

CULTURAL HERITAGE OF MANIPUR CONCERNING THE CALENDRIAL RITUALS

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ABSTRACT

This article talks about the concept of culture especially of rituals observed by our forefather at the time of war, famine and draught, any unwanted happenings and rite the passage cycle from birth to death. It bridging the old and the modern world by the spiritual essence of life that cannot be touched with physical phenomenon. As a society we progress with modern forms of government which are even democratic adapting to various scientific technologies. But even though treated as superstition, doctors before risky operations prays the almighty, scientists at the time launching satellites kneels down to the supreme God to be given the luck of success. So, rituals are an inseparable part of life. Manipur is rich in Her cultural heritage. She contributed the Jagoi Rasa-one the finest classical dance derived from Lai HaraobaDanace form. She contributed the ShagolKangjei (Polo) in the world ans so on. Even though Manipur is encircled by nine layer of hillocks and so had less communication in the ancient time, the then forefathers had introduced such well refined cultures for the modern society particularly of Manipuri people of now. Some of the rituals for the most part of caledrical rituals are putting on here.

KEYWORDS

Ritu, Langjing ,CheitharolKumbaba, Chak-umba, NongdaLairenPakhangba, Pisatao etc.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this article is to properly analyze the scale of indulgence of rituals with particular reference to Manipuri Calendrical Ritualswhich are still performed till date in Manipur society. This depicts the rich cultural value of Manipur from time immemorial and the systematic way of life the indigenous people of Manipuri Chingburoi (hill people) and Tamburoi (the plain people) which ca fascinate the whole nation-India. .

METHOD

I have dealt with the secondary sources of Edward Tylor, Y. Jackson*and* other related books and articles on the concept of culture for the paper. Some of the books that were emphasized for the article include Primitive Culture Vol-1(1871) and Encyclopaedia of MulticulturalPsychology

(1987). Moreover, books, articles, Puya manuscripts and royal chronicles related to Manipuri culture are also taken up for valuable supplements.

INTRODUCTION:

Derived from the word 'Agriculture', Culture means our age-old traditions that have been practised since time immemorial. It is still practised today and will be in practice for generations to come as long as human civilisation exists. John J. Collins would rightly say that Culture is what we live by, what we live in and what we live for. Franz Boas, a German born American anthropologist would talk about how the culture can indicate the life-form and civilizational stage of one community by coining his term called 'Kulturbrille' which means culture-glasses. As far as archaeological data are concerned, the point of beginning of culture in human civilization can be traced back to about 5, 00,000 years to 1, 70,000 years ago. The emergence of civilization has been closely associated with culture. The origination of culture has been discussed in details by anthropologist Jeff Ginsberg, Sheldon Solomon and Tom Pyszczynski in the book 'The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life (2015)' exploring the philosophy of Terror Management Theory (TMT) which is a social and evolutionary psychological theory. According to them, it is the extreme fear and terror of death and disease that compels man to adapt to various traditions and rituals. When human beings lose hope and are in pain and despair, we often resort to God or Divine power to protect us, guide us and ask for his divine intervention. All these performing of rituals for life and protection from disease by praying to God show our allegiance to the divine power and the rational side of human which is the very essence of being a human and an exemplary life style. We perform rituals to save our lives from war and bloodsheds, epidemics and diseases. This also has been the case of our Meitrabak's (Manipuri) civilization. The validity of these views is clearly expressed by cultural anthropologist Earnest Becker in his famous book 'The Denial of Death (1973)'.

The age old practises and customs that have been associated with human beings are called rituals and rituals are part and parcel of culture. The word ritual is derived from the Latin word 'Ritualis' and formulated in the year 1510AD. Thereupon, this was used to indicate the ritual practices since 1600. Ritual means 'to rite' which can be interpreted as 'the proven way of doing something'. Other thinkers are of the opinion that the word ritual can be traced back to Vedic and Sanskrit origins. It is said to be derived from 'Ritus' which means 'those holy practices that had been systematically organised since the origination of nature'.

So, it can be said that rituals are a systematic and sequential worship to an unknown entity that we may regard as god to satisfy the divine so as to give us health and wealth, to forgive us of our sins and grant our wishes. For that, we adopt various means which include peculiar ways of praying, dance, speech and even sacrificing things like food, fruits, flowers etc.

Therefore, cultural anthropologist Earnest Becker in his famous book 'The Denial of Death' written in 1973 said that a ritual is a sequence of activities involving words, actions, or objects, costumes, acting and body posture performed according to a set of sequence. Rituals are characterised, but not defined, by formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, sacral symbolism and performance.

TYPES OF RITUALS AND MANIPURI SOCIETY

There is a close relationship and dependence between traditional faiths and beliefs. Discussing about different kinds of rituals in his 'Anthropology, Culture, Society and Evolution' (P425), John J. Collins said that supernatural practices, sometimes called rituals are of many different types. The first we can call critical supernatural practices. These rituals occur in response to some crisis or need and hence they occur intermittently whenever such a situation arises. These include the activities surrounding such things as war, sickness and wanting to know what the future holds and their occurrence usually cannot be predicted. A second major type of supernatural practice may be cyclical. These rituals occur in a fairly predictable sequence but are not tied down to any specific date throughout the year. Finally there are supernatural practice of a calendrical nature.

Various thinkers, from various perspectives, would discuss about the various types of rituals. But, most agree upon the three fold classification of rituals as given by John Collins in Ritual Studies. They are as follows-

1. Critical/ Occasional ritual

There are some rituals and rites which depend on the time and place. They are accidental in nature as they are performed of a sudden. These rituals are referred to as Critical/Occasional ritual. Since times immemorial, it is even mentioned in the CheitharolKumbaba that there were many rituals performed in the barren lands and foothills by MeidinguKyamba by sacrificing of wild cows for the victory of various wars that were to be fought by the king. There are also rituals in the Meitei society called ThawaiMeeKoukhatpa. It is performed when an untoward and unwanted accident had occurred and prayers are made to call the soul (thawai) that had wanted to escape from the body. Also, when there are floods and famines, there are worship-rites done buffaloes, singing of ritualistic songs on the top of the Langjing hills. Moreover, there are various events which are considered to be inauspicious for a family like unwanted entry of animals and birds inside the house, possessed by the spirits, taking of lives by supernatural forces in water, the unlucky incidents that may occur because of the Saturn-god astrologically and the use of black magic to cause of harm to families. All these and the rituals and rites to be performed in the event of occurrence are properly discussed in the books like ThirelLaiyat, ThirelMeiremLiba and Nunglon.

2. Cyclical/ Life cycle ritual

These are the rituals that are performed by as a rite of passage of life from birth to death. It marks the changes in the biological being of the person and various stages throughout his life. It includes the rites performed on the birth of child, Epan-thaba (first ceremony after birth), Chak-umba (the first taking of morsel of food), Luhongba (marriage) and death. They are therefore called Cyclical/ Life cycle ritual.

As there are differences in the religion and community, there are also differences in the cyclical and life cyclical rituals. With the advent of Hinduism in Meitei society, various changes have been introduced in the ways and forms of practising and performing the rites and rituals. There have been many mixing of rituals and traditions in the pre-existing rituals. Examples of the mixed rituals can be that of Lugunthangba (the sacred thread bearing ceremony), NahutNarengba and Churakaran (the first haircut).

3. Calendrical/ Calendered/ Calendrized / Periodical ritual

Those commemorative rites which are performed monthly or on a yearly basis are calendrical rituals. Romanian Professor MerciaElide in his Treatise on *The History of Religion* had explained about how the calendrical rituals have made the belief system of one community stronger and the performance of these rituals in a regular manner have given us a lifestyle where we can follow the footsteps of our forefathers. He rightly pointed that by saying that "Thus the gods did; thus men do."

CALENDRICAL RITUALS IN MANIPURI SOCIETY

The various communities of Manipur, numbering to at least forty, that reside in Manipur have their own basic rituals and customs. It is an indication of the rich volume of culture of our Manipur which is rightly called the land of Jewel. Even in the same community, there are a lot of differences in the rituals and practices. The belonging to different clans and place of residence also determine the differences within the same community. These are collectively Folk belief and Folk customs.

Since the ancient civilization of the Meiteis, without any gaps in generations or seasons, there have been continuous and sequential performances of various rituals that the indigenous people in the state have been performing for the longevity of life, health and happiness of the people and protect themselves from epidemics and diseases. These created a sense of self-belief and strengthen their faith in divine intervention where they will be protected from all sorts of mishaps and evil spirits. The credit for the existence of the civilization of Kanglei-sana-Leibak (Manipur) is to be given to our forefathers for preserving this rich heritage.

With the development of societies in modern timelines, we can witness how various customs, traditions and rituals are lost or have changed their forms in the sands of time. But, the royal

officials of the kings of Manipur, the Amaiba-Amaibi (the priests like god-men and god-women of Manipur), thinkers and spiritual gurus would try their level best to preserve the old traditions, performed rituals to protect the land and prayed for its prosperity. Some of the most important sequential and continuous rituals throughout the year round performed in our Manipuri society which showcased our culture are shown as follows-

1. Rituals performed in the month of Shajibu
 - a. ShajibuCheiraoba- it is performed on the first day of Shajibu, the Meiteis celebrate it as the beginning of a new year.
 - b. KongbaLeithongPhatpa, ShajibuLeikhunTouba- it is practised on the 7th day of Shajibu to understand the good and bad that may fall upon the new-year that that had begun since the Cheiraoba.
 - c. KanglaLeikhunHutpa- it is performed on the 15th day of Shajibu by offering flowers and fruits on a cave in Kangla.
 - d. KongbaLeithongFunba, ShajibuLeikhunMenba- it is performed on the 21st day of Shajibu to commemorate the worship of IbudhouPakhangba, the father of Ningthem and Pureiromba, the father of Angom.

2. Rituals performed in the month ofKalen
 - a. HangkenPakhangbaThouni- it is performed on the 3rd day of Kalen at Heingang on Hangken drainage for the betterment of the land.
 - b. PakhangbaChenghongba- it is practised on the 15th day of Kalen at Sana-Konung (Palace of the king). Prayers are offered for the long-life of the king and the overall prosperity of the land economically.
 - c. NongshabaamadiThongnangLoichakhombiChenghongba- this rite is also performed on the 15th day of Kalen. This ritual has been on practice since the time of king Khagemba where rice is offered to IbudhouNongsaba and IbenthouThongnangLoichakhombi.

3. Rituals performed in the month of Inga
 - a. AhongKhongchingba-this ritual is practised on the 2nd day of Inga.
 - b. KurakLamtaiba- this ritual is performed on the 3rd day of Inga at Sana-Konung after examining an auspicious hour. Offerings are to ChinguKhunbuba or LeipakpubaChingu.
 - c. SanamahiChenghongba- this rite is practised on the 15th day of Inga on a full moon at Sana-Konung.

4. Rituals performed in the month ofIngen

- a. HeengangKumshaba/ ShamiKouba- on the 2nd day of Ingen, these rituals are performed at PaonamHiden (a sacred place) for the protection of animals and other livestock.
 - b. KanglaEthongFatpa, PakhangbaMikolChangba- this is practised on the 22nd day of Ingen. This is performed for the opening up of the gate in the morning at a sacred place so that the spirit can enter in the evening.
 - c. PakhangbaMeereUrongHongba- this ritual is also known as KanglaUtrongHongba and it is performed on the 22nd day of Ingen.
 - d. KumdairolThaba (IngenKumkhaiba) - this rite is practised on the 15th day of Ingen by offering of prayer to IbudhouPakhangba.
5. Rituals performed in the month ofThawan
- a. KanglaIchaiba, LindaorenPakhangbaKhurumba- this ritual falls for five days from the 11th to the 15th of Thawan.
 - b. ThawanPotlakpa- this ritual is performed in the month of Thawan in which a bad omen day is picked out and prayers are offered to IbudhouPakhangba to satisfy them. Therefore, it is also known as PakhangbaIratpa (the worship of Pakhangba) or ThawanPotlakpa.
 - c. WangrenIreimaThouni- this ritual is performed on the 12th day of Thawan in which prayers are offered to IbudhouWangbren and IbenthouEreima to protect the women, children and weak from falling into the water-bodies and being taken away by the water-gods or spirits.
6. Rituals performed in the month of Langban
- a. LainingthouPishataoKhutheibaIratpa- it is performed on the 1st day of Langban. It is to commemorate the coming of Ashiba (Lord Sanamahi) as an avatar in the form of god LainingthouPisatao and thereby he created many creations on earth.
 - b. HeikhruHidongba- it is performed on the 11th day of Langban since the time of King Irengba to pray for the better health of the king and overall prosperity of the state.
 - c. LangbanHeishoiKatpa- this ritual has to be done from the 16th of Langban to the 30th of Langban on a new moon day.
7. Rituals performed in the month ofMera
- a. LairemmaChaorelHouba (PanthoibiIratpa) - it is performed during the 1st of Mera to the 5th of Mera to worship Goddess mother Panthoibi who is closely associated with Meitei religion.
 - b. LoidamKumshaba (KwakTanba) – this ritual is performed on the 10th of Mera at Sana Konungin order to protect the king from any kind of disturbances.

- c. Mera Shan Tuba- this is a ritual to worship the goddess NungoibiLairembi performed on the 10th of the month of Mera.
 - d. MeraMenkhongLangba- it is a ritual to be performed a day ahead of the ritual called the Mera Men Tongba on the 14th of Mera at Kangla. This is practised by offering of prayers to Lord Pakhangba by the Amaibis (priest-like women).
 - e. Mera Men Tongba- it is performed on the 15th day of Mera at the sacred place of Kangla.
 - f. MeraThoumei- it is performed from the 15th of Mera for a full month till the full moon.
 - g. MeraHouchongba – it is performed on the 15th day of Mera.
8. Rituals performed in the month ofHiyangei
- a. ChanouHuichintu (HiyangeiChanouKatpa) – it is performed on the 1st day of Hiyangei on the sacred place of Kangla-Khurumching. Then, prayers are offered to Lord Pakhangba so as to satisfy the Lord MapaKuruShidaba.
 - b. Heeral Keisha Tanba, HeeralPhairelTaibaPakhangbaThouni (Heeyang) – it is performed on the 15th day ofHiyangei since the time of Churachand Maharaja. It is to recollect the spirits of animals and birds that were affected by the hunting events practised during the period.
9. Rituals performed in the month of Poinu
- a. LairemmaPhouoibiIratpa/ Phougouba – it is to worship goddess-mother Phouoibi on the 5th day of Poinu.
 - b. WakanHee-YaiChanban (ApokpaChukkhongThouniba)- this ritual is practised on the 15th day of Poinu by sacrificing gold, silver and other precious metals to Lord Pakhangba.
10. Rituals performed in the month ofWakching
- a. PakhangbaHeerolThaba- this ritual is to be performed on the 1st day of Wakching at Sana-Konung to worship IbudhouPakhangba.
 - b. AwangLeimaKabokChaibaThounirol – this ritual is practised with the presence of furnace and fire for about 15 days from the 1st day of Wakching. They would use objects like eatables (Loilam-Kabok) and the peaceful weather and climate throughout the year is prayed.

- c. AwangOeirelIruppa- this ritual is performed to ask for forgiveness for the sins that one has committed throughout the year on the 7th day of Wakching by praying to LeinungThongarenShidaba.
- d. LangphamKanba – this ritual is practised on the 11th day of Wakching to prevent us from any kind of obstacles. There are there kinds of obstacles- LangphamAtekpa (sickness), LangphamApaibi (Sudden accidents) and LangphamApoibi (bad mishaps deflected to us by mistake). Therefore, prayers are offered to IbudhouPakhangba to protect us from all these obstacles.
- e. EmoinuIratThouni – this ritual is a form of worship to the Goddess of war, ImaEmoinu on the 12th day of Wakching so as to bless the land economically and make us prosperous. Thereby, prayers are offered so that no hunger prevails in the land.
- f. YumjaoLeirambiEyuChangba- it is performed on the 13th and 14th of Wakching at Sana-Konung and prayers are offered at YumjaoLairembi (LeimarelLeishna).
- g. PakhangbaPhambalKabaThouni- this ritual is performed on the 15th of Wakching to commemorate the ascending of throne by IbudhouPakhangba and prayers are offered for a sound administration of the land by the rulers and a prosperous land for the subjects.

11. Rituals performed in the month ofPhairen

- a. LoidamKumhoubaLoutaba- this ritual is performed on the 5th day of Phairen by offering prayers on the avatar of Lord Sanamahi who is known as Lord Lourunghanba.
- b. WangamWataiPakhangbaThouni – this particular ritual is performed on the 15th day of Phairen to protect the king from any hindrance by praying to IbudhouPakhangba.

12. Rituals performed in the month ofLamta

- a. SharoiKhangba- it is performed on the first and last Saturday of Lamta.
- b. LeipalUrangba (ThabalLirongchatpa/ Lai KeithelKaba/ OugriHangelChongba/ LeikumShangsaba/ LaipupTinnaba)- this particular ritual is performed from the 11th to 15th of Lamta for five days. It can be regarded as an old festival that had been associated with the Meitei civilization for ages.
- c. ShileimaIrapta-this ritual is performed on the 27th day of Lamta at Sana-Konung to worship the second daughter of AtingkokKuru referred to as Shileima-Mukmu. The goddess also is referred by various other names like HumpuNarengShubi, MomuShingjaKhombi, YekoiShingdumshubi, NongdamLaiyumThabi, KhekheNubi and LairikLeima (the goddess of Education). Hence, the worship is done to enhance the knowledge and wisdom of the people.

- d. ChingoiIruppa – this ritual is based on a commemoration of an event that happened in the time of King Naothingkhon (663-763), the father of MeidinguUraKonthouba. The queen LangmaiChanuPitangaLiklu had committed after a certain of events which the king held a feeling of guilt in him. Therefore, to clear himself of conscience, he went and submerged himself at a pond. This process of removal of the sins came to be known as ChingoiIruppa and performed on the 28th of Lamta.
- e. Shingshat-ShingkaibaShingthekShingthaba- this ritual is performed on the 30th of Lamta on a new moon night at the hills of Heibok on a sacred at hill-top known as TharoiIok. One unique feature of his ritual is that it has to be performed at exactly 12am at night.

Rituals consist of the way in which the sermons are uttered, the tone and the rhythms of the verses, the sacred symbolism, the dance in performance, the objects that are to be used, the different ritualistic dresses that are to be worn for the occasion and the various postures of the hands and the legs and its movements during worship ceremony. These are the certain norms, rule and regulations rituals that are practised in every community. The great civilizational stage of our Meitei community can be deduced from the fact that the various dos and don'ts of various rituals are mentioned properly. To take up and study only one particular ritual of the Meitei community would be a humongous chapter. From all these rituals which are tightly packed with intricate rituals, 'Sharoi-Khangba' is discussed hereunder.

Sharoi-Khangba

This ritual has been in practice since ancient times on the 1st and the last Saturday of the month of Lamta very year. Legends have it that it got originated when men and gods used to live together. The seven mother-angels HiepokLeimaMonshabi, LallambungLeimaHemoibi, NongmeibungLeimaEminu, Langjing, LiwaleimaTengolchaibi, ChingaLeimaLanheibi and PishumLeimaShaphabi would perform rites when the evil spirits of the present year would meet the evil spirits which are coming for the new year as they meet on roads diverged into three ways known as Lamlong, the confluence point of the evil spirits. They meet to exchange their duties as they count the number of deaths that are to be taking place in one particular year. So, the rituals and sacrifices are so offered so that the members of the locality are excluded from the list of deaths that are to happen in the year. If at all the evil spirits have already named them, rituals are made to cancel the names from the list. It is a very significant ritual. When we offer the rituals on the first Saturday of Lamta to exclude the members of the community from the lists of the deaths in a year, it is called Awai-AkhumSharoiKhangba or Awai AkhumKhunthokEratpa. On the other hand, the offerings on the last Saturday of Lamta are performed to cancel the names in the list of deaths that the evil spirits are making. This process of ritualistic tradition is referred to as

Shingshatpa. For the betterment of the land, the king and his royal Maibis (women priests) used to perform at the all the Lamlong that existed on all the directions but at the exact same time. On Khurai side there was a Khuraipung(time-zone), on Wangkhei side there was KongbaShoudonpung, on Yaiskhul side there was KakwaLamdaipung and on Khwai side there was TeraWangthonbipung. So, these time zones were estimated at an exact hour for rituals to be performed. Prayers were offered so that there was no bloodshed to king and his subjects, no war and disease should fall upon the people and prosperity and peaceful coexistence exist throughout. These rituals are also known as Lamtaiba. For performing this ritual of Lamtaiba for particular localities of the land, it is done on the month of Inga by examining an auspicious day. These are clearly are mentioned in PanditMoirangthem Chandra Singh's 'ChatnabiAmasungSahitya'.

Every year for the performance of the Sharoi-Khangba in the month of Lamta, a group of older women numbering in odd would perform these rites to protect the lives of the people living in the locality in the morning. Some of the things which are essential for the performance of Sharoi-Khangba are properly cleaned dress of God Lainingthou and Goddess Lairembi, seven cups of Chempak (a kind of dried rice), milk, pot of Chuhi (boiled sugarcane-juice), Phamphi-Phiraktaiba(a kind mat divided in the middle), metals like iron, grass, one shendai, seven lamps made from bee wax (Khoiri), Yam (grinded-rice), seven kinds of flowers and fruits, Shingju (mixture of vegetables), rice, vegetables etc.

For the performance of Shingshatpa, there is also a process that undergoes. These can be explained as follows- like writing down the names of the diseased old people in a piece of wood and wrapping the wood with fresh-fibred yarn and covering it with a piece of cloth. Then, these materials are taken together at the Lamlong (divergent roads) where the evil spirits are believed to be existent. The rites and sacrifices are made in such a way with a certain kind of posture. The two thumbs are put up and the right hand covers up the folded left hand. When the rites are over, the piece of wood is taken back and given back on the month of Shajibu on Cheiraoba which can be regarded as the Meitei new-year. Then a rite known as UshinShinba is performed. UshinShinba means that some objects are sacrificed in lieu of the soul of the diseased person. Therefore, in a pot full of water, fruits, betel leaves and areca nuts,a garland of white flowers and metals are placed for UshinShinba rite.

These rituals and rites are parts of our culture and heritage and are very much needed to be preserved. These rituals are the identities of our Meitei community and it is our solemn duty to take care of it in its state. Heritage Convention of Cultural Diversity and Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights focussed on how it is the right of every community to preserve their own culture and to protect any disturbances coming their way. Blue Shield International says that a community's ritual and rites should not be disturbed. If there are any hindrances on the peaceful existence of rites and rituals, there it can be termed as a war on the

community. These hindrances would be termed as a kind of a psychological warfare and people have the right to move to International Court for appeal. The Meiteis have thousand years of a continuing civilization. The rich culture and heritage have not dwindled away in any sense. The credits of all these varied and vibrant culture go to the high-thinking and philosophical forefathers of our Manipuri society. As a result, we have a unique way of performing rites and rituals that had enhanced the beauty of our culture. It can be said that the advancement of a civilization rests on the rules, norms and culture of the community. On a darker side, with the high advancement in modernity, people have started ignoring the performance of such rituals. Thereby, it has led to a loss on the image and status of the community. This shall further deteriorate the identity of our community. The civilizational development and progress are at stake today. Therefore, it is indeed mandatory for us and even a moral duty to perform all these precious rituals so as to save our civilization. These duties are to be performed with the intention of preserving our rich heritage for the younger and coming generations. It can rightly be said that rituals and rites are the soul of a civilization. Thus, the preservation of our Meitei community and its civilization rests on the preservation of our rituals.

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