

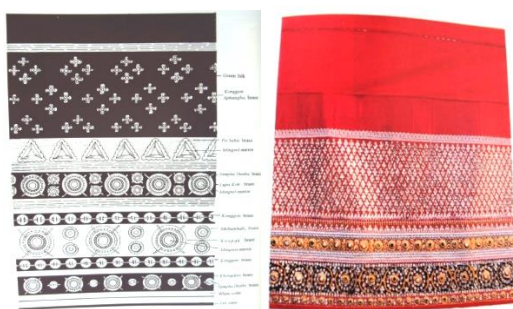
HISTORY OF TRADITIONAL TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN MANIPUR

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Introduction

Manipur, the cradle of early human civilization is bounded by nine hill ranges and a valley in the centre with lakes and rivers. The water outlet of the valley opens at the south by Manipur River, a tributary of the Chindween River. Manipur has a rich tradition and culture with her long written history from the time of king Nongdalai Pakhangba (Nong-Tai-Lai-Pakhangba) 33 A.D. The hills are inhabited by different tribes and the valley by Meitei/ Metai. Manipur is a land of Tai people with their ancestors Tien and Lai (Hlai) as the progenitor but linguistically influence by Poi. But the cultural elements are purely of Tai (Dr. Suresh Laishram 2004).

Manipur is famous for her textiles both traditional and modern. It has a distinctive patterns and beautiful colour combination. Women in Manipur are craft-women, artistic and articulate in making designs with choice of colours. Though the textile products are hand woven, the heavy demands of it from all over the country is a monument to her (women) craftsmanship. The Meitei/ Manipuri women who are settled in Bangladesh and Myanmar also have the same skill in this profession as the Meitei women in Manipur. The culture and tradition of the Meitei of the ancient past had brought out a traditional dress culture of their own textile, different from the other cultures of the neighbouring countries. Mention may be made here about the world famous Manipuri classical dance (Ras Leela) Costume, POTLOI



(Fig.1). The Potloi is worn by Radha and Krishna in the Rasa Leela, a devotional choir dance

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Myth and History

Manipur has more than twenty thousand (20,000) manuscripts dealing with different subjects, some of the following manuscripts dealt with the traditional textiles, designs and techniques of Meitei. They are Leisemlom (creation theory), Leinunglon (the role of Nung people) Cheitharol Kumbaba (Royal chronicle), Naothingkhong Phambal kaba (coronation of king), Leithak Leikharol, Pudim, Pakhangba Phambal, Khunung, Lichatshajat (tradition and costume of Nung people), Loiyumba Senyel (division of labour during the time of king Loyumba) etc.

According to the old manuscripts, the supreme goddess Leimarel and the celestial ancestor Panthoibi (Panto-i-bi) introduced and developed the art of weaving imitating the pattern of weaving the cob-web by the spider. They prepared the thread from the soft fiber of bamboo and bark of trees for weaving the cloth. It is further described that the celestial heroes took part in creation of the land by wearing Khwangli-Laikhal (Male's lion dress to cover the genital part), Khaochon. Phurit (shirt) and the Ashiba with turban and Shidaba wear Lolloi head gear. The dresses worn by kings during the time of coronation from the time of creation are clearly mentioned in old manuscripts.

According to the Meitei customary code of dress culture Meitei traditional and habitual dresses can be divided into the following categories:

- a) King's dress
- b) Queen's dress
- c) Ordinary dress

- d) Visiting dress
- e) War dress
- f) Occasional dress
- g) Religious dress

King's dress and costumes

1. Head dress is known as Lollei Kokyet



(fig.2)

2. White head gear known as Shamjin marked by two golden bubble shaped designs on the front



(fig.3)

3. Slipper like shoe wrapped the frontal part with padden cloth and decorated with two bubble shaped designs over the wrapping part.

4. Shirt Phiren Phurit and padded sleeveless and collarless shirt konkha Phurit
5. Lion overgarment known as chari Ningkham

Queen's dress

1. Hair style
2. -Hair tied into three knots and decorated with hornbill feathers known as Luren Luhao
3. Loin dress of black colour with narrow yellow strip kumlang phanek
4. Loin overgarment of white colour as phiren kanak
5. Band of silk cloth to cover the breast
6. Kha-on Phurit

During the time of king Khuyoi Tompok, the son of Nongdalaiaren Pakhangba a special design of cloth for the king known as Wanphak Phurit was developed imitating the dorsal scale of the chameleon.

Silk worm is still known as Leima Til as recorded in the Meitei old literature as an incarnation of the death princess found at the burial mount. The mulberry worm discovered was reared by the royal servants feeding with leaves after which it developed cocoons by weaving by the worm. The village where the worm was rear was Leimaram near the old site of Kang-Maung (the first Tai Kingdom according to Dr. Suresh paper).

During the time of king Loiyumba 12th century A.D. goes to certain lineage according to manuscript Loiyumba Shilyen; e.g. Maungphi

(Maung cloth) by the Thingucham lineage, Laiphi by Lairellakpam, Yarongphi by Thongbam, Sarongphi) Saronh cloth by Laikhuran lineage etc.

The traditional loin-dress are Khwangli Laikhal, Ningri, Kaptreng, Thougai Phiset, Thaugal Phiset Kunja Yeppi, Pheijom Kunja Kaobi, Khudei, Samu Naton Namei leibi etc.



(fig.4)

The traditional male loindress are commonly of cotton. Silk cloths are strikly entitled for the nobleman, aristocrats and royal family members. Painted/printed design cloths are Khamen chatpa



(fig.5)

Khamu prepared from Khamu plant dye. The colour of the traditional dyes are of mono-dye in case of male loincloths- white, red, black, orange, green, pink, crimson red and violet colour and for ceremonial the dress are purely

white cloth. Lions over garment are of two types in traditional forms- Ningkham and Khwangset composed of triangular White piece with artistic appliqué work. The artistic work are off Khi mayek, Phantup Ningkham, Shirting for male warriors- Khawon Phurit, Khaochom Phurit, Konkha Phurit, Phurit Saikakpa and Phurit Saichonba



(fig.6).

Headdress for male wearers- there are two forms- Lollei and Samijin. Konjin Tuthokpa the mythical hero wore the Lollei headdress to show his sovereign.

Like the early Tais of the mainland South-East Asia male wear turban- (i). Tolok is one of the traditional Meitei turban still used today, it is believed that the mythical hero Ashiba wore this Tollok head dress during the time of creation, Meitei warrior also used this turban in the ritual Thengkou martial art. (ii). Pakhang Tolok is a special youth turban used in leisuring

around. (iii). Another turban is the Kokyet Kangdrum used by Royal guards and by the military. (iv). Kokyet Pheiyet- This turban was used by king Nongdalairan Pakhangba for the first time. (v). Paknoi Kokyet – particular style turban projecting the two ends upward one on the right and one at the left side. (vi). Salai Kokyet-Worn by the celestial god Atiya shidaba (mortal Atiya, Atiya means sky). Atiya is recorded to be from Hlaikha or Leikha (the land of kha in upper Burma) near Khe (Yunan province or Nanchao).

Female dress- Meitei women loincloth locally is known as Pha-nek (Phi-nap) measuring about 1.75m in length and 1.30cm in breadth. Married women dress style is known as Khoidom Shetpa wore lengthwise, with one border around the waist and the left breadth is carried to the right, while the right counterpart, carried to the left end, overlapping the inner one and lastly the its corner end is tightly tucked into the upper end of the cloth wrapped around the waist. The end free hangs in a circular fashion around the middle of the legs. Another style Phidon Chingkhatpa is specially designed for married women fashion, wore above the breast.

Female dress Phanek is of four categories:- a) Kanap Phanek b) Pumngou Phanek c) Pumthit Phanek d) Tunga Phanek. These four categories are again divided according to the designs embroidered at the two border and the colours of the strips.

Embroidery works of decorating the Phanek during the time of Yanglou Keiphaba 967 to 984 A.D.). Other pattern like Khoijao mayek (Khoi means bee or hook, chao means big), Hija

Mayek and Khoi Akonbi were developed in later period. Kanap, women loin dress is a special kind of Lai cloths dress in the coronation by the queen of Manipur from olden days, which are of embroidered border in broad size. The second variety is embroidered in the whole body of the cloth. The designs consist of birds and other living creatures like crawling position of snake peacock etc.

There are other cloths like Langla Khaothangsamba, Naohongpi, Wanphak Phurit, Innaphi Langdom, Innaphi Aphaaibi, Pungjai Purum Ponden, Korou Phinga or Korou Nongka phi, mungphi, Phimu Lanphi, Musum Phi, Khunung Mathang Phi, Yarong Phi, Shaphi Lanphi, Wathok Phi, Sasaba Ngasaba Phi, Luhong Phichil, Luhong Phichil Maree, Luhong Phichil Mapak, Harao Phijil etc.

Kind of stitch used in embroidery: 1). Running stitch 2). Satin stitch (3). Long and back stitch 4). Back stitch 5) Darning stitch 6) Herringbone stitch 7) Botton hole stitch 8). Chain stitch 9). Couching stitch 10). Stem stitch.

Dying Technology

1. Black dye- manufacture from -
 - a) Kum plant (Strobilanthes sp., family Flacccidifolius- after fermentation of the leaves.
 - b) Heikru- embelica myroblam
 - c) Kuhi tree- Quercus fenestrate

d) Or infusion of the three

2. Olive green- mixer of yellow and blue, mixer of Unapu (Fibraura Trotherii) and Kum products.
3. Crimson red- Ash of banana stem is added to water in which Ureirom seeds are squeeze to produce the crimson red colour dye.
4. Maroon red
5. Pink
6. Pale Yellow- Termaric root pound and water added with leingang (red clay) and some fresh milk is added to the mixer.
7. Pale yellow- termaric prepared as above and Heibung fruit juice added (acidic liquid)

Traditional bleaching

Cow dung method: mixed with water and stored overnight and yarn or cloths to be bleach is dipped in it for eight to ten hour according to the season. After that the yarn or the cloth is washed in water.

Ash water: Dried banana leaves and the dried stalk of pea plant or bamboo are dried and burnt to ash. It is then collected in a small basket and water is added repeatedly from above the basket and liquid collected to used for bleaching the cloth or the yarn.

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