Heritage Information

Section-1: Identification of the element

Heritage Location

Division

Sylhet

District

Moulvibazar

Upazila

Details Address

Geolocation(Latitude)

Geolocation(Longitude)

Community Category

Others

Community

Bishnupriya

Name of the Heritage, (as used by the community or group concerned)

Priesthood of the Manipuri community of Bangladesh

Short title of the Heritage, (preferably within 200 words)

Priesthood and priests of the both the Bishnupriyas and Meiteis are at the core of this Manipuri community, with its font of Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe

Concerned Community(ies)/Group(s), (who recognize the element as part of their cultural heritage)

Physical location(s) of the element/how often it is practiced

Srimongol District of Sylhet Division in Bangladesh.

Short description of the Heritage, (preferably within 350 words)

Manipuri society, in Bangladesh, is primarily divided into Bishnupriya Manipuri and Meitei Manipuri communities. Within the Meitei community there is a division between those who believe in the 'Apokpa', and those who follow Vaishnavism. 'Apokpa' is the main cult of Sanamahism also known as Manipuri religion or Kanglei religion, an animistic, ancestor-worshiping, shaman-led religious tradition found among. On the other hand, Manipuri Vaishnavism was adopted amongst Meiteis when a king of the Shan Kingdom gifted an effigy of the Vishnu chakra (the symbolic disc of Vishnu or Krishna) to Kyamaba, king of Manipur. So, since the 1470s the kings of Manipur started worshiping Vishnu. Many Brahmin priests from the West, the main areas of India, came to Manipur and settled there. On the other hand, since the reign of King Bhagya Chandra, towards the 18th century, Vaishnavism became very popular amongst the Bishnupriya

community of Manipuri. For all three communities: Meitei Apokpa, Meitei Vaishnavites, and Bishnupriya Vaishnavites the Priests are an integral part of Manipuri life, wherein each 'rite of passage' i.e birth, naming of child, marriage etc., is consecrated by religious rituals conducted by Priests. Manipuri Brahmin priests occupy a hugely revered position in Manipuri Society. One can became a priest only after acquiring knowledge of 'panchathatya'. Though there is a history of social conflict between the Meitei and Bishnupriya communities, surprisingly Brahmin Priests bridge this divide and not only have access, but also conduct rites and rituals for both Meitei and Bishnupriya Vaishnavites. From birth to death, these rituals are: • Sashtipuja or 'birth-rites' • Shuddikaran or 'purification rites' • Namkaran or 'naming rites'; • Annaprashan – first feeding of rice to child; • Upanayan/Dhiksha – initiation into religious teachings, • Churakaran – shaving of head • Marriage • And, Shraddha Ceremony or 'funeral rites'. Besides the above there are the rites of Gods and Goddesses - Saraswati Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Satyanarayana Broto (Katha) et al. In Harisankirtan, the priests perform the task of setting up the pots, such as: 'Kalpataru's Ghat', 'Lakshmi Narayan's Ghat', 'Shiva Durga's Ghat' at the entrance of the worship. 'Har Gauri's Ghat' where Radha Kundu and Shyam Kundu are consecarated. Nahit Kundu, Vayu Kundu, Ishan Kundu, Agni Kundu are to be placed on all four sides of Kalpataru Ghat. On the left side of the kalpataru ghat is to

Domains of the Heritage (applicable fields)

- [x] Oral Traditions and Expressions
- [x] Performing Arts
- [x] Social Customs and Traditions
- [x] Knowledge and Practices related to Nature and Universe
- [ ] Traditional Craftsmanship
- [ ] Food

Section-2: Characteristics of the element

Practitioners(s)/performer(s) directly involved in the representation or practice of the Heritage (including roles, name, age, gender, social status, and/or professional category etc.)

Name - Jitendra Sharma, Manipuri Brahmin Priest, Age - 55 years, Gender- Male,

Other tradition bearers (individuals/groups and their roles))

All devotees who participate in the worships, specially family members if it is a worship of one of the 'rites of passages'.

Language(s), register(s), speech level(s) involved

Manipuri language and Sanskrit

Associated tangible elements used (if any)

During collective singing [sankirtan] specific instruments such as the pung (percussion), kartal (cymbals), senbun, sankho (conch shell) etc. are used to accompany the incantations of the Priests.

How are women and people of other genders associated with this Heritage?

Women always participate in the 'sankirtan' or collective devotional singing which is interspersed within the rites of worship. During special 'Rasleela' the women are part of the 'Nata-sankirtan' and perform dances.

Division of labour during the practice of this Heritage

Manipuri worship has elaborate procedures where both men and women are assigned to complete designated tasks. However, the Priests are always Brahin men, in contrast to the Apokpa, where the male Maiba Priest is equal in status to the female Maibi Priestes.

Elements to which other customary practices or practices may be connected or accessed in any respect of the heritage (if any)

Both Manipuri Meitei and Manipuri Bishnupriya rarely allow access to outsiders within the. temple premises.

Modes of transmission to others in the community

'Kulachar' is the traditions of lineage, according to which Priesthood can only be transmitted to the male progeny.

Organizations concerned (non-governmental organizations and others)

The community itself has strict traditions and maintains the regulations by themselves.

Section-3: State of the element (viability)

Threats to the enactment

Enactment Threats Description

The threats are sometimes from the majority Muslim population within which the Manipuris of Bangladesh live. However, Manipuris live in their own low-key multi-family bubbles and there have been very few incident of conflict.

Threats to the transmission (if any)

As only the male progeny or offspring is allowed to carry on the tradition of Priesthood there is a conflict of interest within the young generation who are gaining education and opting for other careers. An important factor for the younger generation is the economics of Priesthood which they do not find viable.

Threat to associated tangible elements and resources (if any)

Unfortunately, the elaborate musical instruments and costumes required for sankirtan and Nata-sankirtan accompanying Manipuri worship, needs to be imported from the neighbouring country, India.

Viability of associated intangible elements (if any)

Due to the distance from Manipur, the homeland, of Manipuris and Manipuri culture, the practices of music and dance has become corrupted in Bangladesh.

Have been taken any safeguarding measures to preserve this Heritage practices? (if any)

There are no Govt of Bangladesh or India initiatives to safeguard this practice and there is a need to start a discourse to put into place some safeguarding measures. 'Shadhona' - an UNESCO ICH accredited NGO, with a local community group, Manipuri Theatre, has been working tirelessly for the last eight years to train Manipuri youngsters in dance and pung- playing, which accompanies many worships.

Section-4: Data gathering/documentation, Consent and preparation of inventory entries

Consent of community/group/individuals concerned for data collection with a view to inventorying

Manipuri community participated in an extensive project for ICH Inventorying & Safeguarding commissioned by the UNESCO Dhaka Office and conducted by two NGOs - Shadhona and the Bangladesh Crafts Council.

Restrictions on use of collected data, (if any)

Both Meitei and Bishnupriya communities and the Muslim Pangal Manipuri community participated enthusiastically in the ICH Workshops.

Section-5: Resource Person

Data provider/Resource person (persons/groups, community representatives)

Name - Jitendra Sharma, Manipuri Bishnupriya Brahmin, was the principle resource person. Inventorying was carried out by Sweety Das Chowdhury, a dancer who has been working within the community to train young dancers.

Date of data collection

18-05-2020

Place(s) of data collection

Tilokpur Village of Moulovibajar.

Section-6: Safeguarding techniques

Existing safeguarding techniques adopted by the community for the safeguarding of the Heritage

There are no safeguarding techniques in place for Priesthood, but 'Dhrumel', a joint project of Shadhona and Manipuri Theatre has been operating for eight years to enhance cultural activities within Bishnupriya Manipuris of Bangladesh.

Suggestions for safeguarding of the Heritage from the community

Preservation of old manuscripts which contain the texts of worship, providing incentive to the younger generation to learn Priesthood. Also, there is urgent need to document and research these intangible cultural practices.

Section-7: References to literature, discography, audiovisual materials or archives

References to/in literature

The manuscripts which contain the mantras and chants are the 'Gita,sree', 'Krishno Charitamrito'. 'Gitogovindo', 'Bhagabath Puran", etc which need preservations, specially those which have been redacted in Bangla language from oral transmissions.

Audiovisual materials or archives

There are innumerable private collections, due to proliferation of digital technology, but no comprehensive and authoritative archive.

Discography or archives

No archive has been constituted.

Section-8: Modalities for updating the information contained in the inventory entry

Data Compiler (persons/groups, including community representatives, who compiled the information)

The community is enthusiastic about not just inventorying the ICH practice, but to also be authorised to regularly update documentation.

Date of Community Consent

Consent of community/group/individuals concerned for data collection with a view to inventorying

Consent was procured from the community through our main resource person, Jitendra Sharma.

Present Condition of Heritage

Still maintaining

Brief description of Present condition of the Heritage, (if any)

Still maintaining

Section-9: Community suggestions

Brief description of suggestions for safeguarding of the element by community members/experts/holders, (if any)

The community is willing to start a discourse on safeguarding and transmission.

Restrictions on use of collected data, (if any).

There are no restrictions.

Section-10: Upload Document

Consent Document

PDF

Heritage Details Document

PDF

Heritage Images



Heritage Video

Download/ডাউনলোড