



An Archaeological Study on the Chakpa Phayeng Haraoba

(Ritualistic Practice of the Meitei of Manipur)

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Abstract

The present study deals with the archaeological significance of traditional custodianship of indigenous cultural heritage that found among the Meitei ethnic community of Manipur. The Meitei has been possessed rich indigenous cultural heritage that handed down from past generations to present generations. Such indigenous cultural heritage of the Meitei of Manipur comprises many colourful festivals, vibrant customs, wonderful architecture, delicious cuisines, enchanting music, colourful costumes, exciting dance forms and much more. A number of festivals performed almost in all the lunar months of a calendrical year depict their rich cultural heritage demonstrated by their beautiful rhythms of music, dance and songs. The most colourful and important ritualistic festival of Meitei is Lai-Haraoba which means rejoicing of the deities (Lai = deity and Haraoba = to make merry). The Lai-Haraoba can be broadly divided into four types such as Kanglei Haraoba, Kakching Haraoba, Moirang Haraoba and Chakpa Haraoba. The term Chakpa means earlier inhabiting people of Manipur. The Chakpa people belong to the major ethnic group the Meitei of Manipur. The villages which have been inhabited by the Chakpa group of people known as Chakpa villages. The Chakpa villages of Manipur are Phayeng, Andro, Koutruk, Sekmai, Khurkhul, Tairenpokpi and Chairen. The Lai-Haraoba performs in these Chakpa villages known as Chakpa Haraoba. Phayeng represents a Chakpa village out of the many Chakpa villages of Manipur. The Lai-Haraoba which has been performed in this Chakpa village Phayeng known as Chakpa Phayeng Haraoba. The present study is mainly focus on the Chakpa Phayeng Haraoba of the Meitei of Manipur. It aims to find out the ideational and/ or symbolic aspects of the Meitei traditional custodianship of indigenous cultural resource within the perspective of cultural resource management (CRM) in order to identify their archaeological significance.

Keywords: Indigenous cultural heritage, Lai-Haraoba, Chakpa Phayeng Haraoba, Meitei, Manipur.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage- often described as objects, places or practices which have been handed down by tradition since the time immemorial or which have some link to history- can be defined as our legacy from the past, what we live within the present, and what we pass on to future generations, to learn from, to marvel at and to enjoy (SAHRA 2005). The concept of cultural heritage has been continually broadened over the decades. Apart from tangible elements such as monuments and sites, cultural heritage encompasses ethical values, social customs, belief systems, religious ceremonies and traditional knowledge systems of which intangible heritage is the sign and expression (UNESCO 2003). Traditional custodianship, as a subset of traditional Cultural Resource Management (CRM) systems, has archaeological significances as indigenous people have the prime responsibility for organizing the use and safekeeping of their cultural heritage resources. Traditional custodianship may be defined as cumulative bodies of knowledge, practice and belief about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment that are generated, preserved and transmitted in a traditional and intergenerational context (Taylor & Kaplan 2005; 1646). As a knowledge-practice-belief complex, traditional management systems include the worldview or religious traditions of a society as well as an unwritten corpus of long-standing customs (Berkes, Colding & Folke 2000; 1252). In traditional management systems the use of heritage assets (cultural or natural) is governed by customary rules or laws that are enforced by traditional custodians. Those people have the prime responsibility for organizing the use and safekeeping of each heritage resource. This includes enforcing social mechanisms (rite and taboo) to maintain respect for places that are culturally significant and sacred for the community (Mantjoro 1996; Berkes, Colding & Folke 2000). Thus, traditional custodianship may refer to all mechanisms and actions guided by customs and belief systems, carried out by local communities; aim at the continuous use and preservation of the place, its values, and its surrounding environment, including the preservation of its symbolic and cosmological significance (Jopela 2010). Traditional custodianship systems are seen to be anchored in age-old traditions (although in reality traditions are constantly redefined and changed by society), and communities acquire legitimacy from historical rights of use and ownership. Though ownership is usually assumed as a legal right to the possession of site, Rudmin and Berry (1987 ; 1) note that conceptions of ownership grounded in culture and behaviour may not coincide with explicitly legalistic definitions.

The Meitei ethnic community of Manipur possesses rich indigenous cultural heritage which has been inherited from past generations to present generations. The Lai-Haraoba is one of the indigenous cultural heritage of the Meitei of Manipur. It is a ritualistic practice of the Meitei of Manipur. It can be classified into four types i.e. Kanglei Haraoba, Kakching Haraoba, Moirang Haraoba and Chakpa Haraoba. The term Chakpa denotes the native ethnic community of Manipur. The Chakpa people belongs to the major ethnic group the Meitei of Manipur. The villages which have been settled by the Chakpa people known as Chakpa villages. Such Chakpa villages include Phayeng, Andro, Sekmai, Khurkhul, Koutruk, Tairenpokpi and Chairen. The Lai-Haraoba that performed in these Chakpa villages known as Chakpa Haraoba. The Lai-Haraoba which has been carried out in these Chakpa villages find similar characteristic features. The Phayeng village represents one of the Chakpa villages of Manipur. The Lai-Haraoba performs in this Chakpa village Phayeng known as Chakpa Phayeng Haraoba . The term 'Lai-Haraoba' has been given different etymological meanings by various scholars. While E.Nilakanta is of the view that 'Lai-Haraoba means the "Merry making of the gods and goddesses".S.N. Parratt holds a different opinion and prefers Shakespeare's translation – "the pleasing of the God" (Ratankumar 2019). The present study attempts to

explore the ideational and/ or symbolic aspect of the Meitei traditional custodianship of indigenous cultural resource within the perspective of cultural resource management (CRM) in order to identify their archaeological significance.

Chakpa Phayeng Haraoba : Ritualistic Practices

A ritualistic dance known as Laibou Chongba has been performed in the Chakpa Phayeng Haraoba which depicts the different developmental stages of prenatal human growth along with child birth in the form of dance, hymn and chant. Agricultural activities also have been depicted in the form of dance, hymn and chant in the Lai-Haraoba. On the day before the last day of the Lai-Haraoba a female physician known as Maibi is praying to the deities along with a male manipulating the traditional musical instrument known as pena. The two rows of small heaps of some rice have been offering on each pieces of the banana leaf to the four deities i.e. Koubru, Kounu, Loyarakpa and Nungthenleima. Another rows of small heaps of some rice also have been offered on each pieces of banana leaf to the God Soraren. Fruits and flowers also have been offered to the deities. All of the offering have been carried out by the people in the village for the prosperity in their life. Such ritualistic offering have been continued from the second day of the Lai-Haraoba till the day before the last day of the Lai-Haraoba. A ritualistic dance known as Fungarel Jagoi is performed by many couples in the village on the day before the last day of Lai-Haraoba. This ritualistic dance is not allowed to see by the children. A twig of gooseberry plant locally known as Heikru Panbi has been erected at the shrine as a part of ritualistic practice on the last day of the Lai-Haraoba . Then a man is climbing up on the top of the gooseberry plant and then he disperses some gooseberry fruits locally known as Heikru. Then those all of the persons who take part in the Lai-Haraoba should collect those dispersed gooseberry fruits.

Summary and Conclusion

A ritualistic dance known as Laibou Chongba is archaeologically significant that the past Meitei society might be understood the knowledge of prenatal human growth and child birth since the time immemorial. Agricultural dance is also a part of Laibou Chongba which is archaeologically significant that the past Meitei community might be practised such agricultural activities since the past time . The symbolic or ideational meaning of performing a ritualistic dance known as Fungarel Jagoi is mainly for spreading human generations. The symbolic or ideational meaning of erecting a twig of gooseberry plant and then dispersing of gooseberry fruits in the Lai-Haraoba might be that the past Meitei society might be understood the value of gooseberry fruit in their health. It is scientifically proved that the gooseberry fruit is very rich nutritive value of vitamin - C.

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