

REPORT

Workshop on Maibi Culture of Manipur

By Dr. Kailash Kumar Mishra

Venue: Manipur Dramatic Union Hall, Yaiskul, Imphal

Date: December 11, 2007

Background

The Workshop on Maibi Culture of Manipur was organized by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi in collaboration with the Manipur Film Development Corporation Limited (MFDC), Imphal and the Leimarol Khorjeikol (LEIKOL), Imphal on December 11, 2007 at the Manipur Dramatic Union hall located at Yaiskul, Imphal. Six resource persons and six Maibis spoke during the one day program of interaction and deliberation. Around 69 participants took part in the workshop. The workshop was held with the objective of bringing together Maibis (shamans) from the different parts of the State to interact and deliberate on the present conditions and the future of the Maibi tradition in the State. There were demonstrations by Maibis on their art and tradition.

Inaugural Function

The inaugural session of the workshop was held in the morning with Bormani Maibi, Maibi Asuppi (Head Maibi) of the Sanakonung Maibi Loishang (the Maibi institution at the Royal Palace) attending the function as the Chief Guest. Smt. Maharajah Kumari Binodini Devi, president of LEIKOL presided over the opening function.

Addressing the gathering, Bormani Maibi said that the Maibis (shaman) of Manipur are women who had disassociated with the mundane world to devote themselves entirely to the service of the Gods. They are the symbol of the Manipuri culture and tradition, she said. When the Maibis are offering the ritual worships with a sincere and honest heart, it would usher in prosperity and well being for the people, she said. Therefore, the Maibis should perform their duties without malice and ill intent in their hearts.

Speaking at the opening function, Smt. M. K. Binodini Devi said that it is high time that we do both intensive and extensive studies on the Maibi culture which had been prevailing in the state since centuries. The historical events, and the socio-cultural and the religious aspects of the Manipuri life can be deciphered from the life activity of the Maibis since centuries.

Morning Session of the Workshop

On the conclusion of the inaugural session of the workshop, the first half of the working session of the workshop commenced with a paper presentation by Ng.Kerani, Pandit Achouba (Head Pandit) of the Sanakonung Pandit Loishang (scholars' institution at the Royal Palace). Ng.Kerani spoke on 'The Maibi institution in the context of the Royal Palace'. His paper featured the history of the Maibi institution

beginning from the reign of the king, Meidingu Naothingkhong who reigned in 586 A.D. The main classification of the Maibi institution of that period were the Maiba Loishang, Pena Asheiba Loishang and the Maibi Loishang. He further elaborated that there are three categories of Maibis at the Maibi Loishang, namely, (i) Shanglen Maibi, (ii) Nongmai Maibi, and (iii) Phura Maibi. He also spoke at some length on the functions and the accepted rules to be observed by a Maibi in due course of the ritual performances and ritual worships.

The second paper of the morning session was presented by L.Ashokumar (Archivist, Manipur State Kala Akademi) who spoke on the 'Origin and History of the Maibi Tradition'. In his paper, Ashokumar mentioned how the women took part in the processes of the creation of the Universe. The tradition of the Maibis had been prevailing since the beginning of mankind, he said. Nongthang Leima, Panthoibi, Khoimom Larenbas were the pre-historical Maibis. Those women who attended in delivery cases were also known as Maibis. Men also took the role of Maibis by possessing occultism. However, in the earlier times, only women Maibis performed the ritual worships during the sacred Lai Haraoba ritualistic festival. The dance forms composed by Nongthang Leima – the first goddess Maibi – in human history were repossessed by the other goddesses. He also spoke on how the Maibis described the creation of man inside the mother's womb and how the house was built by their performance text of Laibou jagoi (ritual dance). Maibis in the historical period had an important duty to exercise in their association with the kings of Manipur, where they performed ritual worships for the welfare of the king, the people and the land. The Maiba Loishang (institution of the Maiba – male shaman) was established during the reign of the king, Meidingu Khagemba who ruled in the 16th century A.D. At that time, ritual worships were performed by men. Later, the male Maibas came to be also known as Maibis. So long as the traditional pantheon exist, so will the culture of the Maibis, he concluded.

The third paper of the day was presented by Dr.N.Premchand (Director, EMMRC, Manipur University) who spoke on 'Role of Maibis in Lai Haraoba and other Rituals'. In his paper, Dr. Premchand talked of how the Maibis possessed the supernatural powers in their communication with the divine beings to communicate to the mortals. During the Lai Haraoba ritualistic festival, the Maibis take the most important role; they dance and chant and the devotees follow them in ritual procession. The Maibis take a leading role in performing all ritual worships in the Meitei society. Apart of their religious duties, the Maibis took an authoritative role to advise the king on state affairs in the earlier times. Concluding his paper, Dr. Premchand commented that the system of matriarchal society was prevalent in the Meitei society.

Shri Aribam Syam Sharma, noted filmmaker, moderated the morning session.

Afternoon Session

In the afternoon Session, Dr. Ng. Ekashini presented a paper on 'Life Habits of the Maibi'. In her presentation, Dr. Ekashini defined a Maibi as a woman who is directly conversant with the divine beings. The activities of the Meitei Maibi is somewhat similar to Shamanism of the Russian origin which is usually used by American ethnographers in reference to men or women who, through the acquisition of supernatural powers, are believed to be able to either cure or cause diseases. The Meiteis believed Maibis as persons who could treat sick persons or who could do damage to them with supernatural practices. Dr. Ekashini explained the process or circumstance in which an ordinary woman becomes a Maibi. She also explained the different categories and the roles of the Maibis. She described the details of dress of the Maibi, the dress code and the taboo on food to be observed strictly by a Maibi.

An interesting aspect of the day long workshop was the sharing of personal experiences and knowledge on the Maibi tradition by five senior Maibis, namely, Nungshirei Maibi, Mani Maibi, Mangi Maibi, Tamu Maibi, Dhoni Maibi and Thoibi Maibi. They spoke on how they became Maibis, and cautioned on safeguarding the ancient tradition of the Maibis. They spoke on the lack of discipline and the un-uniformity of ritual dance by the young Maibis of the present times. They advised that this should be checked so as to retain the values and originality of the Maibi tradition.

Interacting during the discussion session, Jandho Devi, K.Hemchandra, Sonamani, Sadananda, Robindro, Chaoreikanba and Dr. Shilaramanai from among the participants put up interesting queries on the Maibi tradition, desiring to know more about the Maibi life and practices. Replying to a query from the participants, the resource person Shri L.Ashokumar said that there are four types of the Lai Haraoba, namely, (i) Kanglei Haraoba, (ii) Morang Haraoba, (iii) Phaiyeng Haraoba, and (iv) Sekmai Haraoba. Though the system of performing rituals are not similar, the philosophical concept of the Lai Haraoba is the same, he said. Dr. Shilaramani observed that it would be worthwhile to have further deliberations on the question of patriarchy and matriarchy in the Meitei society, as regards to the Maibi tradition. The art of the Maibi dance and practice should be incorporated in the academic curricula, she said.

Prof. S. Sanatombi of Manipur University moderated the afternoon session. In her concluding remarks, Prof. Sanatombi said that the purpose of the workshop was to establish the relationship of the Maibis to Manipuri culture. She suggested that it would be right to have a control on the young Maibis who tend to step out of the way of the tradition, and that rules are obeyed in pursuance of tradition. It would not be wrong to make alteration in the dance form to suit to modern needs whereas the philosophy of the dances should not be lost, she said. It would be a right step to bring the study of the Maibi tradition within the academic curricula, she concluded.

Recommendations

1. The resource persons and the participants of the workshop on Maibi culture of Manipur unanimously agreed upon to pursue with the Manipur Government and the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi for initiating both short and long time measures for the rejuvenation and promotion of the Maibi tradition which is an important aspect of the Manipuri culture and tradition.
2. It was agreed upon by the gathering to pursue with the Manipur Government and the IGNCA, New Delhi for organizing an annual festival of the Maibis where there would be academic sessions, interactions among Maibis, demonstrations, performances and documentation of the oral tradition on Maibi culture.
3. It was agreed upon to pursue with the Manipur Government and the IGNCA, New Delhi to initiate welfare schemes for the Maibis, such as, to provide support to practicing Maibis; creation of fellowships/stipend to be awarded to senior Maibis/Gurus for specific period of time.
4. It was recommended to pursue with the Manipur Government, the Manipur University authorities and other relevant institutions to induct the study of Maibi tradition in the educational curriculum so that the younger generation are

List of Resource Persons

1. A. Syam Sharma, Filmmaker, Thangmeiband, Imphal West
2. Ng. Kerani, Pandit Loishang, Sanakonung
3. Dr. N. Premchand, Yaiskul, Imphal West
4. Dr. Ng. Ekashini
5. L. Ashokumar, Manipur State Kala Akademi, Imphal West

6. Prof. S. Sanatombi, Manipuri Deptt., Manipur University, Canchipur

List of Delegates

1. Kshetrimayum Subadani, Leimarol Khorjeikol, Yaiskul, Imphal West
2. Mangangsana, Keisamthong, Imphal West
3. Boramani, Maibi Asuppi, Maibi Loishang, Sanakonung
4. A. Kamala, Leimarol Khorjeikol, Yaiskul, Imphal West
5. Elam Indira, Lalambung, Imphal West
6. H. Guno, Keishampat Thokchom Leikai, Imphal West
7. Prof. N. Tombi, Keishampat, Imphal West
8. Dr. K. Shantibala Devi, Takhel Leikai, Imphal West
9. Maya Nepram, Leimarol Khorjeikol, Yaiskul, Imphal West
10. Y. Indira, Thoubal, Thoubal District
11. Yengkhom Roma, Yaiskul, Imphal West
12. H. Satyabati, Sagolband Meino Leirak, Imphal West
13. Th. Dinesh Singh
14. Kh. Dorendra, Kwakeithel, Imphal West
15. N. Kunjamohon, Uripok, Imphal West
16. Prof. Elangbam Dinamani, Singjamei, Imphal West
17. Laishram Birendra, Yaiskul, Imphal West
18. Laishram Samarendra, Yaiskul, Imphal West
19. R. K. Jhalajit, Yaiskul, Imphal West
20. Dr. Shelaramani, Thambalkhong, Imphal East
21. Ch. Rita Devi, Keishamthong, Imphal West
22. Ibosana Tentha, Thoubal District
23. Thoidingjam Tombi, Khagempalli, Imphal West
24. Dr. M. Priyobarta, Khongman, Imphal East
25. K. Hemchandra, Sagolband, Imphal West
26. A. K. Sharma, Thambalkhong, Imphal East
27. Dr. S. Lanchenba, Sagolband, Imphal West
28. M. Rajendra, Tentha, Thoubal District
29. L. Dorendra Singh, Wangkhei, Imphal East
30. T. Hemchandra, Secretary, Pandit Loishang, Sanakonung
31. Prof. N. Khagendra, Khagempalli, Imphal West
32. Dr. H. Nabachandra
33. Sh. Brojeshwor, Takhel Leikai, Imphal West
34. I. S. Kangjam, Naoremthong, Imphal West
35. Ajitkumar Thiyam, Tera, Imphal West
36. L. Joychandra, Longjam Leirak, Imphal West
37. K. Kulladhaja, Tera, Imphal West
38. B. Jayantakumar Sharma, Bamon Leikai, Imphal East

39. Dr. Romesh Waikhom, Research Scholar
40. Dr. L. Gojendra, Hodam Leirak, Imphal West
41. Dr. H. Behari, Sagolband Meino Leirak, Imphal West
42. Sairem Nilbir
43. A.Chitreswar Sharma, Khongman, Imphal East
44. Dr. Th. Ibohanbi, Manipur Sahitya Parishad, Imphal
45. Dilip Mayengbam, All India Radio, Imphal
46. R. K. Nabinchandra Singh, Guru, Selection grade, JNMDA
47. L. Guneshor, Guru, JNMDA
48. Ms. N. Meenakumari, Research Associate, FACE
49. G. Krishnakanta Sharma
50. R. K. Achoubisana, Pradhan Guru, JNMDA, Imphal
51. Ms. P. Lilabati, Maibi
52. Ms. Kh. Anandi, Maibi
53. Ms. Y. Memchoubi, Maibi
54. H. Sushilkumar, Pandit Loishang, Sanakonung
55. S. Achou, Pena Loishang, Sanakonung
56. N. Bishorjit, P.T.I. Representative
57. M. Macha Chaoreikanba, Lecturer, Manipuri Dance Deptt., M.U.
58. Ms. Nirupama, Student, JNMDA
59. Ms. Y. Ibempishak
60. Ms. H.Sumatibala, Leimarol Khorjeikol, Yaiskul, Imphal
61. H. Mahesh, Laihui, Imphal
62. L. Turist, Student, JNMDA
63. Ms. E.Rojita, Student, JNMDA
64. Ms. N. Phajabi, Student, JNMDA
65. Ms. L.Radhika, Student, D. M. College of Arts, Imphal
66. Ms. M.Priyarani, Student, JNMDA
67. Maipaksana, Filmmaker
68. Ms. L. Indira, Wangkhei, Imphal
69. Ms. L. Randhoni, Wangkhei, Imphal
70. M. Ibotombi, Filmmaker
71. Shyamkishor, Maibi
72. Kh. Chandrasekhar Singh, Pandit