

## **Kanglei Haraoba-significance of its dances and nomenclature**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Dance forms an inseparable part of human civilization since time immemorial. Dance can be defined as the act of portraying or expressing a certain particular part of historical events. Body movements, facial expression, costumes, instruments, taal, songs all constitute dance form. It is the basis of culture, custom and tradition of group of people living in different parts of the world. The Meitei community residing mainly in state of Manipur, north east India and some parts of countries like Myanmar, Bangladesh are culturally evolved, whose social life revolves around religious rites, dance, and music. For the Meiteis, dance and music have a strong connection to the ceremonial acts that occur throughout a person's life, from birth to death. There is an age old saying that Meitei people inherited the art of dance from the time of birth. Every child would love to dance in the verbal taal 'tadhin'. Therefore, dance plays an important role in shaping the whole process of Laiharaoba. Laiharaoba, the only living culture of Meitei people which is celebrated annually is defined as the enactment of creation of Earth by the Almighty God. Dance to Meitei is religion as seen in Laiharaoba festival. Laiharaoba festival shows gratefulness to the Almighty God by performing dances, songs, rituals and chanting of hymns. Dances of Laiharaoba festival portray the culture and traditions of Meitei people. Culture being the lifelong social behaviour of group of people within a social structure is seen to be strictly maintained by the Meiteis in Laiharaoba festival. Kanglei Haraoba is one of the main Lai Haraoba celebrated by a group of Meitei settling in Imphal and adjoining areas. The unique feature of this Haraoba is the ritual "Kangleithokpa" which means consort seeking of the God. Almost all the programme of Kanglei Haraoba are carried out in the form of dances and in this study nomenclature and the unique features of the dances namely Chukparol Jagoi, Laiching Jagoi, Longkhon Jagoi and Panthoibi Jagoi (Jagoi-dances) are discussed.

**Key Words:** Manipur, Dance, Laiharaoba, Meitei, Kanglei Haraoba, Kangleithokpa.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Dance has been defined as a purposeful manner of moving the body in a defined bounded space. It is most frequently characterised as a form of movement that allows people to express themselves and has always played an important role in the social fabric of all human cultures. While movement forms an important aspect of dance, it is more of a well defined special art movement based on the expressive movements of the human body. Many a time, the meaning of dance is restricted to its physical component in terms of artistically refined rhythmic physical activity, but the myriad roles and meanings that dance plays in society is being ignored. In fact, dance is a related aspect of culture. It is not a distinct entity, but rather a component of it. It is an expression of a certain culture/cultures, or it is the language or narrator of that culture/cultures. Dance encapsulates the complexities of culture and life. Dancing is a form of artistic expression; dance styles are linked to the culture in which they emerge, and they evolve over time in response to societal changes. Dance is an ever-changing language. Every gesture and movement has its own cultural and historical context.

Traditional dances convey cultural morals, such as religious traditions and sexual standards; they allow repressed emotions, such as grief to be expressed, they motivate community members to work together, whether fighting wars or grinding grain, they enact spiritual rituals and they contribute to social cohesion. Dance has a distinct meaning that is dependent on the social context in which it is performed.

Dance was tightly embedded in the life of a particular society at all times and in all cultures. From the magic and animism of Palaeolithic man to the indigenous religions of African peoples and tribes; from the ancient civilizations of the East and the ancient societies of medieval Europe to the Western capitalist societies. It was a means of communication and an essential component of the social system's reproduction. Dance and music are inextricably linked to the social and religious fabric of the people.

Manipur is a state in India that lies on the country's eastern border with Myanmar. It is bounded on the east by Myanmar (Burma), on the north by the state of Nagaland, on the west by the state of Assam, and on the south by the state of Mizoram and Myanmar. The social life of the Manipuri people revolves around religious rites, dancing, and music. Dance and music have a strong connection to the ceremonial acts that occur throughout a person's life, from birth to death. The culture of Manipur is firmly ingrained in its soil and heritage. Manipur has a long history of dance and music. The foundations and basis of Manipuri dance and music are the Pre-Vaishnavite traditions of 1) Lai Haraoba and 2) Thang-Ta (Martial Art) and Vaishnavite Classical traditions of 3) Sankirtana and 4) Raasa Leela with numerous varieties and offshoots .

Lai-Haraoba is one of Manipur's most prominent ritualistic festivals, which is celebrated annually by the Meiteis. The word "Laiharaoba" literally means "merry making of Gods and Goddesses." It is commemorated in order to honour the ancestor deities by re-enacting the creation of the universe and its being in exchange for blessings. The main and internal motivation of this event is considered to be reproduction vitality, abundance, and a healthy community life. It is an old custom also a vast and intricate ceremonial celebration that includes a sequence of dances and songs related with ancestor worship and Meitei cosmogony ((Kennedy, 2003).In Laiharaoba, the Meiteis worship their forefathers, called the "Umanglais," in the form of the father (Lainingthou) and the mother (Lairemma). The village folks—men and women, boys and girls, all of them participate in this festival. They offer prayers through dance, rituals, songs, ritualistic materials, etc. The main functions of the festival are carried out by the Maiba (priest), Maibi (priestess), and Penakhongba (Pena-indegeneous stringed instrument, khongba-player)

. Laiharaoba is celebrated in different villages or for a clan. Therefore, according to the tradition of that village or clan Laiharaoba can be of four different types (Kanglei Haraoba, Moirang Haraoba, Chakpa Haraoba, Kakching Haraoba).

Kanglei Haraoba is one of the main Lai Haraoba performed in Manipur's Imphal valley. On the first day of the celebration, the primary rite is Lai Ekouba(invocation of soul of the Deity from water). The celebration takes place in the afternoon, which is considered fortunate. The ceremonial artefacts are taken out of the temple and paraded through the streets. Each procession member wears traditional garb and carries a ceremonial object such as an eshaiphu (earthen pitcher) or the shenkha (pan box). The locals line up in two rows, from oldest to youngest, to watch the parade. The specialty of *Kanglei Haraoba* is the ritual of *KangleiThokpa* or Lai NupiThiba (meaning the Lord searching for his "bride").

### **Language related to naming of dances in Kanglei Haraoba**

Since Kanglei Haraoba is mainly celebrated by the valley people, or Meitei or Manipuri, the etymological name of the dances of Kanglei Haraoba has been archaic Meiteilon or Manipuri. Manipuri language, Meiteilon, is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken mostly in Manipur, India. The Meiteis possess cultural ability to assign names to various traits since time immemorial. Naming of things, places, flowers, surnames, rivers, lakes etc., plays a significant role in shaping the culture of Manipur. Being the worshipper of forefathers and nature, Meiteis had been following the culture of naming places associated with the actions and character of their forefathers so as to revive their memories in history.

### **Dances of Kanglei Haraoba**

In Kanglei Haraoba various kinds of dances are performed namely the *Chukpharol Jagoi, Laiok Jagoi, Thougai Jagoi, PhungarenJagoi, Laiching Jagoi, Khayom*

*Jagoi, Hakchangsaba, Nungnao Jagoi, Yumsarol, Panthoibi Jagoi, Phisarol, Longkhonba, Phibun Jagoi and Thang Jagoi.*

Chukpharol Jagoi is performed by a Maibi holding two pots in her hands at the time of Ekum-Etaba, a ritual done in the bank of river. This dance is believed to be the first dance performed by Nongthangleima at the time of the creation of the earth (Kullachandra, 1963).

**LaiokJagoi:** This dance is performed at the time of 'Higaba'. On the day of Ekouba, returning from the bank of the river to the shrine after the invocation of the soul of the deity is known as 'Higaba'. On this journey, Maibi, along with Penakhongba, performed dance three times, welcoming different deities in three different places. This dance is known as Laiok Jagoi. (Kumar Maibi, 1988).Some pandits also name this dance as Khungjao Leichao Jagoi (Achoubisana, 2007).

Chukpharol and Laiok Jagoi are performed only on the first day of Laiharaoba, i.e., on the day of Ekouba. Thougajagoi is performed in the afternoon session before the start of "Laibou". The dance performed by Maiba, Maibi, Pena, men, women, children, etc., in their own way of offering respect and obeisance to the Lord is known as Thougajagoi (Sharma, 1985). Laiching Jagoi is the first dance of Laibou .It is performed after placing Laibou-La (plaintain leaf) in the Laibung. Laiching Jagoi is performed to recall the creation of Earth. Scholars and pundits have different views about Laiching Jagoi.

Laiching Jagoi has 9 hand gesture:

1. Ningkhal Jagoi
2. Leipek Jagoi
3. Leitai Jagoi
4. Khubak Jagoi
5. Kaibang Jagoi
6. Leising Jagoi
7. Leiok Jagoi
8. Leineng Jagoi
9. Leitin Jagoi

Laiching Jagoi is performed on all days of Laiharaoba except Ekouba day. It is performed by at least three Maibis holding Langthrei (a kind of sacred leaf) between their fingers.

The dances of Kanglei Haraoba which can be discussed in context of nomenclature are:

1. **Chukpharol Jagoi** – Chukpharol Jagoi is the dance performed by Nongthangleima at the time of the creation of the earth. The story behind naming this dance is as follows: The Almighty God (Atiya Sidaba) gave the task of creating the Earth to Asiba. But Asiba couldn't complete the creation as Haraba destroyed it immediately after the construction, so the Almighty God created Nongthangleima to distract the mind of

Haraba. While Haraba was attracted to Nongthangleima's movement and beauty, Asiba finished the creation of Earth. This dance, performed by Nongthangleima to control the chuk in four directions, is known as Chukpharol Jagoi (Indira, 1997). The Maibi holds two Ekouphu (pots used in Ekouba) in both her hands and performs in four directions: Thangjing (south-west), Marjing (north-east), Wangbrel (south-east), and Koubru (north-west), which shows that "Tengbanba Malem" (The Earth) created by Guru is just like these pots. The creation of earth by Asiba and destruction by Haraba, along with the performance of dance by Nongthangleima, is shown on the day of Ekouba. According to Padmashree Elam Indira, this dance is called Chukpharol Jagoi. Chukpharol was given this name because Chuk = bamboo stick and phaba = control (guard). Some scholars and Gurus believe that this dance is also known as Ehaiphu Jagoi, Chaphu Jagoi, and so on. It is called Ehaiphu because the pot held by Maibi is known as Ehaiphu. "Pot" in the Manipuri language means 'Chaphu ', so it is also known as 'Chaphu Jagoi. But, this dance in general is known as "Chukpharol Jagoi"

- 2. Laiching Jagoi** – Laiching Jagoi is performed in the Laibou session. The eldest Maibi will stand on the right side of the Laibung (the open space in front of God's shrine). Then Maibis will start dancing along with the Penakhongba behind the plantain leaf. *"The souls of the Gods and Goddesses inside the shrine have been brought inside the plantain leaf, so no one can cross the plantain leaf. From the plantain leaf, the soul is again pulled out to the navel of the Maibi so that she can recall the creation of Earth again just as the Almighty did. That's why it's called Laiching"* (Kondumba, 2010). The term "Laiching" consists of two words: "Lai" (God) and "Ching" (pull), i.e., God's soul has been pulled out of the shrine and entered into the Maibis navel. The Maibis are of the opinion that the God's soul is pulled out of the shrine and put in the plantain leaf in the form of Langthrei (a kind of sacred leaf). This leaf is taken by the Maibis and put in between their fingers and performed a dance. Langthrei is the connection between God's soul and Maibi. Such form of dance where the God (Lai) is being pulled out (Chingba) is known as Laiching Jagoi (Ema Dhoni, 2008).
- 3. Longkhongba Jagoi** –Longkhonba Jagoi is a part of the Laibou (the evening section of Kanglei Haraoba) session of Kanglei Haraoba festival. It is performed in the Laibung by Maibis and village folks. The concept of Longkhongba is to gather the soul of the God, which might have been wandering outside the shrine during the Laiharaoba festival. The story behind this dance is - "Pakhangba, the King of the Ningthouja clan, was killed by his son Khuiba with the influence of Khaba Clan King Phandongba. Here the underlying story is- Pakhangba disguised himself in the form of a serpent and came

to look after his wife and son every day. Unknowingly, his son killed him, and he narrated the whole story to his mother. Laisna, the wife of Pakhangba, suspected that it must be his husband. So the worried Laisna holds a “long”(a kind of fishing basket) and gets into the Nungjeng lake in search for Pakhangba’s soul. From this incident, a dance came to be existed known as Longkhonba dance (Mangi, 2009).It is of the opinion that the Longkhongba dance was formed during the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33 A.D.). This dance is performed to gather souls by Laisna at Nungjeng lake holding a “long” (Indira, 2010). Further, Longkhongba dance depicts calling back of the soul of an already deceased person to this living world ( Khangembam Mangi, 2009).

**4. *Panthoibi Jagoi*** - This dance is performed on all days except Ekouba day. Maibi or Penakhongba sings song while performing this dance. It is a duet dance portraying the romantic affairs between Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi. The dance performed by Panthoibi in search of Nongpok Ningthou is called Panthoibi Jagoi. It is also called ‘Pakthabi’, ‘Apheibi’, ‘Chokthabi’ in some villages and communities. “*Nongpok Panthoibi ani pao sannaduna Eesheiga loinana saba Jagoi adubu Panthoibi Jagoi Kou-e*” (Singh, 1989). In the book “*Panthoibi Khongul*” it is mentioned that Panthoibi, the daughter-in-law of Khaba Sokchrangba and Tarang Khoinucha, the king and Queen of the Khaba Clan had ultimately gone to the place of Nongpok Ningthou, the presiding deity of the Langmais and her father-in-law and mother-in-law realising her divine attributes erected a temple and made ritual offerings of them. In order to fulfil their wishes Panthoibi and Nongpok Ningthou revealed their identity to the ardent devotees. Thus, the Khaba since that time had been enacting for generations, on specially prepared sacred spots, the fun and abandonment that the divine couple enjoyed on the slope of the Langmai hills. The dance which they performed at that time came to be known as Panthoibi Jagoi.

The Laibou Jagoi process is an ideal location for individuals to learn and engage in the dance process by following the Maibi, who dance in the front row of the two lines ringing the Laibou La. Laiching Jagoi, Khayom73Jagoi, Hakchang Sabagi Jagoi, Nungnao Jagoi, Yumsarol Jagoi, Panthoibi Jagoi, Pamyannlon Jagoi, Phisarol Jagoi, Longkhon Jagoi, Thang Jagoi are the sequences. Manipuri used to call hand gestures-khuthek, and the Manipuri dance contains 364 Khuthek in total, which are employed in a sequence of Laibou dances.

Hakchang Saba has 64 Khutheks, Nungnao Jagoi has 48, Yumsarol Jagoi has 44, Panthoibi Jagoi has 14, Pamyannlon has 30, Phisarol has 158, and Longkhonba has 6 Khutheks. The Maibis have been doing these 364 motions for decades, learning them from their Gurus and according to rigorous norms that haven't changed. Though some stylization occurs, the realism of the motions is preserved via the Maibis' rigid, unchanging ceremonial performances at the Lai Haraoba.

## **Conclusions**

In order to understand the uniqueness of Kanglei Haraoba, an attempt has been made here by conducting qualitative research to explore the unique characteristics and nomenclature of dances associated with Kanglei Haraoba. Collection and analysis of words (both written and spoken) and textual data was done. Field survey was conducted by visiting the different places where Kanglei Haraoba was celebrated. In the field work, interviews of social cultural groups, experts, and gurus had been conducted. Moreover, different books, seminar papers, articles, journals, and video footage were also referred to. The tape recorder, video camera, and smart phones were used as the devices for recording the information from both primary and secondary sources. To the best of my knowledge this is the first study on nomenclature of dances of Kanglei Haraoba. Therefore, it is hope that the findings of the study will serve as a starting point for the current research in the nomenclature of dances of Kanglei Haraoba. The work will show a path which could enlighten dance scholars in the future about the tradition of dance education in Manipur.

Since the current investigation and research were carried out in and around the places where the Kanglei Haraoba is celebrated, the study was restricted to Kanglei Haraoba only due to time and budget constraints. The study was also restricted to the system of nomenclature used in Kanglei Haraoba, giving the main preference to its dances. Further, the study was restricted to studying language related to the naming of dances in Kanglei Haraoba, to studying how the dances of Kanglei Haraoba were named in different stages, to studying how Kanglei Haraoba existed with reference to its dances, and to study the process of Kanglei Haraoba.

Despite its limitations, my study will be an endeavour to understand the process of cultural and religious development, unique social conventions, powerful cultural trends, and religious attitudes among the Manipuri that have not been studied adequately so far. It will help people to know and understand the exact form of name that will be provided in Kanglei Haraoba, which is the living culture of the Meitei. It will provide people with knowledge of the age-old language, history, culture, and religion of the Meitei. So, the current study will reflect the minds of normal social beings of self-knowledge.

Since Laiharaoba is included in the curriculum of the dance institutes, the study will also serve as a significant literature compilation to the students pursuing dance courses. It is true that the Lai Haraoba, when studied as a subject, has to take into consideration not just the Kanglei Haraoba but also other types. However, the specialty of Kanglei Haraoba is the ritual of Kanglei Thokpa or Lai Nupi Thiba (meaning the Lord searching for his "bride"). Therefore, the current study is significant and justified. It is hoped that the findings in this

research effort will be a step for future research on Lai Haraoba, as Lai Haraoba is enormous and never-ending to have the perfect philosophy. As a result, the study will reveal a way that will enlighten future dance scholars about Manipur's dance education legacy.

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