

Tangkhul Saba Nupa in Lairoi (Manipur)

Introduction

Lairoi is the closing ceremony of the traditional Meitei festival Lai Haraoba, which is celebrated in Manipur to honor local deities (Umang Lai) and to reenact the creation of the universe. One of the most important figures appearing during Lairoi is the Tangkhul Saba Nupa, a male performer dressed in the traditional attire of the Tangkhul Naga community. His presence holds deep cultural, historical, and ritual significance

Background and Origin

According to Meitei belief and oral tradition, the Tangkhul community is regarded as the elder brother, while the Meiteis are considered the younger brother. This belief reflects the ancient relationship between the hill communities and the valley people of Manipur. The appearance of the Tangkhul Saba Nupa during Lairoi symbolizes this age-old bond and shared ancestry

Role of Tangkhul Saba Nupa in Lairoi

- He appears during the final phase of the festival known as Lairoi, marking the ritual closure.
- His presence signifies the formal completion of the rituals and blessings of the deities.
- Without the appearance of the Tangkhul Saba Nupa, the festival is traditionally considered incomplete

Cultural and Symbolic Meaning

- **Symbol of Brotherhood:** Represents unity and mutual respect between hill and valley communities.
- **Sacred Alliance:** Highlights the spiritual and cultural connection between different ethnic groups of Manipur.
- **Historical Unity:** Acts as a reminder of shared history, blood ties, and cultural exchange.

Relationship with Tangkhul Nurabi

The Tangkhul Saba Nupa is often accompanied by the Tangkhul Nurabi, his female counterpart. While the Nurabi interacts more closely with the deities and ritual leaders, the Saba Nupa acts as the supporting male figure. Together, they complete the representation of the Tangkhul community in the ritual narrative, especially during final ceremonial stages such as Kanglai-thokpa.

Social Importance

Beyond ritual performance, the Tangkhul Saba Nupa carries an important social message. His presence promotes peace, harmony, and coexistence among different communities of Manipur. It reinforces the idea that Manipur's culture is built on cooperation between hill and valley people

Conclusion

The Tangkhul Saba Nupa is not just a ritual performer but a powerful cultural symbol in Lairoi. His role in Lai Haraoba reflects unity, shared heritage, and mutual respect between communities. Through this tradition, the people of Manipur continue to preserve indigenous values and strengthen social harmony across generations