

GOVERNMENT GIRLS COLLEGE, BETUL

EBSB monthly Report

June 2022

Name of event- Umang Lai Haraoba

No. of student - 50

In relation to World Environmental Day, a culture of Manipur "Umang Lai Haraoba" was Discuss. The **Umang Lai** is a class of deities which dwell in the forests in Meitei mythology, folklore and religion. The term "Umang" means "forest" and "Lai" means "deity" in Meitei language (Manipuri language). The cults of these deities vary from community to community. There are 365 Umang Lais in the state, out of which 166 are identified in the valley regions of the state.

The *Umanglai Haraoba* (in short, *Laiharaoba*), a ritual festival or the performance of ceremonial rites to appease the *Umanglai* (sylvan deity), is counted as the unique contribution of Meitei to the domain of world culture. The Meitei peoples in Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Bangladesh and Myanmar also, celebrate Umanglai Haraoba.

The worlds famous Manipuri dance (*Ras Lila*), polo and Meitei *Pung Eshei Pala* (also known as *Nat Sankritan* which is recognized by UNESCO), etc. are the products of *Umanglai* culture. The ritual festival is the greatest single key to the religion, culture and history of Meitei people of Manipur. Lai Haraoba itself is a university preserving and imparting knowledge on a variety of subjects.

In short, *Umanglai Haraoba* is the biggest original source of all the cultures and traditions of the indigenous people i.e., the Universe of Knowledge in the Meitei society. Identity and civilization of the Meitei are reflected in this festival. It is widely helpful in the socialization and nation making process of the Meitei. It embodies the elements of common ancestry, integrity and communal harmony among the various communities residing in Manipur. Thus, it is the greatest repository of spiritual insight and wisdom of the indigenous peoples of the region.

As a matter of fact, it may be said to represent the epitome of the cultural ethos of the Meitei society, (Ratan Kumar Singh, 2001). It is a vast complex of oral literature, dance and music, ceremonial and rituals, which represent a unique pre-Hindu world-view which has remained in its aesthetic sensitivity and reveals the heart of Meitei culture, (Parrat, and Parrat, 1997).

Laiharaoba is an ancient Meitei fertility rite celebrating cosmic union between male and female principles. In later days it is enlarged to incorporate cosmological and ideological categories of the Meitei nation, assuming an intense and complicated ritual theatre structure. This

festival is still a living legend in Meitei society till the dawn of Hindu Vaishnavism. It is one of the very distinct cultures and only the one in the entire world of its kind.

The only form of conservation of forest in the prehistoric and early part of recorded history of the Meitei people was the practice of worshipping local deities known as “*Umanglai*”, which formed the important aspect of the religious customary practice.

Umanglai Haraoba as a Traditional Institution:

Before discussing the Umanglai Haraoba as a Traditional Institution, let's have an idea about the significance of the Umanglai Culture in Contemporary Manipuri Society. Among all the various ethnic groups that have settled in Manipur, the Meiteis are credited with having the greatest number of population. But inside the Meitei ethnic group there are two religions, e.g. Meitei Hinduism and Meitei Sanamahism.

One follows Hindu religion and the other follows indigenous Meitei religion (*Sanamahi*). Even if these two religious groups profess two different religions, the unique thing is that both of them worship *Sanamahi* deity and *Umanglai* with the same rites and rituals in equal measure.

The Meitei Hindus make it mandatory to preserve the South-West Corner of the house as the abode of Lainingthou Sanamahi which is considered as a sacrosanct area and every day they worship this Home deity with rituals which is same as what is practiced by the followers of Sanamahism in the same corner of the house and in the same manner.

Moreover, the said Meitei Hindus and followers of indigenous Sanamahi religion together pay obeisance as one, to the local ancestral deities (*Umanglais*) with awe and reverence with much merry-making. Both the members of the two religious groups in unison give financial contributions when *Umanglai Haraoba* or merry-making of the sylvan deities takes place for day's to-gather in the locality. The Meitei Hindus and the Meitei Sanamahi take keen interest in such festivals and they perform it with ecstasy.

In the *Umanglai Haraoba*, the origin of the Meiteis, their coming and settlement on the earth, their evolution as a social group, the struggle for existence by hard labours, agricultural works and weaving for a civilized existence along with multiplication of progeny are clearly depicted through dance. To commemorate the younger generation of these things, the *Lai Haraoba* is performed every year in Manipur with pomp and gaiety accompanied by offerings of fruits, flowers, prayers, songs and dances down the ages.

But this should be performed under certain rules and strictures. It was greatly feared that anybody who violates these rules and practices intentionally or unintentionally will suffer and receive the scourge of God. Not only this, strict rules are observed to maintain discipline in the precincts of the *Umanglai*.

All those who are taking part in the *Lai Haraoba* as also the spectators are to observe this discipline. There are beliefs galore that if the participants fail to conform to the prescribed sites and rituals along with the rules and regulations governing the different aspects of the *Lai Haraoba*, misfortunes are sure to befall the village people.

Unfortunately, the change of time and emergence of modern society has brought about undesired influence into the festival and its sanctity has been at threat. Modern people are heavily influencing in transforming the festival into an entertainment festival.

This undue influence has disturbed the psychical of tradition and culture loving citizens of the society. But during the past 40/50 years it has been seen that with the march of time there has been an almost lack of enforcement of discipline in regard to such a very important aspect of the *Lai Haraoba*.

As a result, non-conformation of the accepted rules and standards of observance of the rites and rituals in *Lai Haraoba* has become very common now-a-days leading to a very unhappy trend of deterioration even to the extent of creating a complete mess. There is a tendency for the disappearance of the right kind of dress, costume, folk songs, prayer, dancing style, rites, rituals and festival materials.

Most of the social disciplines present earlier during the *Lai Haraoba* precincts are crumbling. Many irresponsible fellows have appeared on the scene acting according to their whims in complete disregard of the pristine purities of the important facts of *Lai Haraoba* and in violation of the sacred practices of this great festival. It is very unfortunate to think that the *Lai Haraoba* has been slowly reduced to a mere amusement piece or entertainment programme by inserting many items quite unconnected with it.

The purpose of the paper is to highlight the significance of *Umanglai* culture in the contemporary Manipuri society. *Umanglai Haraoba* is a ritual and religious festival consisting of fertility rites and ancestors' worship.

It also reveals the cosmogony-theory of the creation of the Universe then the Earth; Evolution theory of the living creatures specially human being; Self-understanding and meditation plus the abode of the almighty lord; School of philosophy and thoughts of Meitei community; Publicity for the high ideals of the Meitei; Annual conference of a Meitei village; Training Centre for leadership of Meitei ; Democratic ideals of Meitei; Defence, sports and health education system of Meitei; Integration and understanding among the villages i .e, Oneness of the village; School of financial management; School of social discipline and observance thereof.; Protection of forest and environment; School of agriculture, handloom and handicraft of Meitei; School of oral and folk literature, dance and music; School of the various culture of *Amaiba*, *Amaibi* and *Pena* player; and many more.

Thus, *Umanglai Haraoba* is the oldest traditional institution consisting of the different facets culture and tradition in Meitei society.

In Manipur, in the valley area, traditional institutions like the *Ahalup* (group of elders), *Naharup* (group of youth), *Singlup* (locality clubs), *Keirup* () formed the local self-government. They looked after the general administration of the village and also resolved petty disputes. The time has come to re-look, critique as well as recommend certain reforms towards a better functioning as well as understanding of these institutions.

The main objective of the present paper is to find out the roles of *Umanglai Haraoba* as a traditional institution for local self-governance in Manipur. The socio-cultural aspects of the ritual festival regarding its *Lai Thougallup* (organising committee of the *Lai Haraoba*) and its office bearers (*Phamthou- Phamnaiba- Khullakpa, Shellungba, Keirungba, Choubon, Pakhanglakpa, Ningolakpa, Singloi, Laroi, etc.*), *LaigiSenkhai, Lai Potlannaba, LaiphamthouMapan* (9), *Sagei Piba*, etc. are the main issues in the paper.

The administrative set-up and the organisational structure of *Umanglai Haraoba* are closely related with the political and administrative affairs of the Sanakonung (the Royal Palace of the Manipur). *Lai Thougallup*, organising committee of the *Lai Haraoba*, is a tradition of local administration under the supervision of the Sanakonung.

Before fixing the schedule of the *Lai Haraoba*, the *Lai Thougallup* of every *Umanglai Laikon* must inform to the concern authority of the Sanakonung and must get the official order of the schedule and the required *Amaiba, Pena Asheiba, and Amaibi* for the festival. There is also a tradition of exempting official duties of the *Phamthou- Phamnaiba* of the Sanakonung during the *Lai Haraoba* festival of their village.

The office bearers of the *Lai Thougallup* are selected under the supervision of the Sanakonung. There are also rules and regulations framed by the concern *Loishang* of the Royal Palace for the selection of the *Phamthou-Phamnaiba* and their administrative set up.

The various posts of the *Lai Thougallup* i.e., *Phamthou-Phamnaibas* are:-

- *Khullakpa,*
- *Shellungba,*
- *Keirungba,*
- *Choubon,*
- *Pakhanglakpa*
- *Ningolakpa,*
- *Singloi,*
- *Laroi, etc.*

Laigi Senkhai, collection of money or other required materials for the *Lai Haraoba* form each and every family of the locality, is a tradition of *shinglup* (locality clubs) consisting of the

concepts of Annual conference of a Meitei village; Training Centre for leadership of Meitei; Democratic ideals of Meitei; Integration and understanding among the villages i .e, Oneness of the village; School of financial management, etc.

Lai Potlannaba is also a part of village administrative set up. It is an exchange of gifts during the Lai Haraoba festival among the villages and ethnic communities for integration and understanding among us. *Kanglei Pibarel* (the King of Manipur) is head of the *SageiPibas*(administrative head of a clan/sagei). This tradition of the *SageiPiba* is still preserved in the Umanglai culture.

The tradition of the *Laiphamthou Mapan*, Nine important *Umanglais*, is also an administrative set up for the Royal Palace introduced by NongdaLairen Pakhangba and his queen Laisana. Indigenous sports meets are also organized as a part of Lai Haraoba by *Ahalupand Naharup Pana*, mobilised by the *Pakhanglakpa* and *Ningolakpa*.

Conclusion: An institution should be formed under an Act like the Manipur State Umang Lai and Sanamahi Council Act (a proposed Act) to restore *Lai Haraoba* in its true and original form and also to keep on record the roots, stories and accompanying religious practices of this indigenous people. As a safe-guard against these blows on the pristine purity of *Lai Haraoba*, the institution should try its level best to protect, preserve and propagate this valuable gift of our forefathers in its original form by taking up various action programmes.

This institution would be the only one of its kind in Manipur which is working very hard for the survival of this great festival in its true self by maintaining the social codes during the religious functions around the *Umanglai* precincts.

The institution should also firmly believe that if the correct rites, rituals and devotional services as also the social discipline associated with *Lai Haraoba* are strictly observed and the merry-making of the sylvan deities are rightly performed, then our society will be peaceful, prosperous and progressive. Only then the traditional institution of *Lai Haraoba* for local self-governance in Manipur can be preserved.

Reference:

1. https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umang_Lai
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umang_Lai
3. http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=manipur.Arts_and_Culture.Article_Lai_Haraoba.Umanglai_Haraoba_Traditional_Institution_for_Local_Self_Governance_in_Manipur_By_Thounaojam_Ruhichand