

## The Annual Festivals of Aimol

*Chongom Damrenghang Aimol*

*Assistant Professor, Department of Tribal Studies*

*Manipur University of Culture, Imphal*

*Email: [aboyaimol@gmail.com](mailto:aboyaimol@gmail.com)*

### 1. Introduction

Aimol is one of the recognized tribe of Manipur. It was recognized in 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1956 vide notification no. 2477, under Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. It is the minority tribe of Manipur. The present population of Aimol according to churches record is 4900 (approx). The Aimol tribe is found in Chandel, Churachandpur, Senapati and Tengnoupal, Chandel, Churachandpur and Senapati district of Manipur.

### 2. List of Aimol villages in Manipur is given below:

Tegnoupal	(1)	Aimol Khullen	(2)	Aimol Chandonpokpi
	(3)	Aimol Khodamphai	(4)	Aimol Ngairong
	(5)	Aimol Tampak	(6)	Aimol Chingnunghut
	(7)	Aimol Kumbirei	(8)	Aimol Khunjai
	(9)	Aimol Satu	(10)	Aimol Khudengthabi
Chandel	(11)	Aimol Unapal		
Churachandpur	(12)	Kha-Aimol	(13)	Aimol Louchunbung
Senapati	(14)	Aimol Tuikhang	(15)	Aimol Kharam-Thadoi

The distribution patterns certainly show that the tribe doesn't occupy a well-defined territory and that they have shifted their settlement from one place to another.

According to Lt.-Colonel J. Shakespear 1912, Aimol is the name of a village site probably *Ai-mual*. "Ai" Lushai name of a berry and also means crab and appears in Ai-zawl, the capital of Mizoram or Aijal. "Mual" is the Lushai name for a spur of a hill. It is a very common and almost a universal custom to call a new village and originally *Aimual* would be found in the centre of Lushai Hills.

According to oral tradition (unwritten history) the ethno genesis of Aimol traced to uncertain cave at khweps from which the people had been believed to have emerged from the earth. As they came out of the cave, a tiger blocked their way despite many attempts. Two clever persons named *Pukorthangpu* and *Korthangpi* weaved a cloth named *Laijiak* having the same print as the tiger. Taking help of appearance of the woven cloth, *Pukorthangpu* convinced the tiger that they were of the same kind and made friendship. The tiger did not eat him. The tiger was then killed with spear while it was tamed. From there passing many places of Tripura, they went to Burma where the advancement was checked by Kabow shans. According to Shakespeare in *The Lushei Kuki Clans*; In Manipur chronicle the Chiru and Anal are mentioned as early as the middle of the sixteenth century while Aimol make their first appearance in 1723. They are said to have come from Tipperah, the present Tripura state, but at that time the eastern boundary of Tipperah was not determined, and the greater part of the present Lushai hills district was supposed to be under the control of the Rajah of that state. A short distance to the east of *Aijal*, the present Aizawl there is a village site called *Vai-tui-chhum* i.e. the watering place of the Vai which is said to commemorate a former settlement of the Vaiphei. It seems probable that the Aimol and Vaiphei left their former homes in consequences of the forward movement of the Lusheis. The remaining tribes all claim to have come from various places to the south of Manipur.



Fig.1: An old Aimol man with musical instrument

The indigenous term for clan in Aimol is *Phung*. The Aimol tribe has seven clans. They are: *Chaithu*, *Chongom*(2sub-clans), *Lanu* (1sub-clans), *Laita* (2sub-clans), *Shialloa*, *Shongthu* and *Ruijom*. The Aimol society is a patrilineal society where the descent goes to the male line. In this patriarchal and patronymic feature society; monogamy is common form of marriage.

The indigenous mode of political organization centres on the council which is known as *Pasakariat*. The *Pasakariat* consists of eight councillors of which the head is *Kamsakoi* 'Chief'. The *Thoukalnai* (the subordinate council) consists of the same number of post. Except other *Kamsakoi* is the hereditary post. The other post recruitment is on the line of promotion. *Kamsakoi* remains the exclusive right for the eldest *Chongom* clan member. Recently when the Hill Areas Act 1956 is affected in the village, the village authority has been empowered to settle minor cases. Trial is conducted after lodging a complaint with a fee. It is one *bell* (bottle) of *Zu* (wine) in the past which has been substituted by a sum of Rs.1. Punishment is given by the court and may include imposition of fine, confiscation of belongings and ex-communication. For bringing forth justice, oath and ordeal is employed.

The traditional house of the Aimol people is almost similar to that of Meiteis, Purum etc. living in their close proximity in Manipur. It is rectangular box type with slanting crest roof. The length and breadth ratio is about 1:3 or 1:5. The number of compartments is either 3 or 5 in number. The house is basically made of wood, bamboo and mud and the roofing material used is thatch. Around the dwelling place, one will notice satellite sheds generally used as granary storehouse, cattle shed and pig stall. The direction of houses is always towards the east, facing the rising sun. Nowadays, bricks and other different types of sophisticated materials are used for constructions.

Aimol has no written literature except some books, gospel songs, Bible, which is translated from English and 'A Descriptive Grammar of Aimol' written by M. Shamungou Singh, an unpublished PhD thesis of Manipur University, Canchipur, Imphal. There is no native script. Roman script is used for writing books and other journals etc. The teaching of Aimol has not been introduced in any private or government schools. For communication with other communities or other tribe, Aimol people use Manipuri or Meiteilon which is the *lingua franca* of Manipur State. Linguistically it belongs to Tibeto-Burman language family. Since Aimol is minority and endangered language it is very needed to preserve and documents the culture before the elderly people dies and to save the younger generations also. This topic has been taken up to save, nourish and revitalize the rich culture of Aimol in Manipur and other parts of India.

### 3. Annual Festivals

Traditionally, Aimol has annual festivals which are celebrated time to time. Some of the festival are celebrated with full of entertainment and drinks and other are celebrated without entertainment, drinks and feast. The different types of annually celebrated festivals are discussed below.

### 3.1 Lamjir

Lamjir is considered as one of the most important socio-cultural festivals of Aimol which is celebrated annually. It is the celebrated every year in the month of October as pre-harvest festival. The word *Lamjir* means 'festival of road repairing/ cleaning'. Literally, *Lam* means 'road' and *Jir* means 'cleaning or repairing'. It is the festivity of joy which observed after laborious living or getting some hardships in life because of earning livelihood.

Both men and women with their traditional dress take part in the festival equally. The children particularly the girls rejoiced by wearing flowers and garlands which bloomed in the season. The festival is performed by singing and dancing. The songs are sung in group while the dances are performed in group as well as duet. Mainly two types of songs are sung in the festivals. They are;

- (i) Song without dance and
- (ii) Song with dance

The songs which are sung without dance are:

*Ankuarum laa, Kandai laa, Oina laa and Sempui laa* (laa means 'song')

The songs which are sung with dance are;

*Zuasong laa, Thangchuangpa laa, Laniarnei, Vai laa, Rokoning laa, Raturei laa and Honriil laa.*

This festival is usually performed by eating and drinking. The share for eating is borne by the village council and for public drinking like rice beer or tea is contributed from all the households of the village. According to Aimol customary practice, shares of meat for the public feast are divided into three categories. They are;

- (i) The shares of members of the village council which is like cabinet minister is called *Paanchitum* and other member is known as *Thpukalnai*.
- (ii) The shares of youth and the women is called *Mirualtum* and
- (iii) The shares of children is called *Naipangtum*

*The Siarnai* 'members of traditional social institution' are responsible for the whole function of the festival. The entire arrangement for public feast is done by the *Thoukalnai* 'members of the village council'.

The social function of the festivals is divided into two parts viz.

(a) The outdoor programme/daytime function and

(b) The indoor programme/night social gathering

**(a) The outdoor programme/daytime function**

Both boys and girls turn up with their traditional clothes. They come with their domestic weapons for the requirement of cleaning and repairing of the roads. They clean the inter village roads, particularly, the connectivity between the village entrance gate and the village, the road between the villages and the pond or stream. The *Lapu* 'song leader' along with his disciples or followers like junior song experts and musicians, and some other members of the youths lead the festival by singing songs during the work.

**(b) The indoor programme/night social gathering**

The indoor programme is usually held at the residence of an elder of the village, particularly the residence of a cabinet member of the village council turn by turn. After the public feast is over, the villagers both men and women take part in the night social gathering by wearing traditional dresses. The entertainment of gathering is performed with blended songs and dances. The different songs are sung in group in responsive manner. Introductory dance is performed by the girls first in group by holding hands together and other usual dances are performed in duet, trio and quartet which are represented by both boys and girls.



Fig.2: Aimol elder singing traditional song

### 3.2 Suangbowl

It is a festival of collective ritual which observed every year. It is performed at the village entry gate which is traditionally called as *Saungkuhng* two times in a year. The first is celebrated in the month of June before seed sowing festival. The second is celebrated in the month of December as a post harvesting ritual. The village deity is worshipped by offering animals.

The word *Suangbowl* means *Suang* ‘village entry gate’ and *Bowl* means ‘offering and sacrifice’. It means giving offering or sacrifice to the village deity. A pig, a cock of red colour, an egg, and rice beer is offered to the village deity. A public feast is arranged at the village gate. No one is allowed to carry the leftover food at home. They have to keep on the banyan leaf and kept for the next day. The *Khulpu* ‘the village chief’ will administer the function. Prior information is given to the village people by the *Tangva* ‘village messenger’ for the celebration of the function. The *Tangva* will announce the day and date of the function to the village people. *Tangva* is the incharge of giving any kind of information to the village people. The festival is celebrated with the hope of giving peace, prosperity and blessing to the village.

### 3.3. Mangde

The village priest select one auspicious day for the festival which is celebrated in the month of May every year. It is celebrated by worshipping the wealth deity to bless their land for good productivity in the coming year. They used to do various type of rituals such as fertility ritual, vegetation ritual and productivity ritual etc. The festival basically symbolize the worship of wealth deity that is cultivating land for the purpose of expecting higher growth of agricultural products in the coming year. The villagers prayed and worshipped with adoration to the wealth deity under the guidance of *Khulpu* ‘village priest’. The festival is the invocation of the spirit forces in nature to ensure harmony, well being and prosperity of the villagers who have observed it. It is to be performed by the male member of the village only and it is celebrated at the entrance of the village gate. They offer rice beer, a cock, a dog and already cooked curry of different uneatable plants which are locally known as *Chul-an* and *Kaangraaian* to the wealth deity. The festival is administered by the *Khulpu* ‘village priest’. This is done without any entertainment and public feast except drinking rice beer.

### 3.4. Chapaai

This festival is celebrated in the month of August after the completion of seed sowing cultivation probably in the month of August. The village priest announces one special day for the function. The village priest called *Khulpu* administered the ritual. The festival is celebrated for getting higher crops in the coming year by worshipping the wealth goddess called *Chapite*. The festival is celebrated at the entrance of the village gate by beating gong, singing and uttering the ritual of *Chapite*. *Chapite* is the goddess of wealth. Only the male members performed the ritual for this festival. They worshipped with adoration and offered

rice beer, a cock, an egg, plants of the paddy to the goddess wealth to bless their crops and the village.

### 3.5 Siarkhuanglong

It is the festival performed by the *Beibak* ‘adolescent boy’, *Rethar* ‘bachelor’ and *Siarulian* ‘social leaders’. No women and other members are invited for the program. This festival is celebrated just after the harvest. It is the festival of re-opening of using traditional musical instruments of Aimol which are kept in its custody and forbidden to use for some time or some months. Without this festival the musical instruments which are kept in the custody are not allowed to be used anyone. Until and unless this festival is performed the traditional musical instruments is not allowed or forbidden to be used in the village except on the occasion of death or funeral ceremony. On this day onwards they are allowed to use the instruments. The festival is celebrated by beating drums and playing other musical instruments.

A customary hunting is carried out on the day of this festival. The youth and adolescent boys are responsible persons for hunting on this day. Even if they can’t kill any wild animal on this day they have to bring at least a fowl or animal from the village itself by any means such as stealing or forcibly taking out from anywhere. If they are happened to be caught by the owner on the way they have to return to the owner. If the animal or fowl which they have stolen has been received by the elders at the place of the function then no one is allowed to complain it. The function is enjoyed by eating that animal or fowl.

### 3.6 Interakal

It is the minor festival of Aimol community which is performed every year. It is held in the month of December after reaping of crops and food gathering. The term *Interakal* means to close or lock up the granary after putting the grain or paddy. *Inte* means ‘granary’ and *Rakal* means ‘to close or lock up. It is held after harvest probably in the month of December i.e at the last phase of the agricultural activities or reaping of crops. In Aimol customs it is said that the paddy which are kept in the granary should be witness by the members of *Beibak* ‘adolescent boys’, *Riathar* ‘bachelor’ and *Siarulian* ‘social leaders’ once in a year. Only the *Siarnai* ‘youth’ observed this festival. The adolescent boys, bachelors under the direction of *Siarulian* ‘social leaders’ collected some amount or a container of rice or paddy from every family as to witness the crops which were stored in their respective barns. This festival is also known as *Choiruasihng* for collecting the paddy from household as a contribution or the share to be paid to the organizer of the festival. It is performed by

drinking and eating meat from the contribution they got. The festival is celebrated as a part of social solidarity, co-operation, economic prosperity and cultural survival.

#### 4. Conclusion

The festivals discussed above are important festival of Aimol which are performed since time immemorial. But due to changes of time these festivals are randomly celebrated. The festivals mention in serial no 2, 3, 4 are no more celebrated. However the festival mention in serial 1 i.e *Lamjir* is still celebrating because this is very important festival of the community even the younger generations like to observe it. There are no restrictions on religious ground also. As most of the Aimol people became Christian they abandon to perform some of the other festivals mention above.

#### REFERENCES:

1. Kh. Okhup Aimol, 2017. *The Customary Laws and Practices of the AIMOL TRIBE of Manipur, India*, 2017, Sarup Book Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 4740/23. Ansari Road, Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110002
2. Lt.Shakespeare, John. 1912. *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, Macmillan & Co. Ltd: London: p149
3. 1. Kh. Okhup Aimol, 2018. *AIMOL DICTIONARY (Aimual Chongriabuk)*, Sarup Book Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 4740/23. Ansari Road, Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110002
4. Saroj Nalini Arambam Parrat, 2005. *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur; The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Routledge Taylor & francis Group, London and New York.
5. Grierson, G.A. 1904. *Linguistics Survey of India. Vol. 3. Part III*. Calcutta Reprinted 1967, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi.
6. Kh. Narendra Singh and Sarit K Chaudhuri, 2017. *Tribal Life in Northeast India, Ethno-cultural practices and Reproductive Health Issues*, Gyan Publishing house, New Delhi.
7. Personal interview with Chairman, Aimol Literature Society, Manipur dated the 25th Feb 2024