

# **The Cultural and Ritual Significance of Heiree (Rattan Fruit) during Sajibu Nongma Panba Cheiraoba**

## **Introduction**

Sajibu Nongma Panba Cheiraoba is the traditional lunar New Year of Manipur, celebrated during the months of March and April. It marks the beginning of a new year and a fresh agricultural cycle. The festival reflects the deep connection between nature, spirituality, and daily life of the Meitei community. One of the most important rituals of Cheiraoba is the offering of seasonal fruits, among which Heiree (rattan fruit) holds special significance.

## **Background of Heiree**

Heiree is a locally available forest fruit traditionally found in Manipur. It is known for its medicinal and nutritional value and is believed to improve digestion and overall health. Due to these qualities, Heiree is considered a symbol of physical well-being and longevity. Elders of the community regard it as an essential item for beginning the New Year on a healthy note.

## **Ritual Practice during Cheiraoba**

On the morning of Cheiraoba, families clean their homes and prepare ritual offerings for household and traditional deities. Heiree is placed along with rice, vegetables, and other seasonal fruits. Prayers are offered for health, peace, and prosperity for the coming year. After the ritual, the offered food is shared among family members, as it is believed to carry divine blessings.

## **Symbolic Meaning**

The slightly bitter taste of Heiree symbolizes the acceptance of both happiness and hardship in life. Consuming Heiree at the start of the New Year reminds people that good health is the foundation of success and prosperity. It also represents harmony with nature and respect for traditional knowledge passed down through generations.

## **Social and Cultural Importance**

The practice of offering Heiree strengthens family relationships and encourages interaction between elders and younger members. Through this ritual, cultural values and indigenous knowledge are shared and preserved. In rural communities, the collection of Heiree is often a communal activity, promoting unity and cooperation.

## **Conclusion**

The offering of Heiree during Sajibu Nongma Panba Cheiraoba is more than a ritual practice. It reflects the cultural identity of the Meitei community and their belief in health, nature, and spiritual balance. Preserving this tradition helps maintain the rich cultural heritage of Manipur in the face of modernization.