



REVIEW OF RESEARCH

ISSN: 2249-894X

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631 (UIF)

UGC APPROVED JOURNAL NO. 48514

VOLUME - 8 | ISSUE - 9 | JUNE - 2019



HIYANG TANNABA: THE FESTIVAL OF GREAT BOAT RACE OF MANIPUR

Rajkumar Jackson

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of History, Manipur University.

ABSTRACT:

An interesting fact in the physical culture of Manipur is the indigenous games. The origins of different indigenous games of Manipur such as Hiyang Tannaba, Mukna, SangolKangjei, Kang, etc. may be traced in the ancient literary works and chronicles of Manipur. Throughout the history of Manipur, these games formed a part and parcel of the Meitei way of life. Hiyangtannaba or boat race is one of the oldest indigenous games of Manipur. The boat is known as hee in Manipur. HiyangTannaba is one of the important events in Laiharaoba, a religious festival of Manipur. Mythology refers to a boat race between the Lainigthou and the Lairembi. This incident is re-enacted on the last day of Laiharaoba. This episode is known as Hikaba. This paper is an attempt to understand the Hiyang Tannaba festival as it recorded in the Cheitharol Kumbaba (Royal Chronicle of Manipur) and other literary sources.



KEYWORDS: Hiyang Tannaba, Meitei, Laiharaoba, Lainigthou, Leirembi, Hikaba.

INTRODUCTION

Manipur, the easternmost part of India is a mountainous region, isolated from the neighboring states by a chain of mountain ranges. It is one of the most beautiful spots with its delightful physical features, tradition and history. Lord Irwin, the then Viceroy of India described Manipur as 'Switzerland of India'.¹ She has been known by different names in ancient times. According to Sakok Lamlen Ahanba, the land took different names in the four chaks of Meitei or Meitei era viz., Tilli Kokthong Ahanba in Hayi Chak, Mira Pongthoklam

in Khunung Chak, Hanna Semba Konna Loiba in Langba Chak and Muwapalli in Konna Chak. But later on, its name was changed to *Porie Meitei* during the immigration of Poireiton in the state.² Manipur is known for its rich natural and cultural heritage. An interesting fact in the physical culture of Manipur is the indigenous games. Hiyang is derived from two Manipuri words *Hi* meaning boat and *Yang* meaning speed of race and thus it has come to be known as Hiyang Tanaba. There are two types of boats: the Tanna (Race boat) and the HiyangHirel (Royal Boat).³ Hiyang Tannaba or Boat race is one of the indigenous

games of Manipur. It is a vital element of one of the prominent festivals of Manipur called Lai Haraoba. It was a greatest and most popular festival of Meities held annually in the month of Hiyangei (October – November). The beginning of this game dates back to Manipuri Luwang Punshiba of Luwang principality. The chronicles and traditions of the Meites clearly indicate that Hiyangor boat was introduced in Manipur by Luwang Ningthou Punshiba, the king of the then Luwang principality. According to a Manipuri text HijinHirao, an ancient Manipuri text dealing with the origin and evolution of

boat-race in Manipur, one day Luwang Ningthou Punshiba made a stroll on the bank of Singdariver. The river was over flooded due to heavy rain in past few days. He found most of the tiny insects taking shelter on the top of the Tou (reep). He sighted a strange scene of Locust (Langban Koujeng Chaobicha) crossing the flooded river, biting a dry branch of a khiloi plant, a kind of thatch with its teeth. Again, he saw a mouse cutting a dry stalk of khikloi on whose support it to manage to swim across the flooded river using its tail as propeller. A thought of making boat by hawing out a suitable size of the dry wood suddenly struck the king. The text further mentions that Luwang Ningthou Punshiba sent a party of wood – cutters to the Ingen Ching who after performing due rites felled down a huge tree and brought the same to the capital of Luwang. Two artists namely Nungban Wangmitkhu Khutheiba and Wangmanao Shinheiba built a big boat by hollowing it out appropriately. After making the boat, the king put the dried and shrunken head of the Sangai (brow entlered deer) on its Hirubak (prow) as a mark of dedication to his late brother, Luwang Pudankoi Khutkoiba. The practice of decorating the royal racing boats with head of Sangai at the Hirubak became a tradition in Manipur. The first Hiyang Tannaba or boat race was held in the Luwang river as a public festival.⁴

Hiyang Tannaba, the festival of great boat race was related with religious practices of the Meiteis. Some of the practices associated with the use of boats in race and war were Hiyangei Kumdaaba (a ceremony which is associated with the steering of boat during the month of Hiyangei or October/November) and Langban Leishatanba (a ceremony which is associated with the test of depth of water during the month of Langban or August/September).⁵It was during the reign of king Koremba that he introduced boat race in the month of Hiyangeiie., November.⁶During the reign of King Khangemba moats were dug on four sides of his fortress at Kangla and therefore boat races were held annually. Pana⁷Hiyangfor the first time was introduced by King Khangemba.⁸There is an interesting story known as Sanongba Higaiwa, a crisis on the broken boat of Sanongba was the continuous argument between two younger brothers of King Khagemba namely Yaiskulakpa Sangnongba and Khurailakpa Chingsouba about the refusal of the former to return a new boat or the same after repair when the original boat was broken during the boat race at Leisang khong, as hired by the latter. As the problem could not be solved harmoniously King Khagemba expelled Sanongba, his younger brother from the country.⁹Ordinary boat race were also held in Manipur. It is recorded in Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Royal Chronicle of Manipur that every royal department also took part in Hiyang Tannaba.¹⁰In 1782, there was a boat race between the crown tribals and kharam tribe in which the kharam won.¹¹In 1864, the Meitei Pangals (Manipuri muslims) also joined the Hiyangtannaba.¹²

The traditional games and festivals of Meities were totally stopped when Manipur was colonized by the British. However, after a long time eight day long Hiyang festival was organized in 1900 in which two teams of military platoon also participated.¹³On the day of coronation ceremony of Maharaja Churachand Singh, Hiyang Tannaba was held on the Imphalriver at Singjamei in which the Britishers also participated for the first time.¹⁴ It is also recorded in the Royal Chronicle that boat race exclusively for young girls was held on the moat of Bijoy Govinda on the Friday of Mera (October – November).¹⁵

Pana Hiyang Tannaba as mentioned earlier were usually held in the month of Hiyangei (October – November). But in some cases, it was held at any time for amusement purpose. It was commonly held on the moats of King's palace and lasted three days. According to custom, the Panas compete in a fixed order – Ahallup verses Naharup, and Khabam versus Laipham. It was the great event of the year, everyone turned out to see the king and the queen. It is also recorded in Cheitharol Kumbaba that in 1851, ladies of the palace enjoyed Hiyang Tanaba sitting on the elephants.¹⁶According to R. Brown, "This festival is the most important held in Manipur, and great preparations are made for it; stands are erected on both sides of the moat, the one for the Raja being of considerable size and height. The 35 women occupy stands on the opposite side of the moat."¹⁷

Heikhru Hidongba is the traditional boat race festival of Manipur. It is an annual festival to mark the seasonal maturing of an edible fruit, heikhru (*emblicaofficialis*). It has a great heritage and celebrated with a ritualistic approach. Heikhru Hidongba is observed on the eleventh day of the fortnight of Langban month ie., September of Meitei calendar. It is observed at Thangapat Sri Bijoy

Govindajee, Sangolband, Imphal since ancient times. The tradition Heikhru Hidongbais quite old and historically its origin dates back since the time of King Irengba. According to an ancient Manipuri text called Sakok Lamlen Sakok, Heikhru Hidongbawas a traditional Meitei festival that had been around long before Maharaja Bhagyachandra, since the time of King Irengba. This was celebration pertaining to the worship of Pakhangba. There was no fixed day for the celebration. After the king decided on a day considered being auspicious, the festival was held. From the time of King Irengba until the time of King Maramba, the Heikhru Hidongba ceremony was held sporadically at best. However on the day when Maharaja Bhagya chandra with his uncle Nongpok Leirikhomba (Anantasai) after the installation of Shri Bijoy Govinda, there was a grand celebration of the Heikhru Hidongba to commemorate the occasion. It was decided that beginning the following year, on the 11th day of *Langban* of each year, the festival would be held. From then on this festival has been celebrated until this day without a break. The festival is celebrated as a prayer for the well being of the people at large. One of the most important elements of the Heikhru Hidongba is the spectacular visual drama of Hiyang Tannaba. Before the start of the race, graced in a Khabak Lakpaboat (two boats tied together), Shri Bijoy Govinda goes on a procession along the sides of the moat, and stops at every Hiden. This is known as Lai Lamyengba.¹⁸

This spectacle is what the festival marks the boat race celebrated with great fervor. On the eve of boat race, boats are cleaned and purified with the chanting of hymns. The neck of the boat is decorated with garlands. Gold and silver coins are offered to the river before the boat race begins. Prayers are offered to the Lord Sri Govindajee and Rashewori before the Hiyang Tannaba begins. A grand garland made of 180 Heikhru with an alternate bud of Hup together with garland of Cheng Machang (fine whole rice) made of 180 pieces is offered. The pundits or maiba makes predictions for the year based on the outcome of the boat race. The winner of the race is garlanded with the Heikhru or Cheng Machang. Boat race is a major raga among the youth in Imphal. Temporary tents are erected along the banks of the river where the boat race is conducted. The festival draws crowd from far and nearby cities and villages to witness the celebrations.¹⁹

Hiyang Tanaba is a striking water sport celebrated in Manipur. It is one of the most popular festivals of Manipur particularly among the Meities of Manipur. There is a phrase in Manipuri "*Meeashihiyangdaphaobaudri*" which means the man was not seen in the Hiyang Tannaba festival. It seems that the festival was celebrated with huge gathering of people. This festival is also closely related with religious practices of Meiteis. Mention may be made of Hikaba event in Laiharaoba and Hiyang Tannaba of Hekikru Hidongba. From the above facts which were recorded in the Cheitharol Kumbaba Royal Chronicle of Manipur and other literary sources, we can conclude that Hiyang Tannaba is not a traditional boat race festival. It also brings love and unity among the people.

NOTES AND REFERENCE

¹ R.K. Taneja, *Calcutta Who's who in Business*, Calcutta, 1891 -82, Sec. - V, p.23

² Mutum Bahadur, *Manipur Artki Wari Shingbun*, Imphal, 1st, 2nd & 3rd Vol., p.8.

³ N. Khelchandra, *ChakLaihui*, Imphal, 1963, p.13.

⁴ Hijin Hirao, MS

⁵ R.K. Sanahal Singh, *Manipur Ithihas*, 1947, Imphal, p.3

⁶ Kh. Kaomacha Singh, *Manipur Itibrita*, 1980, Imphal, p.26

⁷ *Pana* means Revenue divisions of Manipur

⁸ Gangumei Kamei, *History of Manipur, Pre - colonial Period*, 2015, New Delhi, p.260

⁹ Nepram Bihari, *The Cheitharol Kumbaba: The Royal Chronicle of Manipur*, Guwahati: Delhi, 2012, p. 51

¹⁰ L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, Imphal, 1967, pp. 88 & 125

¹¹ Nepram Bihari, *op.cit.*, p. 125

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 262

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 389

¹⁴ L. Ibungohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 677

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.349

¹⁶ T.C. Hodson, *The Meitheiis*, London, 1908, pp. 52-53

¹⁷ R. Brown, *Statistical Account of Manipur*, Calcutta, 1873, p. 82

¹⁸Dr. Ch. Jamini Devi, HeikruHidongba : Cultural History Of Manipur

(http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=manipur.Arts_and_Culture.Heikru_Hidongba_Cultural_History_Of_Manipur_By_Ch_Jaminiaccessed on 05/11/2015)

¹⁹*Ibid*