lai Haraoba, this research will use a qualitative research approach, focusing on understanding meanings, beliefs, and cultural practices from the perspective of the Meitei community. The methodology will include Field Observation, Interviews, Document and Literature Review. This research will aim to give an honest and respectful representation of Lai Haraoba from the community's point of view, helping preserve and highlight its sacred philosophy.

### Sacred Philosophy of Lai Haraoba

Lai Haraoba is one of the most important traditional festivals of the Meitei community of Manipur. It has been celebrated by the Meitei people since ancient times. It includes dances, songs, rituals, sports like mukna, mukna kangjei, lamjel etc. and traditional martial arts like Thang-Ta. Through these performances, people show the story of how the universe was created. There are two opinions about the origin of Lai Haraoba. The first group firmly believes that the festival first originally began from Koubru hill, which is considered the earliest settlement of the Meitei people. There are two conceptions in the origin of Lai Haraoba, some opines that it was first performed at Koubru Hills, "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"(Chanu 2014, p. 45). In this version, Lai Haraoba was first celebrated at the Koubru Hill. Naorem Khagendra also writes that, "Five gods Chandeba, Khongdoba, Moriaba, Yenbirungba and Yenbikappa were assigned the task of organizing the festive celebration successfully. Then,



the god and goddesses danced imitating the movements involved in the various works and activities of creating the universe and the earth. The sequence of the creative activities were reflected in the dance movements. This was the first Lai Haraoba performed by the rejoicing God and Goddesses on the Koubru hills” (p33).

He placed the first performance of Lai haraoba in the pre-Christian, pre-pakhangba period, during the time of Nongpok ningthou panthoibi. In Meitei history and mythology, Pakhangba possesses both human and divine qualities. He is believed to transform into both human and serpent forms. As a human, he is regarded as the first king, whose reign began in 33AD according to the Cheitharol kumbaba (the royal chronicle of the king of Manipur).

Today, Lai Haraoba is celebrated in many parts of Manipur. It is held every year during the month of Kalen (May) and usually lasts for seven, nine, or eleven days. During this time, many ritual events take place along with performances of dance, music, sports and martial arts. The term of Lai Haraoba is composed of two words i.e., Lai and Haraoba. Lai stands for God and Haraoba stands for rejoice. So, the literal meaning of Lai Haraoba is the rejoice of God. Several books are written on it. Let's have a look on the definitions of Lai Haraoba given in different books.

In the book *The Pleasing of Gods: Meitei Lai Haraoba*, By Saroj Nalini. Arambam Parrat, John Parrat mentioned that “the Lai Haraoba, which may be translated as the pleasing of the God, is probably the greatest single key to Meitei history and culture” (Parrat S.N.1997.p.14).

On another book “Ritual and Performances” written by Nongthombam Premchand, “Lai Haraoba is primary and important ritual observance of the Meiteis. It has developed into a distinct socio-cultural institution and a distinct form of theatre through a long process of evolution” (Nongthobam 2005,p.35)

The meaning of Lai Haraoba also defines by E. Nilakanta Singh in his book *Aspects of Indian Culture* as “Lai Haraoba literally means the merry-making of the gods and the goddesses” (E. N. Singh 36).

Ngariyambam Kulachandra Singh defined in his book *Meitei Lai Haraoba* as: Lai Haraobagi chatnaba arthadi ‘laina haraoba’ nattraga laibu haraohanba’ haibani. (N. K. Singh 1)

Yumnam Tamphajao also cited in his book *Meetei Laai Haraobagi Wangulon (Philosophy on Lai Haraoba)* that: ...mioiba eikhoina pokpadagi siba phaoba punsi matek asibu Lai Haraoba kouwe. (Tamphajao 3)

Subsequently T.C. Hodson also describe in his book *The Meithei* as:

The religious festivals, such as the Lai haraoba (or making merry with the gods), are occasions when the sumptuary laws are a little relaxed, and women don their gayest apparel without let or hindrance. (Hodson 16)

According to R.K. Danisana in his book, *Manipuri Dance (A Panorama of Indian Culture)* that

Lai Haraoba is a derivation from the origin Lai Hoi Laoba. Explicitly Lai stands for deity, Hoi means the inner vibration and Laoba is a loud utterance. (R.K.Danisana 2)

Further another definition of Lai Haraoba is given by Elam Indira in her book *Dances of Lai Haraoba* as:

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. (D. E. Indira 1)

Another view of Elam Indira Devi about the Lai Haraoba is given in her article *Lai Haraoba Wangulon* in the book *Aesthetics and Culture Performing Arts* by M.S. Siva Raju and Pukhrabam Lilabati Devi as:

...in our way of spending life from the moment of birth till our death by doing and following the duties assigned by the lord by stepping in the proper way, without any mistake...it is a message for living with high hope and enlightenment the so called “Lai Haraoba” is. (E. I. Devi 47)

It is a festival that brings together religion, culture, dance, music, nature, and community. The culture of the Manipuri people is deeply reflected in Lai Haraoba. This festival shows the creation of earth, human civilization, yumsharol, phisarol, nungnao all performed in dance are all included in lai haraoba. The storyline also includes the work of luwang ningthou building the ship, lai haraoba was celebrated even before the birth of christ, from the time of Panthoibi, in langba chak.

Lai Haraoba is not only celebrated in Manipur but also in other places like Tripura, Assam, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. In Manipur, there are four types of Lai Haraoba: Kanglei Haraoba, Moirang Haraoba, Chakpa Haraoba, and Kakching Haraoba. Even though they are different in form, they all share the same inner meaning.

Lai Haraoba represents a deep philosophy of life. It teaches how to live in harmony with nature, respect



the divine, and value human relationships. The festival connects the past, present, and future through rituals, performances, and collective memory. Lai Haraoba is not a private or individual event—it is a community celebration. Everyone in the village or locality takes part, regardless of age or gender. The festival is a time for people to come together, forget their differences, and celebrate as one. This reflects the philosophy that community life is important, and that shared happiness strengthens social bonds. Through group dances, shared meals, and collective rituals, Lai Haraoba promotes unity, peace, and cooperation.

Lai Haraoba is the belief that nature is sacred. The Meitei people believe that the gods, called Lais, live in natural places like forests, rivers, mountains, and lakes. These places are spiritual homes of the deities. The festival is held to please these local deities and to thank them for protecting the people and the environment. This shows that the Meitei philosophy sees humans as part of nature. By performing rituals and offering respect to nature, people maintain a spiritual connection with the world around them. In the Meitei belief system, ancestors are honored and remembered during Lai Haraoba. People believe that the spirits of their forefathers continue to guide and protect them. Special rituals are performed to connect with these spirits and seek their blessings. The presence of ancestors in rituals also strengthens the connection between the living and the dead, reminding people of their roots and responsibilities. In Lai Haraoba, three main people play very important roles are the Amaibi, the Amaiba, and the Pena player. They are responsible for carrying out all the rituals. Without them, Lai Haraoba cannot be performed.

Lai Haraoba is one of the most important ritual festivals of the Meitei people and is closely connected to Manipuri customs. There is no fixed number of days for the celebration, but the daily rituals must follow a specific order. The kanglei haraoba festival begins on an auspicious day fixed by the Pandit Loishang according to the lunar calendar of Manipur, usually on odd days such as the 3rd day, 5th day, 7th day. The initial rituals of the festival are considered highly important. Before the festival, an initial meeting takes place among the village elders and festivals authority. A formal invitation known as Lai Barton is sent to the Amaiba, Amaibi and Penakhongba. An invitation is also offered to the creator God and ancestral spirits on the night before the festival.

Lai phi setpa (Dressing up the deities) The dressing of the deities is completed by the Amaibis on the first day

of the festival. The entire ritual process can be divided into three main parts i.e., Ekouba (inviting the soul of deities), Nongmagi Thouram Pareng (daily sequence of ritual activities), and Lairoi (the end part of the ritual). Ekouba (inviting the soul of deities/ invocation of the spirit of deities): Lai Ekouba is the most important ritual that is always performed first in all types of Lai Haraoba. The term Lai Ekouba means calling the soul or spirit of the deity from the water or land. Regarding the statement Shri Ngariyambam Kulachandra Singh opined in his book Meitei Lai Haraoba that:

Haraogadouriba laigi mathawai eshingdagi loukhatpabu Lai Ekouba kouwe. (N. K. Singh 2)

Nongmagi Thouram Pareng (daily sequence of ritual activities): Daily rituals of kanglei haraoba celebration can be divided into morning and afternoon rituals.

### **In morning ritual**

The morning ritual started with lai yakeiba. At this ritual Penakhongba played the pena as well as sing the lyric of Lai Yakeiba, a song to awake the deities. Villagers dressed in clean attire gathered to offer fruits, flowers, uncooked rice, and Amaibi, who then gave oracles and predictions to the people. The morning ritual concluded with the offering of food to the deities.

### **Afternoon ritual**

In the afternoon ritual, several rituals are carried out by Amaiba, Amaibi and Penakhongba with active participation from the community. The Amaibi begins by performing the Laihou jagoi before the shrine, after which the ritual of lei langba is conducted. It is a actual offering of flowers by men, women and children of the community in their traditional costume. Then Hoi Laoba is performed by Maiba (priest) along with a few people accompanied by Pena player.

Thougal Jagoi is performed by Maibi for the enactment creation of the earth and also by the people including male and women of the community. About the Thougal Jagoi Dr. Elam Indira stated in her book Dances of Lai Haraoba as

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' stand for prayer and service. (Indira 7)

Laiboula thaba (placing of laiboula) is done. In this the three layers of plantain leaves are placed over a white cloth folded three times, upon which the sacred langthrei buds of the deities are arranged. It represents



the Supreme Creator who has power over the three main elements i.e., water, fire, and air. With regard to this statement Nganbi Chanu stated in her article Ritual Festival for Appeasing Ancestral Gods: A Study of Kanglei Lai-haraoba Festival of Manipur that:

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 symbolizing the supreme creator controlling over the three main elements- water, fire and air. (Chanu)

Another perspective on Laiboula Thaba is provided by Yumnam Tamphajao in his book Meetei Lai Haraobagi Wangulon (Philosophy on Lai Haraoba), as outlined below:

...Laipou La aduna numitki masakni. Adugaa laipou saktam louriba la adugi mathakta langtheilei (langthrei) maton ahumna leihul tariba aduna mangang – luwang-khuman kouba matam ahum (tri sandhya) gi masaakni. Amana taibangpal haiba asi humnigi taibangni haiba takli. Humnigi taibang haibadi- pokpa nongma, hingba nongma, siba nongma asumna numit humni asibu humnigi taibang kouwe. (Tamphajao 5)

Then one of the most important parts of Lai Haraoba is the performance of the creation story. This story is shown through a sacred dance called “Laibou or Laipou Jagoi”, performed by Maibis (priestesses). They show how the gods created the universe, the earth and human beings. Supporting the above statement Akoijam Ranjita Devi opined in her article Study of the Lai Haraoba: Cultural Heritage of Manipur in the book The Cultural Heritage of Manipur that:

Laibou is an important ritual in which the maibi and the other performers or participants enact the whole process of the life on the earth, starting from the existence of men and women (Devi 287).

According to the Yumnam Tamphajao, Laibou Jagoi is defined in his book Meetei Lai Haraobagi Wangulon (Philosophy on Lai Haraoba) as:

Malem leimana numitpu koibabu Laipou chakoi kouwe. Chakoi haibadi matam kouba laibu ‘Chak’ kouwe. ‘Chak’ kouba chagoda malem leimana koi. Maram aduna malem leimana chakpu koi haibagi chakoi (jagoi) kouwe. (Tamphajao 6)

This is initiated by singing Anoirol. By Penakhongba in the meantime the Amaibi perform Hakchang saba. Hakchang Saba shows how the human body is formed in the mother's womb, step by step. Each part of the body is created through dance and symbolic hand

movements. Then Yumsarol is performed showing the nature of building of a house. After this, performs the Panthoi Jagoi for the wealth of the community. Then Pamyalon Jagoi illustrates the traditional practice of planting cotton plant. Then Phisarol Jagoi is present. Phisarol jagoi is a dance that vividly depicts the intricate process of making clothes present. Here the process of weaving is depicted including the plantation of cotton plants, cultivation, showing of seed etc. After the Phisarol Jagoi, Lonkhol Jagoi is performed. It symbolizes the gathering of souls and spirits into the fishing basket (Long), as well as the exile of evil spirits. Regarding this statement Saroj N. Arambam Parratt, John Parratt stated in their book The Pleasing of the Gods: Meitei Lai Haraoba that: In longkhonba the dance movements mime the sweeping of the souls and spirits into the long (the fishing basket) and the driving away of the evil spirits. (Saroj N. Arambam Parratt 44)

By Dr. Elam Indira Padmashree in her book “Dances of Lai Haraoba” It shows the netting of the five spirits and the shadow of the body into the basket of life. Indicating this, the dancer moves slowly to the four corners in the act of netting fish in the lake. It is not fish we are netting, it is the soul we are netting, the five spirit of life, the shadow inseparable come, come into the temple of body. (E.I.p.132-133).

Then Padol jagoi: (the meandering steps of a serpent believed to be the ancestral god pakhangba) are performed. “The dance embodies the trinitic philosophy of procreation and propagation by generation after generation man and woman. It shows the meeting point of the beginning and of the creation” (E.I.p.137).

### **Ritual after removing Laiboula**

Phibul jagoi/ Chongkhong jagoi Phibul jagoi performed by maibi with two cloth balls. These represent Lainingthou and Lairembi and are adorned with the leihun (garlands) of both deities. Chongkhong yetpa a dance to be performed after phibul dance

and Yumjao paphal/Lairen Mathek (a procession following the meandering steps of a serpent) are performed. About the Lairen mathek Yumnam Tamphajao stated in his book Meetei Lai Haraobagi Wangulon (Philosophy on Lai Haraoba) that:

...ama haiba mapu mahakna ahoubamasing oiragamasida thingamdaba taibangpal oirakpa, mathang mathang chada nongdarakpa masibu Lairel Mathek kouwe. (Tamphajao 9)



After this, Wakol Laoba (shouting of wakol) is present which shows the deities to set aside the lais until tomorrow.

All the participants make together and form a circle in the middle of the shrine's courtyard. The Maiba leads the group, and the Maibi brings out the Wakol Chaktha a sacred ritual object. Everyone then sings together. This ritual is known as wakol laoba.

After that lai Naosumba (a cradle song) is performed on the last day of celebration. It means that the deities are gently put to sleep until the celebration begins again next year. An expert Pena player sits in front of the deity and sings the Naosumba esei, a devotional song. This ritual is called Lai Naosumba.

### **Lai mai khumba**

After the lai Naosumba ritual, the Maiba and Maibi cover the deities with a cloth. This ritual is known as Lai mai khumba.

### **Essential daily rituals**

The essential daily rituals are strictly followed during a Lai Haraoba. The duration of the Lai haraoba may differ it may last for one day or for several days. Therefore, the daily rituals differ depending on the festival's length. Apart from the first and last day, the daily rituals are the same. When the Lai haraoba extends for three or five days, the rituals such as Lai Lam thokpa, Kanglei thokpa and Saroi Khangba are carried out. If the celebration also includes Lai Lam Thokpa. The term Lai Lam Thokpa literally means "Lai (deities) take a stroll." This is performed on the specific day: 3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th. During this ritual, the deities placed in ornate palanquins, or dolai are carried in a procession from the shrine (laibung) to a more open, communal space. This allows a larger crowd to participate in the rituals performed outside the shrine. With regard the above statement R.K. Danisana cited in his book Manipuri Dances (A Panorama of Indian Culture) that:

In the Lai Haraoba festival there is a day for the outing of the deities in the evening from the shrine to some outdoor place to celebrate the festival more jubilantly. The deities are carried in a well decorated palanquin by a group of youths. (R.K.Danisana 14)

All the ritual duties are same but on this day after completing of laibou, Thang Jagoi (sword dance) is perform. About the Thang Jagoi Saroj N. Arambam Parratt and John Parratt opined in their book The Pleasing of the Gods: Meitei Lai Haraoba that:

The sword dance is explicitly featured in Thang Jagoi, where it represents a protective ritual against threats from outside. (Saroj N. Arambam Parratt 46)

From this clearly shows that Thang Jagoi is the protective ritual. Following the Thang Jagoi, Saroi Khangba is performed. According to some scholars Saroi Khangba is performed on the day of Lai Lam Thokpa is to offer food to the residing deities in that place. Saroi Khangba is also observed on the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th and last day of Lai Haraoba for the safeguard from any obstacles and prevents any things that's hinders progress. With regard the above statement The Cultural Forum, Manipur opined in the Peer Review Journal Ritu that:

Lairoi amasung 1/3/5/7/9 ninachingbada saeoi khangliba punsi khongchatta yetkhai thingaiba apanba ayetpa thokhallaktanaba saroi ngaroisingda machinjak thadoklibani. (The Cultural Forum 4)

The Lai Nupi Thiba, also known as Kanglei Thokpa (Appearance of Kanglei), is a unique ritual of kanglei haraoba. This ritual shows the traditional story of searching for a wife and is symbolized by holding kangjei (a polo stick). It tells the myth of khoriphaba, the son of lord Soraren, who come down to earth and met the gods celebrating Lai Haraoba. He asked permission to join the festival and was allowed on the condition that he should bring a companion. As part of the agreement, and with his face covering, he engaged in mukna (wrestling) and kangjei (polo) with Loyarakpa (son of Lord Marjing). In the end, he used the hooked end of the stick to draw a girl from the crowd and made her his companion. The kanglei thokpa ritual is performed by a maibi, who is believed to be possessed by the spirit of khoriphaba. The Lai Nupi Thiba ritual is performed on the 5th day, 7th day, 9th day or 11th day of the festival. This shows that a human being has grown up and developed an interest in marriage. Supporting this view, Yumnam Tamphajao describe in his book Meitei Lai Haraobagi Wangulon (Philosophy on Lai Haraoba) as:

...meeoibana salep kangthong pharakpabu lai nupi thiba kouwe. Haibadi meeoibana sanglep kangthong pharabadi yumnailonda khongdababu takli. Amana anigi taibangni haibasuningsinghalli. (Tamphajao 10)

### **Saroi khangba**

Saroi khangba is a ritual usually performed on the 3rd day, 5th day, 5th day, 7th day, 9th days toward off the evil spirits. The term Saroi refers to evil spirit living in the society who always creates disturbances in the process of existence of human civilization in the Meitei



society, and khangba means here offerings made to the evil spirits to appease them satisfying their hungers with food materials offered. During this ritual maibi offers food to the spirits. The offerings usually include dry singju/ salad made of heibi leaves, dry fish, salt, chili etc.

### **Lairoi (The last day of Lai haraoba)**

Lairoi is the concluding day of Lai Haraoba. A sacred celebrated by the Meitei community of Manipur to honor the Umang Lais (forest deities). It marks the ceremonial farewell to the deities after days of rituals, music, dance, and storytelling that reenact the creation of the universe and human life.

Morning rituals are same as daily rituals. After Hoi Laoba, Phungarel jagoi ( Phungarel dance) performed by the selected husband and wife of the community. After completing of laibou, Thang Jagoi (sword dance) is performed.

Following this, Tangkhul Nurabi (love episode of Tangkhul and Nurabi)

It is a type of dance drama that shows the meeting of Tangkhul representing Nongpok Ningthou, and Nurabi, representing panthoibi. They wear the traditional costumes of the Tangkhul tribe, one of the ethnic tribes of Manipur. The episode depicts, they quarreled over piece of land and then their final reconciliation. This exchange of romantic words and riddles with sexual themes is an important part of Lai Haraoba. The inclusion of Tangkhul shows earlier good and pure relationship between the hill and valley communities.

After this, the ritual of Ougri Hangel lyric is performed for the welfare and prosperity of the land and its people. In this ritual, a rope is held without falling in a circle by an equal number i.e., 20 or 30 of men and women. While holding the rope, the participants sing the Ougri hymn as part of the ceremony. Ougri is followed by rituals such as huithi yenthi yeppa, sarit, litpa, kencho and poasha, all of which are connected with the creation of the universe and its being.

Supporting this statement Wahengbam Lukhoi Singh explained in his book Lai Haraoba that: ...thouri adu laimangda laibou la thaphamda nupa nupi masing mannana haibadi amamamda 20 natraga 30 na koisillaga leipak tahandana paigani. Lai sannaba loidrifaoba thouri adu leipak taba yade. Madu tourabadi khunkai leikaibanachingba phattaba oigal (W. L. Singh 114)

Following the Ougri Hangel, Hijin Hirao is performed. This ritual represents the symbolic making of boats

for the return of the presiding deities to their heavenly abode. The two lines of the procession known as ekouba, now ensembled at the courtyard. And those not holding any item are given the yengdhou (bamboo canes) horizontally representing the structure of the boat. The amaibi sang the hijin hirao lyric and everyone acted out the rowing of the boat. After that, all the ritual objects are were collected and placed the shrine. The amaibi entered the shrine, spread a white cloth like a curtain, and chanted nongarol (song of ascending deities to heaven). Symbolizing the deities journey to heaven. Then, lai tethaba and saroi khangba (the rituals of dismantling and appeasing the deities) are performed, marking the conclusion of the last day of the festival.

Supporting this statement Polem Nabachandra stated in his book Ariba Manipuri Sahityagi Saklon about the Hijan Hirao as follows: Ariba Manipuri Sahityagi ningthiraba machal oina aheibasingna singthanariba "Hijan Hirao" (Hijing Hirao)meiteigi Kanglei Haraobagi lairoi numitta asheibasingna Pena nungonbabu thada pamna cheijing khutta paiduna saknariba esheini. (Nabachandra 115)

Ksh. Premchandra Singh, also cited about the Hijan Hirao in the preface of his book Hijan Hirao: Text, Context, and Translation as: Hijan Hirao is derived from (a phonological change) Hichan Hilao, Hichan is a conflation of hi boat, chan (pa) to make/construct, and Hilao, again, is a conlawo words, hi boat, and lao cheerful noise.

Futher he also showcases about the Hijan Hirao in Kanglei Haraoba as given below: Hijan Hirao, also a sacred song sung at the end of Umang Lai Haraoba, is one of the earliest creative efforts in Manipuri literature. (K. P. Singh 9)

This ritual song represents the creation of boats for the return journey of the presiding deities to their heavenly place. In relation to this statement Nganbi Chanu stated in her article Ritual Festival for Appeasing Ancestral Gods: A Study of Kanglei Lai-haraoba Festival of Manipur that: This ritual symbolised the making of boats for the return of the presiding deities to the heavenly abode. (Chanu)

The song sing in Hijan Hirao is given below:

Hi O Hi O| Hi Nangbu Hondeda| Lainingthoubu Honbane|

Hi O Samde Karengnga, Karengnga|

Hi O Hi O| Hi Nangbu Hondeda| Lairembibu Honbane|

Hi O Samde Tarengnga, Tarengnga.



All of these are carried out to honor the deities, seeking their blessings for the prosperity and well-being of the people in one way or another. Then Lai Nonggaba's ceremony is performed, it reflected that people when pass away, their spirits go to the heaven. In such way Lai Haraoba festival is conclude.

Lai Haraoba is a spiritual teaching that explains the origin of life and the universe. It reminds people that life is precious and divine, and it must be respected. Finally, the philosophy of Lai Haraoba is not something that is only followed during the festival. It is a way of life. It teaches people how to live in a meaningful, respectful, and joyful way. The values of Lai Haraoba such as love for nature, community unity, and respect for elders, equality, and celebration of life are meant to be practiced every day. It is a living tradition that passes on Meitei knowledge, beliefs, and culture from one generation to the next.

## Conclusion

From the opening day to the final day, the festival's daily rituals symbolically depict the creation of the universe and the evolution of human life and society. It also understands that lai haraoba is one of the oldest and most ritual performance traditions of the Meitei community of Manipur, expressing their cosmology, myths and sacred knowledge through dance, music and ritual. The ritual and dance performed in the festival show the story of the Universe's creation. It may be stated that the central and underlying purpose of the festival Lai Haraoba is the promotion of fertility, vitality, abundance, and wellbeing of the community. The sacred union of the supreme male (Pa principle) and the female (Pi principle), represented as the father sky and mother earth, is expressed through the festival's daily ritual practices. Lai Haraoba stands as a profound embodiment of the Meitei people's sacred worldview, offering far more than festive entertainment or cultural performance. It is a living philosophy, one that carries within it the memory of ancient knowledge systems and spiritual beliefs. Through its complex rituals, symbolic dances, and communal participation, Lai Haraoba reenacts the origin of life, the interconnectedness between humans and nature, and the divine order of the universe. It reminds people of their roots, their duties to their ancestors, their community, and their environment. The roles of the Maibis, Maibas, and the Pena players are not just ritualistic but represent the transmission of sacred knowledge and a bridge between the physical and spiritual worlds. Lai Haraoba is more than a religious or cultural festival. It is a deep and beautiful expression of the Meitei philosophy of life. It teaches us all the duties of the people from birth to death and also teaches to respect nature, honor our ancestors, live in harmony, value community, and celebrate life with joy and balance. In today's world, where people are often disconnected from nature and from each other, the message of Lai Haraoba is more relevant than ever. It reminds us to live simply, spiritually, and responsibly, and to always remember that life itself is sacred. Ultimately, Lai Haraoba is a celebration of the sacredness of life in all its forms. It promotes unity, peace, respect for nature, and the power of collective memory. As such, its philosophy continues to guide the Meitei people in preserving their cultural heritage while offering universal lessons about harmony, responsibility, and the spiritual depth of everyday existence. Lai haraoba is one of the most significant ritual festivals of Manipur and has been celebrated since time immemorial. It is performed to please the ancestral deities by symbolically enacting the creation of the universe and all living beings, and in return, seeking their blessings. The festival reflects the origin of life following the cosmic creation.

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