

GOVERNMENT GIRLS COLLEGE, BETUL

EBSB monthly Report

March 2022

Name of event- Cheiraoba

No. of student - 25

Cheiraoba, the great ritual festival of Meiteis is observed on the first day of Manipur lunar month *Shajibu*, which falls in April every year. It is the announcement of the beginning of a new year. To Saroj Nalini Parrat, the name *Cheiraoba* means to announce by means of a stick. Her view is perhaps based on the way of making a public announcement.

According to R K Jhalajit Singh, “Before 1485, the Manipuris had the practice of the king’s servants making a public announcement at the end of every year had just ended. The announcement was made in this way: A few servants of the king held *Khok* (a species of bamboo, tall but slender) sticks kept unhewn at the top, to which little belts were fastened, went about the highways, lanes and bye lanes and announced by shouting that the year had just ended. This practice gave the name *Cheiraoba* to the festival held at the end of the year”.

The word *Cheiraoba* is the combination of two words- *Chei* and *Raoba*; here, *Chei* means the year (*Chahi*), not the stick. Therefore, *Cheiraoba* means the announcement of New Year; (*Chei* means stick and *Raoba*, shouting). The ceremony of *Cheiraoba* is carried out at the state level on one hand and by individuals in their capacity.

This practice did arise from the need of following a uniform calendar throughout the area of the Ningthouja kings. The *Cheiraoba* festival was first introduced by Pakhangba in the first century AD. In early times, the announcement was made by the respective heads of the four Panas of Khurai, Wangkhei, Khwai and Yaiskul. In this festival, the *Pana* heads were dressed in their respective costumes.



In the Meitei tradition, a day was counted one *Shing*, a stick. Thirty sticks did represent a month and twelve months made one *Chei*, larger form of stick. Thus, a year was counted by using the symbols of *Chei*, stick. However, during the reign of king Kyamba (1455-1508), the four *Pana* heads were replaced by one man, who came to be recognized as *Cheithaba*. According to *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, in 1484 AD, *Cheithaba* started with Hiyangloi Namoi Chaoba. This name *Cheithaba* was also used in the preparation of individual horoscope of the Meiteis.

House and its garden are kept clean and beautified; old utensils of the household are also well washed for the New Year festival. These are done one day ahead/in the morning of *Cheiraoba*. On the day of *Cheiraoba*, the priest (*Maiba*) performs the *Usin* divination with *Ngamu* before Lainingthou Sanamahi on behalf of the individual persons of the family to avoid misfortune; and the said fish is set free in the pond.

He observes the movement of the *Ngamu* to decide the fortune; if it does remain silent while offering and swim straight in the water, it is a good sign for the person. Special worship of the household deity Lainingthou Sanamahi and Leimaren Shidabi with offerings of seasonal fruits, flowers and vegetables is performed in every house for wellbeing and prosperity in the coming year. However, the worship of Sanamahi will not be performed if the family is polluted by birth or death.



The offerings thus made are cooked and a small portion of the same cooked food is first laid at the gate on a plaintain leaf. Offering is also made at the *Phunga Lairu*, hearth of the family. They worship deities like Lainingthou Nongshaba and Ibudou Pakhangba.

In the morning of *Cheiraoba*, the elderly women of the village perform *Saroi Khangba*, propitiation of *Saroi-Ngaroi* at a junction of three/four roads. The household rites performed at *Cheiraoba* festival are “both protective and positive; they not only ensure that the domestic deities are propitious, but also guard the household against evil influences from without”.