

LAI HARAoba: A RITUALISTIC AND CULTURAL REFLECTION OF MANIPUR

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ABSTRACT:

Lai Haraoba, a vibrant and ancient festival of Manipur, serves as a rich embodiment of the state's traditional, religious, and cultural heritage. Rooted in the Meitei belief system, this festival represents a re-enactment of the creation myth, celebrating the interplay between deities and humans. This research article explores the various forms of Lai Haraoba, its ritualistic performances, the role of key participants, and its broader socio-cultural significance. Through an analysis of historical texts and contemporary practices, the paper highlights the importance of Lai Haraoba in preserving Manipuri identity and fostering community cohesion.

Keywords: Lai Haraoba, Meitei culture, Rituals and performances, Manipuri traditions, Indigenous festivals

1. INTRODUCTION:

Manipur, a north-eastern state of India, boasts of rich cultural heritage influenced by diverse ethnic groups. Among its traditional festivals, Lai Haraoba holds a special place as a religious and cultural event deeply embedded in the Meitei community. The term "*Lai Haraoba*" translates to "*merrymaking of the deities*," and it is observed through ritualistic performances, dances, music, and oral traditions which all have intrinsic cultural value.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of Lai Haraoba, exploring its historical background, types, rituals, and cultural significance. Although Lai Haraoba is observed across Manipur, this study will focus specifically on Kanglei Haraoba, examining its unique features and importance within the broader tradition.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY:

Manipur, located in north-eastern India, shares its borders with Nagaland to the north, Mizoram to the south, Assam to the west, and Myanmar's Sagaing Region and Chin State to the east and south, respectively. Spanning an area of 22,327 square kilometres, the state is home to nearly 3 million people. Manipur has served as a cultural and economic crossroads for over 2,500 years, facilitating early migration of people, cultures, and religions between the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, China, Siberia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

Before and during the British Indian Empire (1891 to 1947 AD) and during the interion period for 1947 to 1949 AD, Manipur was a princely state. Between 1917 and 1939, democratic movements emerged and advocated political movements reforms. By the late 1930s, the princely state was bound to remain as a part of India rather than Burma, which was then separated from India. These negotiations were disrupted by World War II. On August 11, 1947, Maharaja Budhachandra signed the Instrument of Accession as if Manipur joined the Indian union. Later, on September 21, 1949, he signed the Merger Agreement, integrating Manipur into India as a Part C State. Manipur became a

union territory in 1956 and achieved full statehood on January 21, 1972. The Manipuri language was officially recognized as a national language in 1992 by enlisting into the 8th schedule.

Economically, Manipur is primarily agrarian, with significant hydroelectric potential. The state is well-connected through Imphal Airport, the second largest in north-eastern India. Manipur is also renowned for its game and sports, as well as for being the birthplace of Manipuri dance, a classical dance of India, and the origin of the game of polo (Sagol Kangjei), which was introduced to Europeans from this region during the British rule.

Among its cultural traditions, Lai Haraoba remains a cornerstone of Manipuri civilizational history and heritage. More than a religious festival, it serves as a living repository for the preservation of Manipuri culture, with women playing a crucial role in its continuity (Devi & Aneela, 2024). It embodies the legacy of Manipuri identity, preserving traditions passed down through generations (Danisana, 2012). Lai Haraoba is uniquely celebrated in different locations across the Meitei community in Manipur and has been observed since ancient times (Devi, 2024).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & METHODOLOGY:

This study employs an interpretative approach to examine *Lai Haraoba* as a ritualistic and cultural phenomenon, utilizing historical texts, ethnographic observations, and qualitative interviews with practitioners and scholars. The theoretical framework is grounded in three primary perspectives: ritual theory, cultural anthropology, and indigenous knowledge systems.

2.1 Ritual Theory

Rituals play a crucial role in reinforcing social cohesion and transmitting cultural knowledge across generations (Turner, 1969; Bell, 1997). *Lai Haraoba*, as a performative and participatory event, aligns with Victor Turner's concept of "communitas," where shared ritual experiences dissolve social hierarchies and create a collective sense of belonging. Catherine Bell's (1997) theory of ritual practice further elucidates how *Lai Haraoba* is not just a re-enactment of mythology but an active process of cultural meaning-making and identity formation.

2.2 Cultural Anthropology Perspective

From an anthropological standpoint, *Lai Haraoba* can be understood through Clifford Geertz's (1973) concept of "deep play," where cultural performances are both symbolic and functional. The festival embodies the historical memory of the Meitei people, encoding socio-religious norms, gender roles, and cosmological beliefs within its dance, music, and oral traditions. Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) notion of habitus further explains how participation in *Lai Haraoba* reinforces embodied cultural knowledge, ensuring its continuity through structured practices.

2.3 Indigenous Knowledge Systems

As an indigenous festival, *Lai Haraoba* serves as a repository of Meitei epistemology. It aligns with Devi's (2000) framework of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), emphasizing the integration of spiritual, ecological, and social knowledge in sustaining community identity. The oral transmission of myths and rituals within *Lai Haraoba* highlights the importance of non-textual pedagogies in preserving indigenous traditions.

2.4 Methodology

The study follows a qualitative research design, incorporating ethnographic fieldwork and textual analysis:

- **Ethnographic Observation:** Field visits were conducted to document live performances and rituals, capturing participants expressions and interactions.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Conversations with *Maibis* (priestesses), *Maibas* (priests), performers, and cultural scholars provided insights into the significance and evolving nature of *Lai Haraoba*.
- **Textual Analysis:** Examination of ancient Meitei scriptures and contemporary academic literatures helped contextualize the historical and cultural dimensions of the festival.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Cosmology and Meaning of *Lai Haraoba*

Lai Haraoba is a festival deeply rooted in the myths, legends, and folklore of the Meitei community, preserved through oral tradition. The festival's origins trace back to pre-literary Meitei society, making it older than the earliest known examples of archaic written Manipuri, the main language of Manipur (Chanu, 2014).

The term “*Lai Haraoba*” literally translated as “*merrymaking of the deities*” is observed through ritualistic performances, dances, music, and oral traditions. The fundamental essence of *Lai Haraoba* is to bring joy to the gods, as the name itself signifies a celebratory offering to the divine (Devi, 2024). Various scholars have interpreted the literal meaning of *Lai Haraoba* differently. J. Shakespear (1913) described it as the “pleasing of gods,” while Louise Lightfoot (1958) referred to it as “spirit’s pleasure.” T.C. Hudson (1975) interpreted it as “the rejoicing of the gods,” and E. Nilakanta (1982) defined it as the “merrymaking of the gods and goddesses.”

Lai Haraoba exemplifies rituals that function as theatrical performances, conveying societal values and beliefs while simultaneously providing entertainment to its observers (Premchandra, 2024). The festival seamlessly integrates ritualistic devotion with artistic expression, engaging both believers and spectators in a profound cultural experience.

Though there are varying interpretations of the etymological meaning of “*Lai Haraoba*,” its origin is widely linked to the phrase “*Lai-Hoi-Laoba*” (the chanting of ‘Hoi’) from the Leisemba (creation) myth (Chanu, 2014). According to Manipuri belief system, after Ashiba (Sanamahi), also known as Atiya Guru Sidaba (the son of God), had created the world, he was uncertain at a moment about what should follow. The Supreme God, Atingkok Sidaba, then revealed to Ashiba the beings that would inherit the Earth, which made Ashiba immensely happy. This joyful happiness was expressed in the form of “*Lai-Hoi-Laoba*,” a lengthy ritual symbolizing the stages of life – from birth to death – through dance, gestures, and song. Over time, the chanting of “*Lai-Hoi-Laoba*” evolved into what is now known as *Lai Haraoba* (Kulachandra, 1963).

There are two prevailing perspectives on the festival’s place of origin. One theory suggests that *Lai Haraoba* was first performed on the Mount Koubu, where the Lais (gods and goddesses) enacted primordial human activities such as making fire, giving birth, constructing houses, virtually depicting the human journey from birth to death. The other view, based on the text of *Panthoibi Khongul* (Footprints of Panthoibi), asserts that the festival was first held at the Selloi Langmai Ching (now the Nongmaiching Hill) and quite a great many people considers this text as an authoritative source (Chanu, 2014).

Regardless of these differing views, the tradition of *Lai Haraoba* has been passed down orally through generations and remains deeply embedded in Manipuri culture. *Lai Haraoba* is not only a significant religious event but also a vibrant cultural expression of the Meitei people. Centred on the worship of

Umang Lais, or “forest deities,” the festival features elaborate rituals, prayers, music, and dance. It is celebrated either annually or at predetermined intervals, depending on the deity being honoured.

3.2 Types of Lai Haraoba

According to Pandit Loishang, an esteemed institution of religious and cultural scholars in Manipur, Lai Haraoba manifests in four main forms (Chanu, 2014; Devi, 2016; Singh et al., 2021; Devi & Chaoreikanba, 2022):

1. **Kanglei Haraoba:** Celebrated in and around Imphal, this form of Lai Haraoba honours the deity Pakhangba. A key ritual involves the Maibi (A priestess who performs rituals during Lai Haraoba) invoking the spirit of Khoriphaba who would search for his bride, concluding with Nongarol, marking the ascent of the divine spirit. In the indigenous Sanamahism faith of Manipur, Khoriphaba is a revered deity known for his mythical journey to find his mother and later a bride. He is believed to be the son of Salailen the Sky God and the goddess Konthoujam Tampha Lairembi. According to Manipuri mythology, Khoriphaba descended from the heavens to embark on his quest, symbolizing perseverance and divine will. One of his most well-known exploits during the *Lai Haraoba* festival is his wrestling match with Loyalakpa, reflecting themes of strength and heroism. Additionally, Khoriphaba is associated with *Sagol Kangjei* (polo), a sport with deep cultural significance in Manipur, highlighting his connection to traditional games and physical prowess.
2. **Moirang Haraoba:** Held in Moirang, this festival honours Lord Thangjing and is divided into three forms – Khongchingba, Lamthokpa, and Yumphamba – each is celebrated in successive years. The festival can last up to a month.
3. **Chakpa Haraoba:** Celebrated by the Chakpa community, this variant includes rituals for deities like Panam Ningthou and Pureiromba. Animal sacrifice is a unique feature, and prayers are conducted in the Chakpa language. In Manipuri mythology and Sanamahism, Panam Ningthou is regarded as the divine figure who first ignited fire and serves as the spiritual guardian of crops. His role signifies the essential connection between fire and agriculture in early Manipuri civilization. Pureiromba, on the other hand, is venerated as the deity responsible for bringing rainfall, thereby fostering agricultural abundance. Additionally, he holds particular significance as the ancestral deity of the Angom clan, symbolizing lineage and prosperity. Together, these deities embody the fundamental elements of sustenance - fire and water – within the indigenous belief system of Manipur.
4. **Kakching Haraoba:** Celebrated in Kakching, this festival honours the deity Khamlangba and includes unique rituals like *Ngaprum Tanba* on the final day. Khamlangba is a significant deity in Sanamahism, the indigenous faith of Manipur, associated with iron, mining, metallurgy, iron smelting, hunting, and warfare. He is revered for his expertise in extracting iron ore and crafting high-quality iron, which played a vital role in ancient Manipuri society. The *Khamlangba Thenlon* text describes his mastery of metalwork and blacksmithing, particularly in the historic Kakching kingdom. His skills in metallurgy were instrumental in shaping traditional weapons and tools, emphasizing his role as a protector and provider in Meitei culture.

3.3 Costumes and Instruments

The main three functionaries of Lai Haraoba festival are – Amaiba (Priest), Amaibi (Priestess) and Penakhongba/Pena Asheiba (Pena player/singer) who are credited for preserving the oral tradition of Lai-Haraoba by handing down from generation to generation (Chanu, 2014).

Costumes:

1. **Amaiba (Priest):** Wears a white Pheijom (dhoti) with a white shirt and Inaphi. Awardee Maibas may wear *Khamenchatpa* with a Resam shirt and other ornaments. Khamenchatpa is a distinctive fabric known for its rich purple hue, reminiscent of a brinjal. Its intricate design is believed to have originated from the legendary serpent deity Pakhangba, thereby making it a sacred textile with cultural restrictions. Traditionally, women are refrained from wearing this fabric during their menstrual cycle due to its sacred association. In historical Manipuri society, Khamenchatpa served as a marker of heirarchical identity, exclusively worn by royalty, noblemen, courtiers, and other high-ranking individuals. During the monarchical era, commoners were strictly barred from using this fabric. It was often bestowed as a prestigious reward by the king (Maharaja) to individuals of exceptional merit, such as scholars, warriors, and distinguished contributors to society.
2. **Amaibi (Priestess):** Wears a plain white Phanek (skirt) and blouse, with additional ornaments for those who have received royal gifts. Phanek is a customary garment of the Meitei community, traditionally worn by women in Manipur.
3. **Pena Asheiba (Musician):** Wears a white Khamenchatpa dhoti, a turban, and gold ornaments. The attire varies based on the occasion.

Instruments:

1. **Pena:** A traditional string instrument made from coconut shell and horsehair, used in rituals and festivals.
2. **Langte:** A drum used in Lai Haraoba, played with hands and sticks.
3. **Dholok:** A hollow wooden drum used in various musical functions.
4. **Toudri:** A wind instrument made from bamboo.

3.4 Rituals of Lai Haraoba

Main Rituals of the First Day in Kanglei Haraoba

The festival begins with Lai-Ekouba, a ritual of invocation of the deity's spirit from a water body. The amaibas (priests) and amaibis (priestesses), along with the villagers, move in two rows toward the Ekoupham (river or pond). An amaiba initiates the invocation by offering konyai (gold and silver pieces) and rice into the water. Concurrently, an Amaibi performs a ritual dance, drawing Hirilung (cotton thread) from an Ehaiphu (earthen pitcher) and tying Leiyom (a sacred leaf) to a stick. Holding the stick in her right hand, she dips it into the water while ringing a bell and chanting the Laihourol (hymns of creation). When the deity's spirit enters her, she falls into a trance and delivers prophetic declarations. After the ritual, the procession returns to the shrine in the same two-line formation, a ceremony called Hikaba or Lai Higaba, signifying the infusion of the deity's spirit into two *Ehaiphu* carried by *Lai-Pubas*. An Amaibi leads the procession while dancing and following the rhythmic beats of the Pena (a traditional stringed instrument) and Harao pung (a drum). The ceremony concludes with the installation of the divine spirits into sacred urns, marking the beginning of daily worship.

Prescribed Rituals

The festival comprises both morning and evening rituals.

Morning Rituals

- **Lai Yakaiba:** The Pena Khongba (Pena player) performs the Yakairol, an invocation inviting the deities to participate in the day's ceremonies.
- **Laimang-Phamba or Laipao Chenba:** An Amaibi, seated before the deities, attains a trance-like state and delivers laipao (prophetic messages), followed by a sacred dance known as Jagoi Katpa in honour of the deities.

Evening Rituals

- **Lei-Langba:** Devotees, in traditional attire, gather at the Laibung (festival venue) to present floral offerings to the deities.
- **Hoi Laoba:** The amaiba leads the Lai Hoi Laoba, a ritual chant accompanied by Pena and Harao pung, with participants joining in by singing and clapping.
- **Thougal Jagoi:** A dance performed by the amaibis and devotees as an invocation to the deities.
- **Laibou or Laipou:** A gestural indicating the genesis of human life ritual from conception to birth and so on. During Hoirou Haya Laoba, participants remain silent while chants are being sung with Pena accompaniment.
- **Laiching Jagoi:** The amaibis, holding Langthrei (a sacred leaf), perform a dance to invite the deity's spirit into their bodies. This includes Laishem Jagoi, which portrays the creation of the universe by nine male gods (Laibungthou Mapal) and seven female deities (Lainura Taret).
- **Hakchang Saba or Hakchang Sagatpa:** This ritual dance, depicts the formation of human body in the womb by using 64 intricate hand gestures (Laibou Khutheks) and culminates into the symbolic infusion of the soul (Thawai Happa).
- **Yumsarol:** A gestural ritual of house construction, indicated through hand gestures which culminates in the offering of the completed house to the deities.
- **Panthoibi Jagoi:** A dance narrating the courtship between Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi, performed for communal well-being.
- **Pamyaron & Phisarol Jagoi:** A performance re-enacting the process of cotton cultivation, culminating in offering of fabrics to the deities.
- **Longkhoh Jagoi:** A dance performed with a long (fish-catching basket) to symbolize the gathering of the deities' souls.
- **Paton/ Padol:**
- **Chongkhong Jagoi & Phibul Jagoi Pachuba:** Part of the Phijang cycle, beginning with sacred rituals under a Phijang (ceremonial cloth). It includes Phibul Ahabi, a dance with sacred cloth balls representing Lainingthou and Lairemma, followed by **Chongkhong Yetpa**, where the amaibis move in intricate patterns around posts symbolizing divine unity.
- **Yumjao Paphal:** The Phijang cycle concludes with the Lairen Mathek ritual, where the procession moves in a serpentine formation beneath the ceremonial cloth, symbolizing cosmic unity.

- **Wakol Laoba:** The day's rituals end with the Laikaba ceremony, where participants chant Wakol in a circle, accompanied by drumbeats.
- **Naosum Eshei:** Finally, a Pena player sings the Naosum Eshei (cradle song), symbolically lulling the deities to sleep with which the day's festivities conclude.

Concluding Rituals

- **Lai-Lam-Thokpa:** On the eve of Lairoi (the concluding day), sacred masks or representations of the deities are carried in a dolai (palanquin) to a designated location for a symbolic outing.
- **Kanglei-Thokpa (Lai Nupi Thiba):** An Amaibi, in a trance, selects a maiden from the audience who is then initiated into the priesthood.
- **Lairoi:** The final day of Lai Haraoba includes significant rituals such as Louyanba, Thang Jagoi, Ougri, Khencho, Uyanlon, and Hijing-Hirao, performed after the Laipou sequence.

At the end of the festival, a concluding ceremony called Lei Khomba takes place, where all ritual items, including flowers, fruits, and plantain leaves, are ceremoniously buried within the temple grounds. Lai Haraoba thus holds immense religious and cultural significance for the Manipuri people, preserving and transmitting their traditional Meitei religio-cultured practices across generations.

4. PHILOSOPHICAL AND EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LAI HARAoba

Lai Haraoba is not merely a festival or a ritual; it is a profound expression of the philosophical worldview and traditional social education system of the Meitei people of Manipur. Through its intricate dance movements, songs, and rituals, Lai Haraoba encapsulates the essence of life, from birth to death, and imparts valuable lessons about existence, spirituality, and community life.

Below is a detailed exploration of its philosophical and educational significance:

4.1 Philosophical Significance

a. Representation of the Life Cycle:

Lai Haraoba is a metaphorical representation of the stages of human life, from conception to death. The dance movements, known as *Laipou*, depict the creation of life, the development of the human body, and the various stages of physical growth and aging. These movements are not just physical expressions but they also carry deep philosophical meanings:

- **Creation of Life:** The dance sequences symbolize the formation of the human body, starting with the creation of nerves, blood vessels, bones, flesh, and internal organs, culminating in the birth of a child.
- **Life Stages:** The movements also represent the journey of life, including childhood, adulthood, and old age, emphasizing the cyclical nature of existence.
- **Death and Renewal:** The ritual concludes with the symbolic death of the deity, followed by renewal, reflecting the Meitei belief in the continuity of life and the eternal cycle of creation and destruction.

b. Connection to Cosmology:

Lai Haraoba is deeply rooted in the cosmology of the Meitei people. The festival reflects their understanding of the universe, time, and the divine:

- **Cosmic Creation:** The rituals and dances are believed to re-enact the creation of the universe by the supreme deity, Ashiba, and the role of the Guru in guiding the process. This mirrors the Meitei belief in a divine order governing the cosmos.
- **Time and Divinity:** The 364 dance movements in Lai Haraoba are said to represent the 64 divisions of time in a day, according to Meitei tradition. Each division is associated with a specific deity, highlighting the interconnectedness of time, divinity, and human life.

c. Spiritual and Moral Lessons:

Lai Haraoba serves as a medium for imparting spiritual and moral lessons:

- **Harmony with Nature:** The worship of Umang Lai (forest gods) underscores the Meitei belief in living in harmony with nature. The rituals emphasize the inherent sacredness of the natural world and the need to protect it.
- **Community and Unity:** The collective participation in Lai Haraoba fosters a sense of **community and unity**. The rituals and dances reinforce the importance of social cohesion and mutual respect.
- **Control of Instincts:** The *Laipou* sequences, which depict the sublimation of basic human instincts, teach the importance of self-control and spiritual discipline.

4.2 Educational Significance

a. Traditional Knowledge Transmission:

Lai Haraoba functions as a *traditional education system*, transmitting knowledge orally and physically from one generation to the next. It serves as a repository of *cultural, historical, and practical knowledge*:

- **Oral Tradition:** The songs, chants, and prayers performed during Lai Haraoba contain oral histories and mythological narratives that preserve the Meitei people's cultural heritage.
- **Practical Skills:** The festival teaches practical skills such as house-building, weaving, agriculture, and craftsmanship through symbolic gestures and dances. For example, the act of building a house during the ritual symbolizes the basic importance of shelter and community life.

b. Moral and Social Education:

Lai Haraoba imparts moral and social values that are essential for community living:

- **Respect for Elders:** The rituals emphasize the importance of respecting elders and ancestors, who are seen as custodians of wisdom and tradition.
- **Gender Roles:** The participation of both men and women in the festival, with distinct roles for *amaibis* (priestesses) and *amaibas* (priests), highlights the complementary roles of genders in society.
- **Discipline and Devotion:** The strict adherence to the norms of rituals, taboos and the dedication required for the multiple performance teach the values of discipline, devotion, and commitment.

c. Cultural Identity and Continuity:

Lai Haraoba plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting Manipuri cultural identity:

- **Cultural Preservation:** The festival keeps alive ancient traditions, dances, music, and rituals that might otherwise be lost in the face of modernization.
- **Intergenerational Learning:** Young participants learn the intricacies of the festival by observing and participating alongside elders, ensuring the continuity of cultural practices.
- **Resistance to External Influences:** Despite the influence of Hinduism and the influx of alien cultures, Lai Haraoba has retained its pre-Hindu character, proving as a symbol of cultural resilience.

d. Philosophical Education:

Lai Haraoba also serves as a medium for philosophical education, teaching participants and spectators about the deeper meanings of life and existence:

- **Concept of Time:** The festival's association with the 64 divisions of time reflects the Meitei understanding of time as a cyclical and divine force. This concept is imparted through dance and song, offering a unique perspective on the nature of time.
- **Human Connection to the Divine:** The rituals emphasize the connection between humans and the divine, teaching that humans are part of a larger cosmic order and must live in harmony with it.
- **Life and Death:** The festival's focus on the life cycle, from birth to death, teaches participants to accept the inevitability of death while celebrating the continuity of life through renewal and regeneration.

4.3 Broader Implications

The philosophical and educational significance of Lai Haraoba extends beyond the Meitei community, offering universal lessons that can be appreciated by any people from different cultures:

- **Sustainability:** The emphasis on harmony with nature and the sacredness of the environment resonates with contemporary concerns about environmental sustainability.
- **Cultural Diversity:** Lai Haraoba highlights the richness of indigenous cultures and the importance of preserving cultural diversity in a globalized world.
- **Spiritual Well-being:** The festival's focus on spiritual discipline, self-control, and community cohesion offers insights into achieving spiritual well-being in modern life.

5. CONCLUSION:

Lai Haraoba stands as a profound and multifaceted expression of Manipur's spiritual, cultural, and philosophical heritage. Through its intricate rituals, dances, and songs, the festival encapsulates the essence of Meitei cosmology, offering a window into the ancient traditions of civilization. It is not merely a religious event but a living repository of cultural knowledge, preserving the collective memory and identity of the Meitei people across generations.

The festival's elaborate performances, such as the *Laipou* dance sequences, symbolize the entire life cycle – from birth to death – while also reflecting the Meitei understanding of cosmic creation, time, and divinity. These rituals serve as both a spiritual practice and an educational tool, imparting essential life skills, moral values, and cultural wisdom through the mediums of dance, music, and oral traditions. The participation of *amaibis* (priestesses) and *amaibas* (priests) underscores the complementary roles of gender in Meitei society, while the collective nature of the festival fosters a sense of community and unity.

Lai Haraoba's emphasis on harmony with nature, respect for elders, and the cyclical nature of life offers timeless lessons that resonate beyond the Meitei community. In an era of rapid modernization and globalization, the festival serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving indigenous knowledge systems and cultural diversity. Its rituals and performances not only reinforce Manipuri identity but also provide a model for sustainable living and spiritual well-being.

Looking ahead, Lai Haraoba holds significant potential for further exploration and application. Future research could delve into its evolving role in contemporary Manipuri society, particularly in the context of cultural tourism, intergenerational learning, and the integration of traditional practices into modern education systems. By fostering a deeper understanding of Lai Haraoba's cultural and philosophical significance, scholars and practitioners can contribute to its preservation and adaptation in a changing world.

In conclusion, Lai Haraoba is more than a festival; it is a holistic cultural expression that bridges the past and present, offering valuable insights into the human experience. Its enduring legacy serves as a testament to the resilience and richness of Manipuri culture, ensuring that the traditions of the Meitei people continue to thrive for generations to come.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We express our gratitude to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi, for their financial support through the Post-Doctoral Fellowship Award for 2023–2024 under File No. 3-90/2023-24/PDF/GEN. Their support has been instrumental in the successful completion of this study, and we appreciate their contribution to making this research a reality.

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