



Mera Haochongba (Mera Hou Chongba)

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Abstract:

MeraHaochongba is an important festival of Manipur. The main event of this festival is the cultural and ritual ceremony of showing solidarity of Manipur, celebrated jointly by valley people and hill people. The day of the festival falls on the 15th lunar day of *Mera* (name of month in Manipuri which corresponds to the month of September-October of Christian calendar). The main location for the celebration of this festival is at the royal palace of Manipur. On this day, all the hill people and valley people of Manipur come in their ethnic dresses along with customary gifts for the king and gather at the royal palace of Manipur. Hill people and valley people perform their folk dances, folk songs, other art forms of warfare and hunting. The festival ends with a grand feast and gift exchange between the hill people and the king. This festival has been celebrated since ancient times when some kind of autonomy was enjoyed by every ethnic people in their own way and it also accepts the king of Manipur as central authority. Therefore, to show their loyalty to the king and to mark oneness for the growth of nationalism in the state, this festival is observed in a grand way.

Keyword: 'MeraHaochongba'.

Article:

Manipur is a small state located in the north eastern part of India. There are many communities inhabiting in Manipur. Manipur is very rich in art and culture. It has its own culture and tradition since ancient times. Every year every ethnic group celebrate their festivals related to religious rituals. The culture and tradition of an ethnic group is very much related to the livelihood of the ethnic group and it is a treasure of that ethnic group. The festivals are not only for enjoyment and entertainment but they have their inner meanings. The festivals are celebrated on specific days, as per lunar calendar and solar calendar from generation to

generation since ancient times. "*MeraHaochongba*" is one of them. Since olden days, every year all the hill tribes under the jurisdiction of Manipur king came to the palace with crops and grains which they harvested and offered to the king. On this very day, there is a grand reception of hill tribes. In the reception ceremony different tribes show their traditional cultural activities like folk songs and folk dance etc; therefore this festival is named as "*MeraHaochongba*". The main event of festival *MeraHaochongba* is the cultural ceremony of showing solidarity of Manipur, celebrated by every indigenous ethnic group, including the valley people and the rest of hill tribes. Every ethnic group wear their traditional dresses and perform their respective cultural dances, songs and other art forms. There is a grand feast shared by all the attendees and also gift exchange. This festival shows the solidarity, oneness and love amongst the ethnic groups in the region and beautiful relationship of all the indigenous people.

Different scholars have different views on "*MeraHaochongba*". According to Scholar Khulem Chandrashekar Singh, an eminent scholar of old Manipuri literature, in the month of "*Mera*" (name of month in Manipuri), hill tribes come down to royal palace to present gifts to the king. Different hill tribes perform traditional folk dances, folk songs and many cultural activities etc of their respective tradition and culture therefore it is named as "*MeraHaochongba*". He further states that the event is especially for the hill tribes therefore it might be called as "*MeraHaochongba*". However, the event is not only for hill tribes, Meitei community also take part in this festival. And according to Scholar Moirangthem Chandra Singh, an eminent scholar of old Manipuri literature, in "*MeraHaochongba*" once in a year all hill tribes come to royal palace with gifts for the king and also the king present them gifts in exchange to show the brotherhood relation of hill tribes and valley people. Every year on the 10th of *Loidam* "*Mera*" (name of month in Manipuri calendar) "*MeraShanduba*" ritual event is



performed. The event of this festival is to sacrifice of “*Shandang*” (ox) to Goddess *Nunggoibi*. The meat of the “*Shandang*” (*Mithun*) is cooked and a grand feast is arranged for the hill tribes and valley people in belief of bringing prosperity to the king which is mentioned in the book *KhunungLichatSajat*. Also, according to R. Brown in his *Statistical Accounts of Manipur*, The festival called *Hawchongba* in October, last for only one; it is a gathering of the hill tribes under the Manipuri Government, and is a curious sight on account of the great number of different tribes assembled, with their curious dress and weapons, differing from each other in feature and language, but all unanimous in one particular, to get drunk as speedily and remain so as long as possible. The hill men indulge in feast of strength before the raja, such a carrying heavy weight & atc. . . . They also indulge in war dances and sham fight. The sports of the day conclude with a feast. (Brown 83)

As per the above versions, the festival “*MeraHaochongba*” is expressed as the cultural festival of showing solidarity of Manipur, celebrated by every indigenous ethnic group, including the valley people and the rest of hilltribes to show solidarity, oneness and love of all the ethnic groups in the region and beautiful relationship of all the indigenous people by having a grand feast together and exchange of gifts between the hilltribes and valley people. This festival has been celebrating since ancient times every year in the month of “*Mera*”.

In ancient times, “*MeraHaochongba*” was celebrated on the 10th of “*Mera*” (name of month in Manipuri). On this day all hill tribes and valley people came to royal palace in their traditional dress with some customary gifts for the king and also the king arranged gifts for them. The grand reception and gift exchange between the king and head village of hill people and the grand feast that followed were the main events of this festival. On the same day, the ritual event of “*MeraShanduba*” was also performed. And also ministers of king sacrificed *Nonggoubi* Bird (Pheasant) to Goddess *Nunggoibi* as a prayer and worship, which is called “*HuyenLalluChanba*” and also the ritual ceremony of sending message “*HuyenLanpao*” to God *Nongshaba*, *Pakhangba*, Goddess *YumjaoLairembi* was performed. In this ritual, a “*Shandang*” (*Mithun* animal) is sacrificed to the Goddess *Nunggoibi*. Thereafter *Shandang* meat was cooked and a grand feast was arranged for the hill tribes. Hence, it is believed that the event called “*MeraShanduba*”

comes from the activities of killing many *Shandang*” (*Mithun* animal) to feed to guests.

Even though “*MeraHaochongba*” and “*MeraShanduba*” are celebrated on the same day, both the events have different meanings. “*MeraShanduba*” is a ritual of sacrificing (*Mithun* animal) to Goddess *Nunggoibi* for the goodness and happy life of the king as mentioned in *Tharon*. And the meat of “*MeraShanduba*” cooked feed to the people of “*MeraHaochongba*” is to show solidarity, oneness and love of all the ethnic groups in the region.

On the occasion of *MeraHaochongba* all the hill tribes and valley people gather in the royal palace and sit on their designated seats and later the king attend the event. All the hill tribes and valley people give their gifts to the king and introduce them-self one by one to the king and the king also give them gift in exchange of it. And later they go back to their respective seats. After the gift exchange all the ethnic groups perform their traditional art and culture. Later on the meat offered to the goddess *Nunggoibi* cook and feed to the all people gather in the *MeraHaochongba*. There are two kitchens, one for hill tribes and another for valley people, where meats are cook in hill tribe kitchen and fish are cook in valley people kitchen. Everyone participate in this event have the grand feast together and end the festival.

In “*MeraHaochongba*” gifts brought by people are simple, they are what people have in their village and what they can afford namely - *ChakPaotam*, *Kurek*, *Kairenphi*, *Phiton*, *Phimu*, *ChakhumPhitooop*, *Lashing*, *Hawai*, *Thoiding*, *Yaingng*, *Shing* (ginger), *Pan*, *HentakChafu*, *Yu* (wine), *Ngaamu*, *Pongkot*, *SarengPaonga*, *HeimangPolang*, *Puleimanbi*, *Long*, *Sairup*, *Yendai*, *Yangkok*, *Sumchit*, *Chengchamluk*, *Thoumei*, *Kairangthouri*, *Thang*, *Dolai*, *Chamangli*, *Khoiru*, *Thouri*, *Paya*, *Suk*, *LihingMapak*, *Khoijuleikham*, *Pukham*, *Tengkot*, *Uchan*, *HidakPon*, *Mengkruk*, *Mukthruhi* and *Some money etc.* And some specific tribes have their specific gifts. Some of them are example. *Etham*, *Montha*, *Keihou* and *Umang* groups bring gifts like *Mangtaruk*, *Lamchata clothes etc.*, for *Langte* it is one *Sangdang* (*Mithun* animal), for *Aimol* it is *ChakKhurumPhitup*, *Kurek*, *Charol*, *MitlangSumchit*, *ChakPaotametc.*, for *Tarou* it is *Heipon*, *Phimu*, for *Mayon* it is *Thoiding*, *Naiphi*, for *Anal* it is *ThoidingPon*, *Uchan*, *Shuk*, one *HidakPonetc.*, for *TangkhuAwang* group it is *Lashing* (cotton), *ShingPon* (ginger), *Hawai* (grains) and for *Tingsang* it is *yu* (wine).

In “*MeraHaochongba*” different ethnic groups wear their traditional dresses like round their neck



people wear *LikMoirik*, *LikkonPareng* and *Poham* etc. On ear people wear *Longthrei*, on arm people wear Ivory tusks and on leg people wear bones of animal. On this day men are perform their skill like weight lifting, art of warfare and other related physical activities of hunting. Folk songs and Folk dances are also performed. Every ethnic group perform at their best to show that they are stronger and rich in culture. Just to express the identity of the ethnic groups a song was also perform where only one person sings some questions and to answer it.

This festival is organised by “*HaomachaLoishang*” (Hill Tribes Committee) under the supervision of hill village heads. In earlier days, before 1891 the festival was celebrated in the old palace compound ground which is on the eastern side of *Kangla* and north western side of *Kangla* Lake.

“*MeraHaochongba*” is a big festival which all ethnic groups including the king of Manipur take part in it. It is also an opportunity to know each other of hill people and valley people and head of committees. It is festival of showing love among the hill people and valley people. Folk songs, folk dance, sports and other cultural activities of every ethnic group show the rich and diverse culture of the state. Art of warfare and other related physical activities of hunting performed by male also show the physical strength of the people and the exchange of gift show the respect and honour of each other inhabited in the region. Having the grand feast together shows the unbreakable relation of oneness and collective strength of the region. The “*MeraShanduba*” event shows that prayer and offering to God is our culture from ancient time. Therefore “*Mere Haochongba*” is not only a festival of happiness, it has the significance of oneness.

There is no such evidence when and how this festival started however in oldbooks;it has, however, been mentioned that *MeraHaochongba* was celebrated from ancient time. In the book of *LoiyumbaShinyen* during the reign of *MeidingnguKhangemba* “*MeraHaochongba*” is mentined. That means during the reign of *MeidingnguKhagemba* this festival was celebrated as a big event. *MeraHaochongba* festival is continuing celebrated on 10th of Mera (name of month in Manipuri) every year. During the reign of *Meidingngu* Nara Singh and ChandrakirtiMaharaj there was a changed of festival day as per chronicle of Manipur *CheitharolKumbaba*. In Chronicle of Manipur *CheitharolKumbaba*, it is mentioned that during the reign of ChandrakirtiMaharaj the festival was celebrated in the month of Hiyangei with firing 100 rounds of tank gun and also mentioned the

festival *MeraHaochongba* was celebrated and also in the same book during the reign of ChnadrakirtiMaharaj it was celebrated on 28th of day *Hiyangei* (name of month in Manipuri). That is why the “*MeraHaochongba*” which we currently celebrated on 10th of Mara was celebrated in the month of *Hiyangei* during the reign of *Meidingngu* Nara Singh and ChandrakirtiMaharaj. Later on during the reign of ChurachandMaharaj the festival was started celebrating in the month of *Mera* (name of month in Manipuri) however the day is slightly changed. It was celebrated on 10th of *Mera* and during the reign of ChurachandMaharaj hill people started gathering from 13th of Mera and the event was celebrated on 14th and 15th of Mera. Therefore the festival is celebrated for 3 days. Later on in 1977 Sanamahi Temple board has started celebrating “*MeraHaochongba*” only one day on 15th of Mera and it is continue till today. Since then, this festival has commonly known as “*MeraHouChongba*”.

It is a historical fact that the population of Manipur is made up on the basic foundation of pluralism. From the ground reality, it can be stated that right from ancient timesome kind of autonomy was enjoyed by every ethnic people in their own way; it is also accepted by the king of Manipur as central authority. However, in spite of all these political structure people have full loyalty to the supreme authority of the king. Therefore, to show their loyalty to the king and to mark oneness to the growth of nationalism in the state," this festival is observed in a large scale way.

Lastly, “*MeraHaochongba*” is an important festival, it does maintain and strengthen the harmonious relationship among the hill people and valley people of Manipur.

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