

PENA: THE TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENT OF MANIPUR

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Abstract

The folk fiddle instrument of Manipur "Pena" is one of the oldest and less known traditional instrument among other traditional instruments of India. This instrument availed before the Christian era and has been existing till today as an inseparable constituent signifying the identity of Manipur by occupying a special status in the cultural heritage of the Meitei community from birth to death. It has been a companion in the transmission of oral tradition whether devotional, religious, amorous, festive or legendary. The study of Pena would require a large amount of field work involving observation, participation and data collection with the coverage of four main established areas viz, Kanglei (Imphal and peripheral areas), Moirang, Chakpa and Lois.

Keywords: *Culture, Instrument, Musical, Pena, Traditional*

Pena is an indigenous musical instrument used from the time immemorial by the Meiteis. This instrument belongs to the category of chordophones and is a bowed mono string instrument. Since the beginning of the human civilization, musical instruments have been used by the people as an inseparable part of their culture and tradition. Similarly, in the context of Manipur, folk musical instruments have been used since pre-historical times as a part of our culture and tradition. Pena is the oldest indigenous musical instrument of Manipur which is contemporary to its mythology and literature. The instrument can be traced back from the 1st century A.D. to the progenitor Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. It is believed that the sound produced by this instrument caused creation of the world and living beings. When its holy melody reach the ears, the human hearts tend to fill with sacredness and satisfaction. According to some scholars, the Pena was so entitled since the sanctified sound produced by it was very much enchanting and holy to the listeners. Therefore it got abbreviated from the word "PENBA NAIDABA" (never satisfied) and thus termed "Pena". The pena is also known as Tingtelian Tankhul (ethnic groups living in Indo-Burma border) and Labum in Kabui (major indigeneous community and a part of naga tribes). It slightly resembles in appearance with some of the traditional Indian stringed musical instruments such as Ravanahatha, Ubo or the Kendara, found in various parts of the country. According to Pena Meihaurol by R.K. Achaubisana it is described as that: *Before the earth was formed, there was no day and night, no Water and fire, nor air, the Sun and the Moon etc. that, when it existed in the form of galaxy. Lord Guru Sidaba thought of creation of the universe from the celestial periphery situation. He cried first producing a sound of Hung (Hum) with love and Applause so as to form the universe. And God of air produced the sound of Ung similar to the sound of a flying Bee. Such was the origin of first Pena music from the concentration of creating the*

*universe. Guru Sidaba produced everything from his mind and body. As such the Sun is considered the handle of Pena and main frame is the form of the earth. The small bells Decorating the Pena are indication of 108 pulse and nerves of the human body.*¹

Brief History of Pena

The origin of pena can be traced back to the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33-154 AD). According to scholars, Leinung Tharuk Asheiba the court singer of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba had first initiated the use of the instrument and later it was played by Lord Thanjing, the progenitor of Moirang. The first human being to play Pena was Nahaba Moirangjamba and its notes and patterns of finger movement were developed by the minister Ningol Yaimaba, according to ancient manuscripts. Since ancient period, singers with sanctified voice used to play Pena in sitting postures either in the MANGOL (veranda), or in the SANGOI (outhouse located in front main house). The singers played a vital role in propagating the message of love and triumph. The tradition has been handed down from generation to generation since ages.

The Making and Set-up of Pena

The framing up of pena consists of different materials according to the customs. Materials like claypot/coconut shell (maroo), wood, brass bells/Yong sarik (wild plant having small bell like seeds), specific threads (chambuli lang), cloth (samai), bamboo (warukak), bamboo pipe (utong), iron, horse tail hairs (khongding shamei), leather (pungmai) etc. These collected materials are made to be corrected and set up in certain configurations in order to design and assemble them one after another.

Portions of Pena

The Pena has 2 main parts- PENA CHEIJING and PENA MAROO. The Cheijing (bow) held in the right hand is regarded as the god father and the Maroo (sound box) which is held pressed against the chest is regarded as the god mother. It is believed that the sound produced by the friction of these two components caused the creation of the world and living beings.

Pena Maroo (sound box)

The Pena Maroo is a bowl shaped structure comprising of 9 main components, proper consisting of a dry coconut shell covered by a piece of leather. Some scholars said that the maroo was originally made of clay during the ancient times. Now there has been an evolution in the preparation of the Maroo.

During the ancient period, it was first made of a small pot of earth followed by the primary root of a bamboo plant which is now replaced by coconut shell. The MAROO (sound box) is the resonator. PUNGMAI (leather covering) is the head of the sound box. In the beginning, the head of the Maroo was prepared with the skin of a big frog and later it was replaced by that of an ox. The UYEK (curved wooden base of the neck) is adjacent to the Maroo. The UTONG (hollow bamboo pipe) forms the upper portion of the neck. The SHAMEI (strings) is made up from the hair of horse's tail (120-150 nos.). NURA – KHANGSET (thread binding the Shamei) lies in the middle beyond which the

finger cannot move. The LEINA (decorative and knitted piece of cloth) positioned in the form of a reverse “U” with thrums of hanging down the CHAMBULI LANG (thread knot) at the tip of the neck. The TENKHAL (bridge) is a small thumb sized piece of bamboo.

Pena Cheijing (bow)

The Pena Cheijings designed in a questionmark set up by bending the branches of Ureiom (*Bixa axellana*) tree stretching horse hairs end to end. It comprises of 10 main components: TENOU YOTKOL (a curved metal frame of iron), CHEIKHOK (the wooden handle), SHARIK (small brass bells), CHEIJING SHAMEI (strings made of horse tail), KONTHANG (ring made of iron), MON (cloth pieces at the end of shamei), LANG THANGJING (small sized cotton thread), KHUBI KHANG (piece of cloth joined with the mon), KHUROU LANG (cotton thread used for hanging and binding purpose), UCHAN MAREK (an oily piece of pine wood that smoothens and straightens both the strings).



Picture of Pena Maroo (Sound box)

Kinds of Pena

There are 2 varieties of Pena. One is the bigger Maru (sound box) and the other of a smaller one. The bigger Maru goes by the general name PENA and the smaller one goes by the name KHUTKHONG PENA, and the use of khutkhong pena is confined to the festivals of the Chakpa, a group of original settlers of Manipur.



Picture of Pena Cheijing

Importance and uses of Pena

Pena is not merely an instrument but it is associated with dance, sports, traditional marital arts, rituals, narratives and many more aspects of Manipuri cultural heritage.

Pena in the Royal Court: Penawas once believed to be a part of luxurious living and was played at the royal gatherings. Pena singer used to accompany the King and the Queen during their tour within or outside the kingdom. When the king is supposed in tour, the Pena player will describe everything about the places behind the king with his narrative songs. It is also believed that the Pena singers of the Royal Court are always a well-trained martial artistes. If there is any

sudden incident or attack to the King by the enemies during the tour, first of all the Pena singer will try to his best to protect the king from the eventuality.

Pena in Ceremonies

Laiharaoba ceremony (Salvas deities ceremony): The Pena singer takes part in the ritual ceremonies of Laiharaoba or the feast of Umang Lai (Salves deities). Pena music has been an integral part of Manipuri society and its culture. Pena still enjoys its place of importance as in the past so far as the great social and ritual festival of Laiharaoba is concerned. In the sanctuaries of some sylvan deities held high by the Meiteis, the service of the spirit medium known as Maiba and Maibies are dispensed with Pena alone accompanying the rituals.

Birth ceremony: Before the advent of Hinduism in Manipur, Pena used to be played at ritualistic and religious functions of birth and death. On the 6th day following the birth of a baby, Pena music accompanies prayers for the young baby's good health, long life and protection from evil spirits. This ritual ceremony is performed in the rural areas of Manipur.

Death ceremony: When a man is about to breathe his last, the song Nongarol describing the separation of the ethereal soul from the mortal body is sung with Pena. And as a sequel to it, just before the lifeless body is carried to the funeral site, relatives of the deceased person present certain dance movements.

Marriage ceremony: During the marriage ceremony, Pena music was rendered when blessings of the almighty lord was sought by reciting the stories of the creation of the earth, birth of mankind and values of conjugal life.

Lai ee kouba: A special ceremony that symbolise the beginning of Lai-haraoba festivals.

Yakairoi: Playing the pena in order to make people wake up early in the morning.

Khunung esei: Accompanying with the performance of folk songs. The Pena is believed to be the source and origin of all tunes of Manipuri Folk songs.

Puya paba: The reading of the holy Puya (highly evolved manuscript) is done by using this musical instrument.

Pena in the field of entertainment: In ancient days, the Meitei community use to organise Pena recitals as an entertainment programme after the harvest season. Such programmes were also organised when the local community wanted to listen the tales of creation, heroic events of the great warriors, stories of the kings and songs sung in archaic language. The entertainment of Pena music may be divided into 2 categories:

Pena Phamshak: Singing with Pena in sitting position as a part of entertainment is known as Pena Phamshak. It is performed either in an entrance hall or an outhouse of a traditional Manipuri house. It is performed in the evening when the cowherds return home and continued up to the late hours of midnight.

Pena Pala: This form of entertainment is generally performed during marriage programme and shradha ceremony etc. Such programmes generally started in the afternoon or in the evening. For the programme, in front of the performer's arena, flowers and fruits are arranged in a systematic manner. The Pena artist sit

on the mat with one or two assistants nearby him. The left side of the sitting place is reserved for the ladies whereas the right side for the audience. This type of sitting discipline is strictly followed in Manipuri society till today.

Pena music in Manipuri Literature

Early Manipuri language and literature were sung and rendered along with Pena music. From this view point, the context of the songs, their words, lyrical verse were placed as a part of folk literature. Moirang has a rich cultural heritage. Khamba-Thoibi is a great epic of the Moirang clan of Manipur. Pena singers sing old lore's, myths and legends of Moirang and Kanglei. Pena music used proverbs on flora and fauna of Manipur. Thus Pena music takes a great role for the development of Manipuri literature since the early days.

Costume & Ornaments

Costumes: Khamen Chatpa: It is a dhoti made with colourful designs of purple or maroon against a grey backdrop. It is considered good omen if khamen chatpa is woven according to Salai (clan); Resham phurit: It is a traditional blouse like shirt worn as the upper garment of the body; Kokyet: It is a head attire made of white starched cotton cloth crossed with golden Jhari; Inaphee: It is a white cotton cloth which is worn over the shoulder and left hanging over the front and back side of the body; Khangset: It is a hand woven cloth tied around the waist over the khamen chatpa dhoti.

Ornaments: Khuji: It is a brass bangle made of old traditional style to wear at the wrist. It is one of the oldest designs of Meitei ornaments; Tan: It is an armlet made of brass designed in prescribed form having rectangular shape with an embossed motif of Pakhangba printed on it. It is attached length wise either side of the upper arm by thread for tightening; Garlands: There are various styles of garlands made of various beautiful flowers. Now a day it is substituted by different materials like cloth, paper, yarn etc.

Conclusion

The folk fiddle instrument "Pena and Pena Sheishak" is the origin of various types of musical forms of Manipuri culture. This instrument is used in its most original and characteristic tradition still today. Still Pena has retained its original shape and structure since the ancient days. Nowadays, Pena is also played by women which was not done in the past. A revolution can be seen in the use of this folk instrument in film music, concerts etc. They are also seen in national and international platform where they perform together with other folk instruments and electronic instruments. It is indeed a matter of pride to see our traditional instrument Pena to get popular in modern times. Even though it is a popular instrument in Manipur, there are minimum number of books and guide books related with this instrument, it is a need of the hour to concentrate in producing more research in this field. With the evolution of changes one after another, it is required to set up an appropriate musical notation form to encourage teaching-learning process for the upcoming artists and students of

Pena Sheishak, which will help in bringing a new dimension to the development of this art form in the modern context.

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