

## **Chapter III**

### **3.1 Traditional Media in Manipur**

The state of Manipur lies in the northeastern part of India covering an area of 22,327 sq km, which lies between 88° E (approx) and 95°E (approx) longitude and 22°N (approx) and 29.5°N (approx) latitude, neighbor of Myanmar in the east, Nagaland in the north, the Cachar district of Assam in the west and Mizoram in the south. It consist of nine districts- Imphal West, Imphal East, Thoubal, Senapati, Chandel, Churachanpur, Tamenglong, Ukhrul, Bishnupur. The Meiteis have settled down over the fertile valley of about 700 square miles of Manipur, while the tribal settles in the hill areas. Manipur has around 29 tribes.

The performances of religious origin can be seen through all the cycle of seasons of the year, and they can be divided broadly into two groups based on their religious association and differences in the style of performance. The first is the pre- Hindu forms of theatrical performances which are associated with the primitive culture, non-Hindu religion of the Meiteis and the second form of performances came into existence after the Meiteis were converted into Hinduism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of King Pamheiba. The first group has purity and a sense of independence in terms of its origin and the milieu which gave rise to its evolution. The second category of theatrical performances is associated with Hindu culture. It is closely related to the pre- Hindu form of theatre in Manipur because its evolution was closely associated with a long process of the social and cultural structures of Manipur.

Manipur has a very powerful tradition of transforming oral text into performances such as the famous performances of Penasakpa, Wari Liba, mythological tales, etiological tales, legends, folk dance, ritual and beliefs, customs. During the Penasakpa, the performers used to sing songs based on stories or stories from various sources bringing in the essential qualities of theatre. The vast oral literature supplied by the Penashakpa and the Wari liba became the oral text which had given raised in a

creative process resulting in a proliferation of Hindu play performances. It could be said as a natural outcome of a continuous process of development of theatre in Manipur. The Lai Haraoba is the meeting point of the Hindu forms of theatre which is heavily influenced by its form and structure and had also influenced the later realistic forms of Hindu theatre in which the element of rituals have been diminished to a great extent. Shri E. Nilakanta a scholar observed that the later Hindu religious performances in Manipur are an extension of the Jatra tradition of Bengal

Forms of the performances are mostly consisted of religious rituals, which are connected with the primitive Meiteis. Lai Haraoba, Ukai Kappa, U-Hongba, etc. are some of the important traditional forms of ritualistic performance in Manipur. Unfortunately, some of these ritualistic observances are no longer in existence, for example Ukai Kappa; it is a ritual through which it is believed to predict the future of the king and his kingdom. After the conversion of Hinduism religion the original form of Ukai Kappa was gradually changed and perhaps with serious erosion, it became a new ritual called Kwak Tanba.

Ethnic tribes residing in the hills of Manipur have numerous ritualistic forms of theatre. Rituals as they are, efficacy remains as a pivot or chief function of theatre inherent in these performances. Ethnic tribes like Rongmei, Thadou, Mao, Tangkhul, Annal, Koirang and many others have a myriad of ritualistic theatre forms. Although ritualistic in character these performances are embellished with colorful ethnic costumes and properties, beautifully carved totem-poles, ornamented decorated facades of traditional house, the folk instrumental music, singing and dancing. Characters of a hunter or hunted, or the soul of a dead man journeying to a spiritual world is enacted through singing, dancing, use of body language and occasional dialogue. Lura of Tangkhul, Ikam Totangkam of Anal, Goshem of Thadou, Gan-ngai of Rongmei, Chas-nee of Mao, Cham-er-sheer of Koirang are few examples of the ethnic traditional theatre form for the tribes of Manipur. The wider interior space of a traditional house, a courtyard, a central congregational space on a hill and the village

are performance space. Most of the performance is connected with the inauguration of a newly constructed house, birthright, mortuary rite, and seed sowing rite, reproduction and rite connected with the change of seasons.

### **3.2 Lai Haraoba**

Lai Haraoba is the primary and most important ritual observances of the Meiteis. It has developed into a distinct socio-cultural institution and a distinct form of art through a long process of evolution. Lai Haraoba has its origin in the tradition of ancestor worship followed by the Meiteis. Its underlying philosophy gives us some ideas about the way in which the primitive Meiteis struggled for a collective life of the community against the odd of nature. It is a ritual performed by the primitive Meiteis with the belief that they could ensure a normal existence by maintaining a continued process of productive relationships between man and nature, man and supernatural forces and among the various dimensions of time in the life of the community.

Lai Haraoba is a fertility ritual in which the primitive Meiteis seeks the favor of the local gods and goddesses to promote biological procreativity in the community. The primitive Meiteis believed that a successful observer of this ritual could lead to fertility in the life of man, animals and to have a good harvest. The Meiteis also believed that the ritual could bring a healthy communal life free from disease, epidemics and atrocities of war and wild animals. It could be said that, primitive Meiteis had organized Lai Haraoba to win the favor of the presiding deities and spirits who are believed to be present from the chthonic realm in the festival. Lai Haraoba can also be termed as an enactment process of birth and death, which is observed in the primary ritual segment called Laipou, which is performed daily during the whole process of Lai Haraoba. Laipou is based on the primal concept of the continuing building of human body part by part and also shows the process of the circle of life, by enacting the process of childbirth, the construction of house by the primitive Meiteis, sowing of seeds and harvesting also making of cloths.



Fig: 3.1 The Lai Haraoba Performances Photo Credit: Dinesh Sharma

Lai Haraoba means ‘pleasing of god’. The word Lai stands for god and the word Haraoba means ‘pleasing’. During the ritual performance of Lai Haraoba the Lai (god) or Lais are called upon by the people of the community and attempts are made to please these presiding deities by dining, dancing, chanting and singing. T.C Hudson of the book *The Meiteis* have termed the meaning of Lai Haraoba as ‘rejoicing of the gods’. Mr E. Nilakanta Singh a Manipuri scholar had used the word Lai Haraoba as ‘merry-making of the god and goddesses’. Lai Haraoba is a ritual performance, which aims at pleasing the god and goddesses, and which leads to a process of merry-making or rejoicing on the part of the gods and goddesses involving the people of the community performing the ritual.



Fig: 3.2 Procession made by the devotees known as Lamlaithokpa during the Lai Haraoba ritual, along with the deities **Photo Credit: Dinesh Sharma**

There is also another interpretation which takes the concept of Lai Haraoba back to a mythological origin. Most of the Manipuri pundits believed to this interpretation. They termed Lai Haraoba to be derived from Lai Hoi-Laoba, which literally means shouting of Hoi by Lai. Hoi is a monosyllabic sound associated with many rituals and legends of Manipur. The production of this sound implies a person or persons producing the sound, trying to bring about a co-ordination of physical and mental powers for some action, which will persuade or compel the listener of the sound to respond to it. According to the myth of the Meitei creation, Aseeba the Meitei god created the earth in accordance to the instruction of his almighty father Atiya Sidaba. After the creation he was confused as to what should be the next step. Understanding to his son's bewilderment the supreme father opened his mouth widely and showed the whole world of living beings who are supposed to populate the earth. God Aseeba also known as Sanamahi was happy to get hint from his father and called out the living being by shouting Hoi. Thus, the pundits belonging to this school of

interpretation believed that Lai Haraoba is delivered from Lai Hoi Laoba which is a ritual performance based on the myth of creation popular among the Meiteis.

The deities are represented by two iconic brass masks, two presiding deities the Lainingthou (god) and Lairembi (goddess) installed on a pedestal which is kept in a building or a sacred place called Laishang. The whole performance of Lai Haraoba is organized in front of these two icons. Apart from the two deities the Meiteis believe that there are nine other important gods Laibungthous and seven principal goddesses known as Lainuras presented during Lai Haraoba. The supreme godfather Atiya Sidaba is also believed to grace the function with his presence. Then, the guardian deities of the four directions – Thangjing (South-West), Marjing (North-east), Koubru (North-West) and Wangbren (South-East) are present in their respective places around the area of performance called Laibung. Thus, Lai Haraoba is a very important Manipuri ritual performance in which god and goddesses who are believed to be controlling the life of the primitive Meiteis and the human beings who represent the community as a whole take part.

Lai Haraoba is generally performed during the summer season before the arrival of monsoon. Usually the performance is conducted for one day or three days or five days or seven days, the propitious days for the beginning and the ending of a Lai Haraoba are decided by the Maibas and pundits who belong to the department of experience and erudite scholars called the Pundit Loishang. In case of the Lai Haraoba for the deity Thangjing at Moirang, a village in the South-West of Imphal the performance continues for one month.

The choice of the season for the performance is very important, after a successful completion of the Lai Haraoba the monsoon season arrives which invites the Meiteis to visit the paddy field and work until the harvest season arrives and yet another season for Lai Haraoba comes. The Meiteis believe after the ritual performance of Lai Haraoba, pleasing or propitiating sacred ancestors and other supernatural forces

controlling human life and nature, they will reap a rich harvest of crops for the season.

There are at least 364 (Three Hundred and Sixty Four) Lais (god) so far recognized by the Meiteis. They are found scattered all over the valley and established in separate sanctuaries preserved for each of them. Usually there will be a small patch of land with a temple built in an area surrounded by a cluster of trees. These lais are also known as Umang Lais, Umang lai literally mean forest deity (Umang = forest, lai = deity or god). The lais have no recognizable symbolic relation to the forest. But people consider the tree to have some connection with the lais. While some people give their opinion of Umang to be derived from Mang(cremation ground) but no confirmation of the Meitei cremating dead bodies in the forest or growing trees on the cremation ground to make it look like a forest. However, some of the tribes living in the hills of Manipur perform cremation rites at places where trees are grown and preserved. Thus, it is believed that the primitive Meiteis in the distant past might have organized Lai Haraoba on the cremation ground.

The Meiteis do not organize Lai Haraoba for each and every deified ancestor or ancestress. Some who were really powerful and significant in the life of a particular Yek (clan) or particular Sagei (lineage) have been deified and ritual performance of Lai Haraoba is organized in their honor. In the entire pantheon of the deities of the Meiteis there are cases of kings who are deified after their death. Some of the deified kings are Tabung Ningthou, Khagemba, Khumbomba, Khunchaoba. While some of the deified ancestors are Khoriphaba, Loyalakpa, Puthiba, Nongpok Ningthou, etc. Among the deified ancestress are Konthoujam Lairembi, Sarangthem Lairema, Ichum Lairema, Yumjao Lairema, Panthoibi, Laisana Laikhrembi, etc. There are also four lais associated with the four directions Thangjing (South-West), Koubru (North-West), Marjing (North-East) and Wangbren (South-East). Deified ancestors associated with the yeks are Pakhangba (Ningthouja Yek), Oknarel (Khuman Yek), Pureiromba (Angom Yek) deified ancestries associated with different lineages are

Yumnam lairembi (Yumnam sagei), Oinam Lairembi (Oinam sagei), etc. People belonging to the particular Sagei (lineage) are responsible for organizing Lai Haraoba for a particular Lai. However, at present Lai Haraoba connected with a particular Lai are organized by all the people belonging to a particular area or a village, even though the Piba (lineages head) of the Sagei concerned will be present in such important rituals as Ikouba and Laipou processions.

The ritual performance of Lai Haraoba is always conducted with the help of three ritual functionaries called Maibi, Maiba and Penakhongba. These functionaries have full knowledge of the intricacies of the ritual laws and they work with mutual responsibilities. Though most of them are illiterate, they have wide knowledge of myths, legends and rituals, handed down to them by their predecessors through oral tradition. In a way they are traditionally bearers of the whole community, preserving the old values and trying to maintain a sense of continuity in the cultural and religious life of the people.



### 3.3 Maibi



Fig: 3.3 A Maibi performing the ritual process of Ikouba

**Photo Credit: Dinesh Sharma**

Maibi is the most important ritual functionaries of the ritual performance of Lai Haraoba. The role of the Maibi, is considered to be the medium through which an attempts are made to bring about a link between the natural and supernatural orders of life, she is larger and more significant than that of either Maiba or Penakhongba, emphasizing her role in Lai Haraoba. In addition to making ritual offering and looking after the detail of the whole performance the Maibi dance, sing song and enacts various episodes taken from myths and legends. She leads the ritual processions like Ikouba, Laipou and Lamthokpa. On the day of the beginning of Lai

Haraoba she calls up the spirits of the Lais of presiding deities from water and transfers it to the brass-masks kept in the Laishang (temple), representing the Lais. Every morning during the process of Lai Haraoba the Maibi sit in front of the deities and transport her into a state of trance and delivered Laipao (prophecy or oracle). In the evening session, which generally starts at about 4 or 5 p.m. and continues late in the night the Maibi conducts the most important rituals of the evening called Laipou. During Laipou she enacts primal processes like the building up of a human body, building houses and making cloth. During the performance of the ritual sequence called Kanglei Thokpa which generally takes place on the 5<sup>th</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup>, the 9<sup>th</sup>, and the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the lunar month the Maibi gives a trance-enactment in the role of Khoriphaba, an important deity for the Meiteis. On several days during the performance, she performs the ritual of Saroi Khangba at the four corners of the Laibung (the area of performance before the temple). The purpose of this element is the appeasement of the Sarois (evil spirits) and preventing them from interfering with all the sequences of Lai Haraoba. On the final or Lairoi day the Maibi along with other supporting Maibis, Maiba, Penakhongba and some people of the village perform a highly dramatic sequence called louyanba, a ritual sequence enacting the first meeting of two divine lovers called Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi. In short, the role of Maibi in Lai Haraoba is very big and significant. She is a priestess, a medium, a dancer, a singer and a theatrical performer, all rolled into one. The Meitei society has Nupa Maibi (male transvestite performing the duty of maibi)

During Lai Tongba (a trance or moments of possession by supernatural power) she shouts, sings and moves in frenzy ways, showing a state of proximity or intimate connection between her and the spirit of deity she is possessed with. At this moment her personal human identity is lost and she turns a medium through which the macrocosm from the macrocosm of the supernatural are communicated. Apart from her involvement in Lai Haraoba the Maibi is also involved in various rituals like Kumchanba, Chaklon Katpa, Sanamahi Loukhatpa.

A Maibi generally wears white color dresses. For her white dress a Maibi is traditionally known as Kongrei Charel-Pheegou Shetpeikhaabi in archaic Meitei language. She also refers to a phase in Meitei language as Pheengou Eera Tanbi Khwangchet Machi Langbi (a female putting on pure white cloths with a waist-bend having the two ends hanging down) A Maibi wears a Phanek (a sarong-like loose skirt), Aninaphi (shawl) and a long sleeve blouse, all in white. The two ends of the inaphi are beautifully embroidered. She wraps the inaphi in such a way that the two embroidered ends cover the front and back portions of her body below the waist. They have a peculiar hairstyle, with a knot at the back of the head and flower tuck around it.

### 3.4 Maiba



Fig: 3.4 Dance performance performed by the Maibi and Penakhongba during the Lai Haraoba ritual. **Photo Credit: Dinesh Sharma**

The maiba is also an important ritual functionary playing an important role in Lai Haraoba. He performs ritual acts as Konyai thaba and Khayom lakpa on the Ikouba day of a Lai Haraoba. He organized and takes part in Hoi Laoba, Ougri Hangel and Lairen Mathek, which is an important ritual sequences in Lai Haraoba. During the enactment of Louyanba, another important sequence of Lai Haraoba, the maiba plays the role of Meitei Lambu.

A Maiba is a man who has adopted this profession by choice. Like a Maibi he is well-versed in ritual lore's and other ceremonial stories which are connected with myths and legends. He also sings, dance and chant words, lines connected with rites, myths and legends like the Maibi. During the ritual performance the Maiba wears white dresses.

### 3.5 Penakhongba



Fig: 3.5 A Penakhongba playing Pena. Photo Credit: Dinesh Sharma

The third ritual functionary is an artist playing on Pena, an old indigenous musical instrument of Manipur. He is popularly known as Penakhongba, who is not a mere instrumentalist, but a singer and a dancer also. From Ikouba (first day of Lai Haraoba) to Lairoi (last day of Lai Haraoba), throughout the duration of Lai Haraoba the Penakhongba plays a very significant role. He provides musical accompaniment to most of the ritual sequences and sing songs prescribed for the particular sequences. Every morning during the Lai Haraoba he sits in front of the two presiding deities and sings Yakeirol, a song of invocation inviting the deities to the program of the day. At

the end of the Lai Haraoba the Penakhongba will sing the Nongkarol, a song reflecting the process in which the deities involved in the performance leaves the venue and join the world of spirit.

Pena players may broadly be divided into two classes, Asheiba Ojha and Phamsak Ojha. The first groups of players are engaged in Lai Haraoba and other rituals while the second group generally performs at secular entertainment. In Lai Haraoba it is believed that the presiding deities Lainingthou and Lairembi are satisfied with the music produced by the ena played on by the Penakhongba.

As the rapid transformation of the social and political, religious life of the Meitei the history of the ritual performance of Lai Haraoba is difficult to trace. However, it is believed that Lai Haraoba had attained a stage of development during a particular period of 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. when Naothingmang was the king of Manipur and also when King Khagemba had reigned over the state. During this period, many of the hymns chanted and spiritual songs sung in Lai Haraoba were discovered and translated into performance. The state chronicle Cheitharol Kumbaba has recorded that during the reign of king Loyumba in the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D, the ritual episode called Ougri Hangel, which is performed on the concluding day of Lai Haraoba was introduced for the first time. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Lai Haraoba was more or less ignored when King Pamheiba adopted Hinduism as the state religion.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Lai Haraoba movement was re-activated and rejuvenated which was perhaps with the strong movement of Meitei revivalism challenging Hinduism and its influence in the life of the Meiteis. The Meitei began to look for their cultural identity and Lai Haraoba was used as a means to remind the Meiteis of their origin of their distinct cultural and political identity.

Thus, Lai Haraoba has institutionalized to the life of the Meiteis living in the valley of Manipur. It has left an everlasting impression in the social, cultural and religious spheres of the Meiteis. Its organizational pattern and modes of performance

have been deeply instrumental in the definition of the identity of the Meiteis and their forms of expressions like dance, music, theatre etc.

### **3.6 Manipuri Folk Tales:**

The Manipuri folk tales are diverse and multiform in view of the existence of different groups, communities, standard etc. It represents all the aspects of human activities and experience, myths, cosmology and cosmogony drawing from the memory of the race and has been passed down through the folk tales. The Meiteis still preserved some of the tales from early times till date. In correspondence to the folk tale of Manipur, it is also known as “Phunga Wari”, (tale associated with the hearth).

Folk based on the historical events are recorded in secret text like Poreiton Khunthokpa (Migration of Poireiton), Lamitlon (lore of places),etc. are some of the well know legends. Folk tales based on the themes of the ill treatment of step-daughter by the step-mother are Uchek Langmeidong, Kumjamala, Sanarembi and Chaishra.

The Meitei tales show the connections of animals and birds, there are various tales based on the story of animals. In the Manipuri tales the tiger is the most ubiquitous character such as Kabui Keioba (Half man and half tiger), Tapta, The fox and the tiger, The tiger and the heron.

Folk tales related to birds consist of Khambrangchak Pidonu, Tokpa Lanabar (war with the wild cat), Pebet.

Tales associated with the beliefs of evil spirits, ghosts and demons are Henjunaha and Lairourembi, Lai Khutsangbi (fairy with long hands), Yennakha Paodabi, Tales of Soirels (satan).

The folk tales represent the custom, the lifestyles, the beliefs and the structure of the society. The stories are the creation of untutored elderly women of the Meitei

society which are created from the articles of daily used, nature, extraordinary events which they have experienced in their life and had been passed down the ages.

### **3.7 Folk Songs and Ballads:**

Folk songs described the spontaneous outburst of feelings, emotions, love, sentiments of the ancestors, morals, disciplines, events, from the cradles to the funeral. Every community of Manipur has its own distinctive folk songs which are performed at every occasion and events such as the funeral song, songs of Valor and Patriotisms, Khullang Ishei, Khunung Ishei (songs of the past), Phousu Ishei (song while pounding rice by females), children's games and songs, naosum(lullaby), hunting song etc.

#### **Khulang Ishei**

Khulang Ishei meant the song sung at the time of work to divert from the hard work, Khut meaning hand in Manipuri, Lang-lend, Ishei-song, it was performed at the time of accomplishing the planting of seeds and reaping of crops. It was performed by the villagers without the use of any musical instruments. In course of time this work song has been developed into a kind of romantic song.

In the Khulang Ishei, a young man expressed his proposal to the girl through singing, in reply the girl also sings to the man. It is a humorous song, with the course of time it had been adopted in singing various mythological epics of the Meiteis. The artist of Kongpan Moirang Parva used the tunes, styles of singing and speech from the Pena sakpa and applied the same in the Yatra performance. Unfortunately, this form of song is not performed much by the people in today's world.

#### **Khunung Ishei**

Khunung Ishei is songs sung by the primitive Meitei people, the song is sung about the past based on the theme of the ancient folk tale of Kabui-Keioba (half man



half tiger). The ancient people sing this song when they see Thaba/ a bright star rising just before dawn.

### **Pena Sakpa**

Pena is the indigenous musical instrument of the Meitei, which is the most typical instrument, consists of a piece of a bamboo inserted into a coconut shell. The strings of both the Pena and the bow are made from the horse's tail. The bow is called Cheijing; small bells are attached to the bow. It has a bulb like curved iron at the top which is adorned with a beautifully embroidered cloth. The Pena Sakpa is the singer who performed ballad using the instrument Pena.

The Pena Sakpa wears white dhoti or printed silk dhoti, a turban of white color with flowers, gold bangles and earrings. He performs ballads of mythological tales such as Numit kappa (shooting sun), an epic of Khamba and Thoibi (counterpart of lord Siva and goddess Durga) Khongjom Prava (ballad by beating the dholak).

### **Khomjom Prava (ballads by beating the dholak)**

Khomjom Prava is a style of ballad, sang by using the Pena along with the beating of dholak which was originated by Dhobi Leinou (a washerman). The songs described the Khomjom war in 1891 A.D., describing the events of the war through the perspective of Leinou. He describes the heroic fights of the battle. It was later used at different important events such as the installation of the sacred image of the Govindaji and marriage of Sija lairoibi with the lord, the capture of elephant by King Joysinha (1763-1798) in Tekhoo, birth of Prince Pamheiba (1709-48), Zilla Darbar of King Chandrakriti with the British in Cachar, demarcation of the boundaries of Manipur under King Gambhi Singh (1825-34), seven years devastation of Manipur on account of Burmese invasion (1818-1825), death of Maharaja Gambhi Singh, King Joysinha's fight with the Burmese etc.

### **Thabal Chongba**

Thabal Chongba is a ballad performed in the courtyard or an open air space during the festival of Holi (Dol Jatra) also known as moonlight dance. It is performed in the month of March/April. In the old tradition, young men and women form a circle by joining hands and echo the words of the singers who stand in the center of the circle starting with the word Haribola. The participants repeat the song in chorus till the movement of the dance progresses.

### **Khamba and Thoibi Dance**



Fig : 3.6 The Khamba-Thoibi performance.

Photo Credit: Dinesh Sharma

Khamba and Thoibi dance is a duet performance, based on the mythology love story of a princely kingdom of Moirang, the dance describes the story of Khamba a poor and brave lad of Khuman Clan who falls in love with the princess of Moirang Clan Thoibi. The dance is believed to be a dance performed done by the couple in

front of the god Thangjing, after which they came to be known as the incarnation of Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati. The dance is performed during the Lai Haraoba festival.

### **3.8 Religious Performance of Manipur**

Hinduism was first adopted in Manipur in the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. during the reign of King Kyamba (1467-1508). A Vishnu temple was created at Bishenpur about 25 miles from Imphal West; some local scholars gave their opinion that the Bengal form of kirtan was introduced as a part of religious performance of the Vishnu temple. However, Hinduism could not leave any lasting impact on Manipuri society until King Pamheiba came into power in the eighteen century. Under his patronage a Brahmin named Santidas from Sylhet started a movement to popularize Ramandi school of Vaishnavism in Manipur. During this period a new form of kirtan performance known as Bangladesh Pala was introduced. Apart from attempts made to introduce Hinduism in Manipur, the period saw the translation of some sections of the Mahabharata and Ramayana also the replacement of traditional Meitei script in the Bengali script. The Ramandi School was replaced by the Chaitanya school of Vaishnavism in the second half of the eighteen century through a wise and systematic policy adopted by King Bhagyachandra (1759-1798 A.D). The period under the kingship of Bhagyachandra was a benchmark in the development of Hinduism in Manipur. With the king enthusiasm and with the support given by the loyal courtiers various forms of religious performance were conceived and translated into real action. Nata-Sankritana, Maha Ras, Kunja Ras, Basanta Ras and Gostha lila are some of the Hindu religious performances of Manipur.

The overall performing structure of Ras Lila, Nata-Sankirtana is an important component; it comes as the Purvaranga before the actual performance of the Ras Lila and again at the end of the performance as the antaranga. It is said that in the performance of the first Ras Lila king Bhagyachandra himself had taken part in the Nata-Sankritana as a performer beating the Manipuri drum called poong. Beside

Maha Ras Bhagyachandra had created and popularized two other forms of Ras Lila: Kunja Ras and Basanta Ras, performed annually during a certain specified season of the year. The tradition of organizing the three forms of Ras Lila still continues, particularly at the Mandaps of Shri Govinda and Shri Bijai-Govinda situated at two areas of Imphal. The three forms of Ras Lila are performed every year, according to the following schedule:

- Basanta Ras : on the full moon of Sajibu (March/April).
- Kunja Ras : on the full moon of Mera (October/November).
- Maha Ras : on the full moon of Hiyanggei (November/December).

In addition to the creation and popularization of the various forms of the Ras Lila, Bhagyachandra had created and popularized Nata-Sankirtana, it can be claimed that Ras Lila was an extension of Nata-Sankirtana. There had been various opinions on the origin of Nata-Sankirtana. Many people believed that both the Bangladesh Pala and Nata-Sankirtana were delivered directly from the kirtan or the procession singing of Bengal. However, it should be noted that Nata-Sankirtana and Bangladesh Pala are different from the curtain of Bengal, which is a purely form of processional singing. Nata-Sankirtana is usually performed in a mandap with white curtains surrounding it with a broad white cloth serving as a ceiling. It is necessarily performed as a part of mortuary rite or sardha ceremony.

King Bhagyachandra had also given rise to another religious play called Gostha Lila which depicts the playing of cowherd Krishna during his childhood. It also depicts the childhood pranks of Lord Krishna along with his friends, the Gopas. The Lila is presented in the form of a children's theatre and it ends with the young Krishna and Balaram kills the demons Dhenukasur and Bokasur. Although started during the reign of Bhagyachandra Gostha Lila was further developed into a popular theatre form during the reign of king Gambhir Singh (1825-1834 A.D.).

Successive kings ruled after Bhagyachandra were also devout of Vaishnavities who had strictly followed the religious ways of life and the tradition of religious performance or theatre started by the king. The Hindu festival Rath Yatra (Kang Chingba) was introduced for the first time in Manipur during the reign of King Gambhri Singh.

King Chandrakirti (1850-1886 A.D.) created the form of Nata-Sankirtana to 64 rasas and had introduced for the first time in 64 sessions spreading over 32 days and also a fourth form of Ras Lila called Nritya Ras.

In 1835 A.D, a Hindu religious play called Kalidaman was performed for the first time in Manipur in a natural setting of river and hills. The socio-political status of Manipur during the reign of king Churachand was a troublesome period. The people of Manipur were fed up of the long colonial rule and with the feudal system by the king; therefore they began to revolt against the oppressive British regime and the dictatorial power of the king. Thus the history of Manipur recorded the first uprising of the women of Manipur in 1904 as Nupi Lal.

Although Manipuri society showed a lot of socio-political restlessness, the Hindu religious theatre had received some momentum under the patronage of the king. A new form of Ras Lila called Diba Lila was created during this period. In addition to this Gour Lila and Udukul were also created and popularized. Plays such as Nouka Lila, Sabha Parba and Ram Lila were also performed.

The Manipuri Nata-Sankirtana represents an extension of Lila-Kirtana of Thakur Narottam Das of Bengal. It came to Manipur in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when a disciple of Narottam Das brought Vaishnavism to the valley. A local Sanskrit scholar called Shri Atombapu Sharma has given his opinion that Manipuri Nata-Sankritana may be termed as rasa-kirtana as he stated that it re-enacts the lilas of Shri Krishna in various rasas.

The term nata placed before the word Sankritana is meaningful; according to Bharata's Natya Sastra the word nata comes from the root nat which means 'to act'. A person practicing nat is known as nata, who is trained in this particular art and as a professional 'he acts again and again the stories of men with sentiments, states and temperaments'. Again, in Sanskrit the word nat also means 'to dance'. In short, Nata-Sankritana is a drama which enacts non realistically the lilas of Shri Krishna by using a medium growing out of creative fusion of dance, vocal music and instrumental music produced by kartal (cymbal), poong (drum) and moibung (conch). It is also sadhana having no scope for exhibitionism. The essence of bhava is given maximum emphasis, and it is realized through an abstract and non realistic presentation. It is a representation of the body and soul of all the natas which are completely merged in a comprehensive process aiming at the final identification with the Lord Krishna. It demands the same kind of involvement on the part of the audience. Through a creative arrangement and organization of the structural components involved, the performers and the audience are transported to another world far from the mundane world. This may be regarded as a process which retards the outgoing urge and promotes an inward movement. The whole impact is so great that in almost all Nata-Sankritana performance one can hear some performers and some members of the audience crying and weeping audibly.

It can be said that Nata-Sankritana is one of the most difficult form of the Hindu religious theatre. Being a ritual there is no room of exhibitionism, and the sense of devotion involved overrides the claims of entertainment. Each and every unit of the performance- the body movement, the voice, the words, the music and the beats of the talas etc has been based on a total sense of devotion and dedication of the supreme godhead. A Nata-Sankritana performance is based on the finest talents of the natas which appealed to the audience mentally and emotionally so that the members of the audience become completely absorbed in an experience of divine harmony and oneness with their object of devotion.

The performance area (mandap), the performers (natas) and the audience (bhaktas) are bound by an intricate system of equations, parallelism and symbolic projections build up by the people, Chaitanya and the spiritual friends of Nabadwip and Shri Krishna including Gopa and Gopis of Brindavan. At the initial stage there are groups of people- performers and audience who have been governed by a deep understanding of Vaishnava traditions, and who undergo an inner process of mental and spiritual transformation. In this process both the performer and the audience construct a world of imagination in which they become participants in the world of Chaitanya and his followers. As, for example, the lead singer (isheihanba) is taken for Srivas, the next singer (duhar) taken for Mukunda. The lead drummer is also taken for Abdeita. Thus the entire performer and the members of the audience, individually and collectively identify himself or themselves with the important members of the world of Chaitanya in Nabadwip.

Through a process of transformation, mental and spiritual transportation the mandap becomes Nabawip, the eight pillars represent the spiritual followers of Chaitanya and the pillar at the centre of mandap stands for Chaitanya himself. The section of the audience sitting in the South represents Nityainanda and the section occupying the Western side of the mandap stands for Madhavendra Puri. In this way the whole area of performance, including the performers and the audience constitute a non-realistic representation of Chaitanya's world. This is the first stage of transformation and transportation. In the second stage the small world of the Nata-Sankritana performance is again transformed into Shri Krishna and his friends of Brindavan. Now, the mandap becomes Brindavan and the eight pillars become Gopis and the central pillar stands for Shri Krishna.

This process of symbolic identification is taken to the musical instrument used. The golden color of the brass made cymbals hint at the golden complexion of Radha whereas each of the cymbals stands for the two breasts of Radha. The knotted cotton thread used as handle of the cymbals is taken for the hair of Radha and the sound

produced by the clanging of the cymbals represent her sweet voice. Then the drum (mridanga or poong) is taken for Shri Krishna.

As in Lai Haraoba the four directions are believed to be guarded by the four Hindu gods. God Ganesh is stationed at the North-eastern corner of the mandap, Lord Kesava at the South-western corner, Lord Ananta at the North-western corner and Lord Maheswara at the South-eastern corner. Again the section of the audience sitting in the Western side represents Radha, the section in the East represent Hanuman and Shankarshan at the Southern side. This is the brief summary of the complex network of equation and symbolic projection forming a background of all the performances of Nata-Sankritana.



Fig: 3.7 Artists performing Pung Cholom. Photo Credit: Dinesh Sharma



The performance of the Nata-Sankritana begins with a prologue (purvaranga) and ends with an epilogue (antaranga). In between the prologue and epilogue Brindavan Lila of Shri Krishna is enacted with remarkable artistic finesse. The natas stand in a circle around the central pillar, leaving a small passage on the Western side. The three main singers Isheihanba, Duhar and Khongbangba and the two drummers occupy important positions in the area of performance. The costume of the natas consists of white koyet (turban), a white dhoti, white lagoon (sacred thread) and uric (a kind of necklace to be worn by the Manipuris who have been formally initiated into Vaishnavism). The upper bodies of the natas are bare till the waist and are decorated with sandal paste marks on several parts. After they are in their respective positions the mandap mapu (master of ceremony) and the organizer will then come in the area of performance where the mandap mapu give the announcement to begin by shouting in an incantatory tone. As soon as the name Chaitanya is uttered by the mandap mapu in his announcement the two drum players will start beating the drums according to raga achouba (major raga).

The beat is given three times, followed by the clanging of cymbals and the blowing of conch. The beating of the drum and the patterns of sound produced by the instruments reflect to a whole process of building up of limbs of the body of Lord Shri Krishna, which is supposed to be built up in the middle of the area. The whole process of building up from the foot to the head of Lord Krishna is presented non-realistically through the medium of the drum beats. Once the process is complete the conch is blown and the natas, start making movements of their bodies and bowing their heads slowly towards the centre of the area where the whole body of the Lord is imagined to have been built up and starts singing. The pattern of sound or raga described during the singing and the instrumental sound signified the process of infusing the spirit or the soul of the Lord in the body.

After the infusion of spirit in the body the drummer brings in Sanchar by producing three different beats, which give an expression to the infusion of the mental

faculty in the body. The natas or palas starts singing led by Isheihanba (lead-singer) of Guru Vandana, Sabha Vandana(both are prayers to the guru and the audience) and Gourachandra. Gourachandra is a description of the beauty of Gouranga and tells the sequence of how the Brindavan Lila of Shri Krishna appears before the mental eye of Shri Gouranga. After the singing of Gourachandra the drummer beats their drums and clangs their cymbals producing different notes of music. Then the intensity of the musical and the theatrical experience is slightly relaxed where the natas sit down and sings the text of the day's songs like Niti Lila or Nimai Sanyas. Most of the texts are taken from the padavalis written by the Vaishnava poets of Bengal.

The singing will continue for a long time. In the meantime the poong- players or the drummers and the natas jump, whirl and dance. They also performed different kinds of body movements composing a beautiful intricate pattern of rhythm and movements. The dance performance exhibited by the drummers of Manipur is known all over the cultural centers of the world as the poong cholom. After singing for nearly three hours, the performance reaches an important stage called rajmel or sambhog (total communion and consummation) which is said to be an artistic representation of the consummation of the relationship of Krishna and Radha through symbols. Starting with slow drum beats and body movement the rhythm becomes gradually intensified; the momentum of the body becomes faster till a moment of climax is built up where the whole process become relaxed and the rhythm is slow along with the slower body movement. This climatic movement of rhythm, sound and movement is called mel thaba. After the process of mel thaba the process is followed by the second lead singer (duhar) with the dance movements of the body which imitate the movements of birds and animals. The movement of duhar is repeated by other palas and the drummers perform choloms or acrobatics.

After this the performers resume to the sitting position and continued to sing. During this process the organizer comes to the area of performance and distributed koyets (turbans), shawls or wrapper. In which it will replace the old turban and

wrapper, changing of cloths symbolize or represent Lord Krishna and Radha changing their cloths after the union and thus the Nata Sankritana comes to an end. After seeking permission from the master of ceremony the whole performance the natas will sing Nityaipada in honor of Nityainanda and Chaitanya. The master of ceremony will again shout in an incantatory tone to conclude in which the natas and the audience will respond shouting Hare Hare. In this way the performance which has started with the involvement of Gouranga ends with the name of Gouranga.

A very important observation to be made at this stage is the way in which Nata Sankritana has been structured. It is a common knowledge that Brindavan Lila of Shri Krishna serves as its content. However, the form has grown out of the interaction and synthesis of some indigenous art-forms of Manipur like the Lai Haraoba, Pena music and Khulang Ishei (a popular form of folk song). There is also a popular contention that the sitting and standing postures, the body movements and the intricate footwork of the natas have been very much similarities with the indigenous martial-art forms of Thang-ta and Mukna. The style of singing has a close resemblance to the reciprocal style adopted by Khulang Ishei singers and tonal system of the Pena music. This shows an interesting example of how components of Hindu life and culture have been transplanted into the soil of Manipur.

### 3.8 Ras Lila



Fig: 3.8 The Ras Leela Performance. Photo Credit: Dinesh Sharma

The emergence of the Ras Lila after Nata-Sankritana was a remarkable landmark in the history of the development of the Hindu theatre in Manipur. Ras Lila belongs to the third phase of development of theatre while Lai Haraoba belongs to the first phase followed by the Nata-Sankritana as the second phase. The influence of Lai Haraoba on Ras Lila is visible in terms of the movement, its dances and tune of the song and particularly in the aspect of fertility. All these forms are depicted through the help of its unique instrumental ways, which has been found quite different from other form of Ras Lila performed in other parts of India.



Fig: 3.9 Ras Leela Performances. Photo Credit: Thokchom Roshini Devi

Ras Lila is more towards realistic form in terms of the technique of production. It is deviated from the traditional form, which were non realistic in technique of the production large scale innovations in matter of costume, make-up background scene-design and props have been introduced in order to create an illusion of reality. The plot consists to have a story-line. Popular Hindu scriptures such as Srimad Bhagavatam and Jayadeva's Git Govindam served as the foundation on which the imaginative world of the form has been built up.

The performance area is called Ras Mandal, which is situated at the central area of the mandap attached to a temple, especially designed and decorated to represent the realistic natural environment of Brindavan. All the pillars of the mandap surrounding the central area are wrapped with green leaves of the peepal tree. The ceiling is also decorated with the same design. Plantain tree, creepers and domesticated parrots are used to create a sense of the natural environment of the Ras

mandal. The hand-made figure of peacocks and snakes are drop from the ceiling with strings attached to them. According to another school of Ras Lila the Ras Mandal is supposed to wrap with white cloth and the ceiling of the area is also covered with white cloth.

The orchestra group consists of a drummer, the conch-blower, the flutist and the ersatz player in which they occupied the North-Western side near the Ras Mandal. The drummer or the teacher the guru is accompanied by an important female singer namely Sutradhari. The audience will sit around the area of the Ras Mandal keeping a small passage connecting the Western entrance with the main door of the temple.

The artist playing the role of Shri Krishna will put on a golden colored dhoti upon the upper part of which strings of colorful beads are sewn in a circular form. Two decorated flaps will run round the right and left shoulders and after crossing each other will hang down from the waist. These two flaps represent the bags believed to have been carried by Krishna while going to tend the cows. He also wears a headgear with a peacock feather attached to the front portion. The limbs and some parts of the uncovered body are adorned with armbands, anklets, bracelets and necklace etc. He also holds a flute decorated with flowers. A narrow decorated flap also hangs down from the waist in the front part of the body.

The costume of Radha and the Gopis wears a peculiar type of brightly colored and well-decorated silk skirt called Potloi. It is a broad, stiff and a cylindrical bell like skirt studded with bits of bright glass framed within thin brass circlets. The Potloi hangs down from the waist nearly touches the ground. A brightly white coverage called poshwan bordered with bits of glasses framed within brass circlets spreads around the waist forming a wave like over the potloi. The upper part of the body is covered with velvet blouse. Their head is decorated with a thin muslin veil studded glittering and silvery object. The veil covers the entire face and back of the head. They wear ornaments such as necklaces, bangles, bracelets etc. The potloi of the Gopis are uniformly red in color but the Radha wears green colored potloi.

There is a slight variation of the features of costume for different forms of Ras Lila. For example, in Basanta Lila there will be an additional character called Chandrabali (another lover of Krishna) who also wears the green colored potloi. In Nitya Ras the Gopis including the Radha do not cover their head with a veil. The veil will cover the knot of hair on the back of the head. The upper head will have the hair neatly combed and decorated with sparkling golden and silver objects. The costume of Ras Lila is unique for its beauty and combination of variation. It has its own relationship with the underlying thematic content with its color and motifs bearing the essence of the respective characters.

The potloi is the costume meeting the essential demand of Ras Lila. It plays a very important role in hiding or suppressing the human element in order to suggest the divine or spiritual aspect of the performance. The upper part of the body, particularly the breast of the Gopis is covered with a velvet blouse which is again wrapped over with a white cloth to hide the movement of the breast. The intention is to hide the movement of certain part of the body which usually arouses carnal appetite. The remaining parts of the body which remained uncovered are covered with various ornaments. The covering up or hiding of the body itself is an important factor which promotes the peculiar aesthetics of the art in terms of controlling the body and intricate hand gestures. Thus ultimately the costume controlled the graceful movement of the body and the delicate hand gesture.

Ras Lila has five different forms; each form has a common theme, i.e the love sports of Krishna, Radha and Gopis. Maha Ras, Kunja Ras, Basanta Ras. It is performed at the mandap of Govindajee temple. Among the five forms of Ras Lila, Maha Ras is the only form of Ras which is strict adherence to the text of Rasa Panchadhyayi and had been appreciated by the pundits who runs the show at Govindajee temple. Maha Ras enacts all the five chapters of the basic text using song, dance and drumbeats as the means of communication. Kunja Ras is regarded as a part of Maha Ras. Basanta Ras also follows the Srimad Bhagavatam but it is marked by

the omission of some sequence of action inspired by Jayadava's Git Govindam. In Nitya Ras and Diba Ras some of the sequences are innovated by local poets by composing of songs and sequence like Suka-sari. The performance of individual dance by artistes could be seen perhaps to show more human interest.

In all the three forms when performed at the Govindajee temple no artiste will play the role of Krishna and Radha, there will be only Gopis. The idols of Radha and Krishna will be taken out of the sanctum sanctorum of the temple and will be placed at the centre of the mandap on a revolving platform called chakrapith. The Gopis will take the two idols as their actual divine companions. They talk to the idols, sing and dance around them. The chakrapith is made to rotate slowly when the Gopis dance to show the presence of the idols.

Likewise the Nata-Sankritana, Ras Lila also begins with Purbaranga section the last two sections of Purbaranga i.e Gourabhabi and Krishnarup. When the Purbaranga ends the Palas or Natas will leave the performance area to start the actual Ras Lila. The drummers will give a drum beat called raga macha, the conch will be blown, and Sutradhari will chant the Slokas from Rasa Panchadhyayi. The flutist plays on his flute, representing Krishna's calling for the Gopis. In case of the Maha Ras performance the sequence known as Krishna Abhisar is omitted as the idol is already being placed in the centre of the performance area on Chakrapith. Of other Ras Lila performances Krishna Abhisar is an important sequence.

After the vibrating music from the flute dies the Sutradhari will again chant a series of Slokas from the Rasa Panchadhyayi describing the expectant Gopis leaves their household chores and hastening to the source of the flute music. This stage is called Gopi Abhisar. The Gopis will enter the area of the performance through the Western entrance of the Ras mandal in two rows they go toward the idols sit down and pray to the lord. In response to the prayer the sutradhari representing Shri Krishna will chant the slokas.



Among the Gopis one of the Gopi will chant the Radha's sloka. In response to the prayer of the Gopis Krishna agrees to dance with them, one of the very important points of development in the whole sequence of Ras Lila. The Gopis will dance around the chakrapith.

The next sequence is bhang-gi pareng achaouba. The composition of the dance is very much resemblance to the hakchangshaba (formation of human body) of Lai Haraoba. It represents the formation of the body in the womb. Then the sequence is followed by singing of song and dance. The major sequence of the whole Ras Lila which gives an intense structure to the plot is the disappearance of Krishna and Radha at a time when the Gopis are experiencing a state of elation and excitement. The disappearance is meant to teach a lesson for the Gopis who have not suffered the pang of separation. The Krishna and Radha will walk out of the area of performance in other form of Ras Lila, but in Maha Ras performance at Govindajee temple the central part of the mandap is partially darker to signify the disappearance of Krishna and Radha. After the disappearance of Krishna and Radha the Gopis will anxiously search for Krishna. Meanwhile one of the Gopi separate herself from the other Gopis and goes towards the North-Western corner of the mandap acting out Radha's pang of separation. The other Gopis will find Radha and along with Radha the Gopis will search out for Krishna. With the re-appearance of Krishna the darkening part of the mandap will be again shone with light. After the appearance of Krishna the Gopis enjoys a mystic experience with one Krishna for each of the Gopis dancing together. This mystical experience is presented by the Gopis dancing around the two idols on the chakrapith which kept on rotating all the time. The dance composition called Brindavan bhang-gi pareng represents the beauty of Brindavan. The Maha Ras comes to an end with the offering of arti to the idols of Radha and Krishna in the centre and the audience will also rise up from their seats and take part in the aarati.

### 3.9 Gostha Lila, Udhukhal and Gour Lila



Fig: 3.10 Artist performing Gostha Lila. Photo Credit: Thokchom Roshini Devi

The other form of Ras Lila such as Gostha Lila, Udhukhal Lila and Gour Lila has made a benchmark for the growth of Hindu religious theatre in Manipur during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. Gostha Lila was supposed to be created and performed during the last year of the reign of King Bhagyachandra (1759-1798) but the form was developed further during the reign of King Gambhir Singh (1825-1834). With the introduction of court-jester or clown as one of the prominent characters of the theatre performance it gave an important development of the theatre of Manipur. The court-jester or clown became very popular among the king and the courtiers that it leads to the introduction of Phagee Lila which made a great impact. The presence of Balbasu in Gostha Lila was influence of Phagee Lila.



Fig :3.11 Performance of Goshta Lila on the IX Festival of Narrative Arts 2013 organised by Theater Centre of Manipur at Indira Gandhi Memorial Community Hall, Mekola Bazaar. **Photo Credit: Thokchom Roshini Devi**

Goshta Lila may be broadly divided into two sections. The first section refers to the performance at the mandap and the second section refers to the performance organized at the setting of the beautiful natural scenic background. Goshta Lila begins with Sutradhari chanting and singing the glorifying song of Gouranga. At some stage the Sutradhari will give a hint of the entry of the divine messenger Narad and Balbasu. Narad comes to the palace of Nanda and teaches Krishna and Balaram the art of milking cow. Then the Gopas friends of Krishna and Balaram will try to take them away to the field to herd and tend the cows. At first, Yasoda, mother of Krishna will refuse to let Krishna and Balaram go but finally she yields to the pressure. Before leaving for the fields Krishna and Balaram are taught to dance by Yasoda and sweets are offered to the Gopas while waiting for the two brothers. In this sequence the

childhood pranks of Krishna and his friends are also enacted. Finally, Krishna and Balaram will leave for the fields. In this way the first section of the Gostha Lila comes to an end.

In the second section Krishna and Balaram will be seen along with the Gopals in a beautiful field. The Gopas hold richly decorated sticks. Krishna holds a flute and Balaram carries a tot plough. The idols of Krishna and Balaram will be placed on a cart drawn to the area of performance by groups of devotees. On reaching the selected spot the audience will make a ring around the cart carrying the idols. Then the Gopas performs two dance compositions referred to bhang-gi pareng achaoba and brindavan pareng. These two dance composition gives expression to the same ideas which have been presented in the case of Ras Lila, but the performance is quite different. In Ras Lila the movement of the dance is soft and graceful, but in Gostha Lila the movement is more vigorous and sportive. In addition to the masculine and vigorous performance of the two dance compositions performed by Krishna, Balaram and the Gopas other dances also represent the athletic game of childhood. In the middle of the game the character of demon, Dhenukasur and Kansa appears in the form of a bull. A man covered with the mask of a bull on his head represents the demon. Dhenukasur will be killed by Balaram and the Gopas will dance with joy. Another demon will again appear in the form of a huge crane. Another man carrying a contraption resembles a crane playing the role of Bokasur. Krishna and his friend Gopas will again kill the demon in which they dance in celebration of the victory. The whole performance comes to an end when the Brahmin offers aarati to the two idols of Krishna and Balaram. The audience and the artistes performing will also join the offering of the aarati to the two idols.

An important observation that could be made is the stage of turning towards the realism, such as the role of Nanda, Narad, Balbasu, Dwari, Yasoda, Rohini etc are played by older people or artist. They used costume and make-up which are highly realistic.

The used of real cow and calf during the sequence of Narad teaching Krishna the art of milking a cow. The presence of Balbasu with his clownish character drawn from Phagee Lila has made an input of comic character to the whole performance which is more to realistic form.

### **3.11 Udukhal Lila**

Udukhal Lila was created and introduced during the regin of Churachand Maharaj. In this particular form of performance one can observe a sequential structure of various scenes of the performance. One can fine some sort of structural continuity based on a logical arrangement of the scenes.

The play begins with Narad transforming the two brothers Nalakuvera and Manigriva into two trees as a punishment for their misbehaviour. The performance contains major episodes such as the marriage of Devaki and Basudev, the birth of Krishna in jail, his departure to Nandagram and the killing of demon like Putana and Trinavarta and uprooting of the udukhal trees. The roles of Krishna and Balaram and Gopas are performed by children and the other roles are performed by older artist.

### **3.12 Gour Lila**

Gour Lila depicts the life of Gouranga from his childhood to the age when he becomes a sanyasi and propagates Vaishnavism through the singing of kritan. The performance is similar to Udukhal Lila, but the sequence shows more of human interest. Gour Lila is properly preceded by a Nata- Sankritana sequence performed by a group of six or seven year old boys.

A traditional form of theater plays a very important role in the life of the people in Manipur, It shows or reflect the periodically community of the essential role of theater in both the pre-Hindu and Hindu period. These performances have made certain transformation and got refined due to the changing situation of the cultural and political outcome, but the fundamental theme of these performances remain

constant starting from the pre-Hindu days of Lai Haraoba till the contemporary secular theater of Shumang Lila.

### **3.13 Theme of the Study: Shumang Leela–**

Shumang Leela is one of the most popular forms of Manipuri folk theatre in Manipur. As a form of traditional media Shumang Leela has lived its folk life for more than 100 years, it has been nurtured by the common people who have a taste for its simple but vibrant performance. Earlier Shumang Leela was also known as Jatra or jatrawali which is an import from Assam and Bengal as a result of contact with the mainstream Indian culture and developed in Manipur but it cannot support the contention with substantial historical fact and arguments, the origin of Shumang Leela is indeed a debatable topic which had been discussed in two ways of interpretation by certain classes of scholars where a group of scholars had stated that “Shumang Leela can be trace back from the Meitei ritual festival the Lai Haraoba( pleasing of God),” though there is no evidence of it but the Meitei believed that all forms of performing art, narrative or any ritual forms in Manipur is confined with Lai Haraoba. It results to a serious misunderstanding of the continuous process of the development of traditional Manipuri theatre. The Lai Haraoba ritual is observed in two distinctive ways by the Meitei community, the Chakpa Haraoba is observed by the lois (schedule caste) of Manipur and the Kanglei Haraoba is observed by the general Meitei in the Manipuri society, on the last day of the Kanglei Haraoba a type of humorous play or a skit is performed popularly known as Tankhul Nurabi or Saram Pakhangba, it is believed that the play have been incorporated in Lai Haraoba during the reign of King Loiyamba (AD 1074-1112) as documented in Loiyamba Shilyen. It is an enactment between Tankhul, an incarnation of Lord Nongpok Ningthou who dresses up in a Tankhul tribe attires and Nurabi an incarnation of goddess Panthoibi, in Tankhul lady attire, when they were out in the field for farming. The skit incorporated the philosophy of fertility in terms of reproduction, it represents a sense of humor, and pantomimic elements with simple but meaningful dialogues from the

rites, traditional proverbs, riddles along with singing and dancing. The skit entertains the audience and gives a hearty laugh while observing the performance. Thus, it had been assumed that this skit is the gateway to the origin of the Shumang Leela.

In addition to the Lai Haraoba, some forms of entertainment of Shumang Leela are believed to have been in existence during the period of King Khagemba (AD 1597-1652). One of it was known as “Chengpak khulou yengdaba huidri padam loudaba toknga makhum hangba” meaning speaking out whatever one wishes. During the reign of King Khagemba it was known as “Mitou Tamba” (to imitate), these forms of entertainment were basically episodic without regularity in performance and formal theatrical structures.

Naba Warrepa (Director of Theater Mirror) have also stated that Shumang Leela was initially known as Jatra or Jatrawali, which was an influx from Assam and Bengal as a result of contact with the mainstream of the Indian culture and later development in Manipur but after much observation conducted it had come to an agreement that Shumang Leela performance has originated from Lai Haraoba and it is agreed by experts and researcher.

A group of scholar had also given another interpretation about the origin of Shumang Leela, it gives an account of how Shumang Leela was first known as Phagee (fare) Lila and it was performed at the king’s court. The Phagee Lila was first performed at the court of King Chandrakriti (1850-1886), by the court jesters. It was performed to entertain the court, especially the king and his subjects. According to N Ibobi he had stated that Shumang Leela could be observed as Phagee Lila initially, according to his book “Shumang Leela and its prose”.



**Fig: 3.12 An Illustration of the King and the members in the court.**

One afternoon in the king courtroom after the Darbar session, the king had ordered the jesters to entertain the court with some of their humorous jokes, the two jester Khariba Laishuba and Ambujambi Saiton came up a short and humorous play by making fun of one of the court members, Thokchao on his big foot. The performance made the whole court burst into laughter, even the king was overwhelmed with the performance and the talent shown by the two jester, the king was impressed with the presentation that he had even prohibited any types of action which the jesters might faced from the court member in his absence due to the mockery. The news of the incident occurs within the court had spread all over the palace and within a few days it was spread like a wave all over the Imphal areas. The news of these humorous play reached the ear of the king's brother (Nongmaijing Vaisanabi) who was residing at Wangkhei Thangapat (an area located at part of Imphal East), he had requested the king, if he would allow the two jesters to perform a play during the Durga Puja festival at Durga Puja Lampak (Durga Puja Ground) to

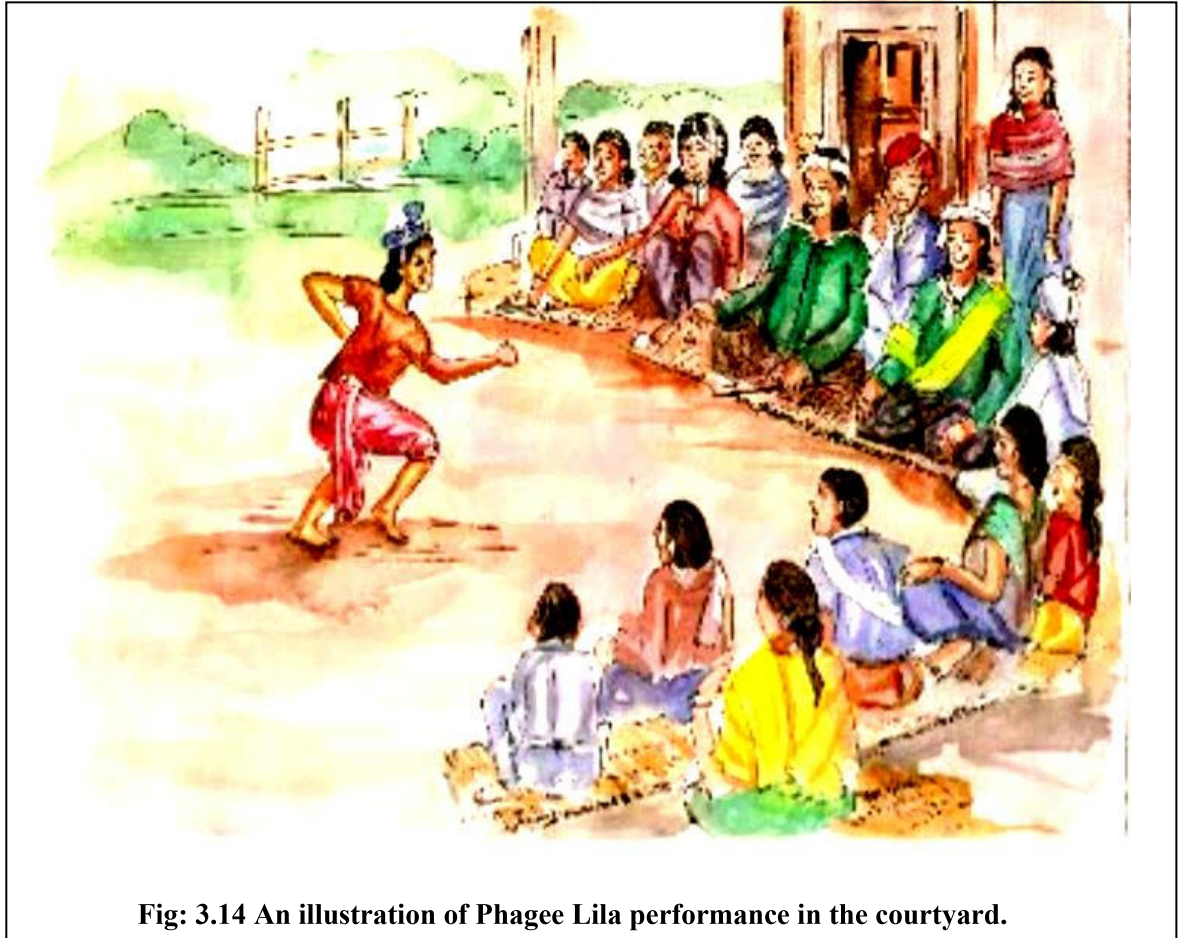


entertain some of his guest and localities. So the kings permit the request of Nongmajing Vaisanabi and for the first time the performance of performed outside the king's court.



**Fig: 3.13 Illustration of Phagee Lila performance during the festival of Durga Puja.**

Initially Phagee Lila was not permitted to perform outside the king's court, but soon after the performance shown during the Durga Puja has made an opportunity for the royal princess and the other royal relatives to permit in showing the Phagee Lila performance at their own appropriate courtyard. The king had to certify in order to show the performance. Thus the journey of Shumang Leela, from the king's court to the courtyard, a research was done by Aribam Somorendro regarding on how Shumang Leela was transferred from the king's court to the courtyard.



**Fig: 3.14 An illustration of Phagee Lila performance in the courtyard.**

Phagee Lila is important for the indigenous tradition of clowning as it was influenced by the performance of the character called Tangkhul in Louyanba episode performed on the last day of the Lai Haraoba. During the reign of king Chandrakirti, the light, hilarious performance and clowning were popular among the people of Manipur. The king himself used to witness the Phagee Lila performed at his court. Abujamba Saiton, Urit Mahum, Kharibam Laisuba, Heining Maroo, Laithangba etc. are some of the well known artists who took part in Phagee Lila during the reign of Chandrakirti. Some of the distinguishing jesters were Khariba Laishuba, Ambujamba Saiton, Thokchao Siki and Heining Maru. Again during of Churachand (1891-1941) artiste like Yotsubi, Pangamba, Chengba etc are the famous performers. The most important component of Phagee Lila was the sense of humor. The actual names of the artist were not used in the play, in fact, the names are given by the public to the role

played by the artists in their performances. Phagee lila is an improvised form of a comic skit based on a thin storyline. Witty exchanges of dialogue and comic gesticulations are the key features of this play. Mrs Grimwood who witnessed the Phagee lila performances during a sport event held at Imphal Pologround in which the Jubraj (Prince) Tikendrajit had distributed cash prizes in December 1889 has given an interesting account of the Phagee lila performer as:

“And to wind up there was a play. The Maharaja had three jesters exactly like the old fashion of having court jester to amuse the loyalty. The Manipuri specimens were very funny indeed. Their heads were shaved like the back of a poddle, and their eyebrows whitened. They wore very few cloths but what they had were striped red and green and a variety of shades. They walked up to the tent where we were sitting to watch the spot, all leaning against each other and carrying on a lively conversation in Manipuri, which seems to be amuse the spectators, very much. On reaching the door of the tent they all fell down at our feet, making terrible grimaces by way of greeting, and then they picked each other up and retired a few yards off and command the performance. One disguised himself as an old woman another as a native doctor (maibi) and the third as a sick man lying on the ground covered with a white sheet. Someone out of the crowd was impressed into the play, and he had to call the doctor to the sick man who was meanwhile leaving up and down upon the ground in a very extraordinary manner. The doctor came and poked him about, making observations in Manipuri at which everyone roared with laughter and then the old woman arrived and dragged the doctor off home. She was supposed to be his wife, and as soon as, she appeared a scuffle ensued, in which the old woman’s cloth fell off. We thought best to beat a retreat as the play was beginning to be rowdy and the dialogue to be vulgar, but I believe that it went on for some hours afterward as we heard shouts of laughter proceeding from the direction of Pologround, where the sport was held, late at night and the princess told us the next day that it had been a very good play, and the only pity was that we had witnessed so little of it”. She described the play was a satire against the life of a native physician maibi (who deals with massage therapy and

prescribe indigenous medicines to patients) and that it was also an attempt to laugh at the follies of the existing society of Manipur.



**Fig: 3.15. Performance of Phagi Lila before the king and his members.**

This important feature has become the part of the Shumang Lila of the present day; it is an important aspect of the continuity of the traditional Manipuri theatre. According to her account, Phagee Lila was the last event after the sport and it continued till the late night. People who had gathered around the area to watch the sport had also witnessed the Phagee Lila in the same way as an item of sport was witnessed. The performances of Phagee Lila in the open space became a threat to the performance of Hindu plays such as plays based on the episodes from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana performed at the mandaps. Meanwhile the Phagee

Lila became really popular among the common people. The royal chronicle Cheitharol Kumbaba gives a report of the Phagee Lila performances as a part of entertainment program was organized in honor of the arrival of an important British officer in Manipur. Ever since the British had conquered Manipur in the war of 1891 Phagee Lila became a popular medium of expressing the pent up anguish and anger of the people of Manipur against the British rulers. It also became a medium of expressing unhappiness towards the king Churachand and his courtiers, who became mere puppets in the hand of the foreign rulers.



**Fig: 3.16 Performance of Phagee Lila in an open space and audience watching the play.**

### **3.14 The Growth and Expansion of Shumang Leela:**

The structure and the form of Phagee Lila were brought into its originality under the leadership of Churachand Maharaj (1891-1941). The phagee artiste or the jesters were well known under the leadership of – King Chandrakriti, King Surchandra and King Kula Chandra. Exposure of new artist was observed under the leadership of Churachand Maharaj but the form and the structure of the play remains its originality, yet more refined. The portrayal of women by male actor (nupi sabi) was more subjective.

The elements required for Phagee Lila consist of Name, the Artiste, the plot/story, the makeup and the costume, the way of presentation and the humorous part. The name of the play is derived from the name of the troupe it does not relate to the plot of the play Such as the names of the famous artiste Ambujamba Saiton, Khariba Laishuba, Heining Maru, Laithangba, Urit Mahum. Later on the word Phagee was used by the artist in the title of the play during the reign of King Churachand. Example: Pangamba Phagee, Chengba Phagee.

Well known popular comedian, artist during King Churachand were – Yotsubi from Malom Keithel, Pangamba from Yairipok, and Chengba from Charang Pat. Chengba Phagee is originated from Charangpat (Imphal East, Thoubal District) and it is based on two characters Cheng and Yaibi. The play is about their beauty. Some of the distinguishing artists of Shumang Leela are Oja Gandhar Singh, Salgolsem Tombi as Tomal Saba.

There was no appropriate script or plot, theme or story for Phagee Lila. The artiste performed according to their emotion based on some of the Manipuri riddles, proverbs and humorous incidence making the audience laugh. Phagee (fare) is the most important ingredient for a Phagee Lila as the purpose of the play is to entertain the public through its gesture and the performance.

The dialogue were delivered in Bengali so most of the play were spoken in Bengali. Bengali dialogues were considered to be more fashionable or highly respected so during this period Shumang Leela was also known as Jatra Wali. In 1902 during Churachand Maharaj the influence of Bengali was at its peak, his brother Raja Dombra had ordered to set up a stage and a play had performed called Pravas Millan. During this period theater movement in Manipur was developed by setting up a stage and plays were performed during Durga Puja and Saraswati Puja. Then it was succeeded by plays such as Ramlila, Sabha parba, Kabul Lila, etc. But the real form of Shumang Leela was started during the reign of Maharaja Harischandra (1918). Later followed with some few other plays such as Sabitri Satyavan, Meiraba charan, Thok Lila.

### 3.15 Kabul Leela and Phadabi Leela:

The Manipuri society was introduced to a kind of theatrical art known as Phagee Lila the crowd were very fond of this performance yet another type of performance similar to Phagee Lila was introduced as Kabul Leela and Phadabie leela during the same period under the reign of king Churachand. Kabul Leela was started under the guidance of Sanamacha Tombi from Khwai Yaiskul Moirangkhom.



**Fig: 3.17 Illustration of Kabul Lila.**



### 3.16 Phadabee Lila:

Phadabee Lila started in the same period of Kabul Leela; it was started from Khwai Lalambung Makhong Meital Keisangbam Leikai and with the help of some artiste from Wahengbam Leikai.



**Fig : 3.18 Illustration of the performance of Phadabee Lila.**

### 3.17 Harischandra Lila:

The growth of the real form of Shumang Leela was witness the year 1918, through the play Harichandra, it was one of the most important and remarkable play in the journey of Shumang Leela. “The real form of a play could be witnessed in this play through its structure, the way of presentation and most importantly, it was the first play to have a script a plot which is indeed one of the important components of a

play”, stated by Naba Weppa. The play was based on the story of King Harichandra an adaptation from Mahabharata. Arambam Somorendro a pioneer and drama writer and shumang leela researcher had stated that, “It was a landmark in the development of Shumang Leela because it was a full length play based on a story and the language was in the vernacular. It was received with enthusiasm by the people, the loyalty as well as the commoners and it travelled throughout the state”.



**Fig: 3.19 Illustration of the play Harichandra.**

The first Manipuri play Narashinga by Lairikmohon was performed in 1925. Areppa Marup Oi, Sati Khongnang were some of the important play during that period. Shumang Leela was used as a form of communication in giving announcement to the public and the voice of the public by representing the public.

Various historic plays were performed after the Harichandra play since 1918 till 1942 before the Second World War. One of the most important and unique plays was “Moirang Praba”. It was one of the most vibrant and controversial plays in the

journey of Shumang Leela. The king suspended the play for some years; the play highlights the patronized status of the Meitei society of the King and the British administration.

The king was a member of Brahma Sabha a true devotee of Hindu religion; he had encouraged to start up a secular play, which could be a platform to expose and express the emotion, and utilized the freedom of speech through Shumang Leela. The Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha was formed by the king Sir Churachand as the president on 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1934. However, after sometimes the king left the Mahasabha due to his ideas and tendencies which were in conflict with the ideals of democracy. Beside the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha many other parties such as Manipuri Praja Sanmelani (1939), Manipur Praja Sangha (1946), Manipur Krishak Sabha (1946), Manipur State Congress (1946), Socialist Party (1948), Manipur Praja Shanti Sabha (1948) was formed before Manipur merged with the Indian Union in 1949.

### 3.18 Sabitri Satyaban:

Sabitri Satyaban was a religious play adapted from the sacred book of Bhagabhat Gita the play projected and highlight the role and the responsibility of a woman, the boldness of a woman. The play was about the dedication of a wife towards her husband, the play shows the sacrifice of a woman she had to make for the life of her husband.



**Fig: 3.20. Illustration of Thengu Hunba which is an integral part of the play Sabitri Satyaban.**

Apart from the religious story, the play also highlights the issues that was prevailing the society. In the play there was a comic part about Thengu hunba, this comic part became more popular than the play itself that the audience started addressing the play of Sabitri Satyaban as Thengu leela.

### **3.19 Moirang Praba:**

A remarkable performance of a new form of medium known as Moriang Parba(an epic play based on the legendary lovers- Khamba and Thoibi of Moirang) was evolved during the reign of Churachand Maharaj. It is a secular form of performance in which the character place in the open field and not at the mandap. Moirang Parba is a performance based on the episode taken from the legend of Khamba and Thoibi, which is the central component of the folklore associated with Moirang, however the performance of Moirang Praba was banned by the royal court for a long time and it was later revived only in the year 1914.

As recorded by the Shumang Leela Artiste Association it have been agreed that Moirang Praba was performed by three different groups

The early Moirang Praba considered being the first part of the play since 1898-1915, which was suspended by the king.

Kongpal Moirang Praba group (Old group)

Keishampat Moirang Praba (New group)

According to the book of “Manipur Theater” by Ibotombi Hourakchanbi and the Drama of Manipur it had been described that the first Moirang Praba was performed in the year 1898till 1915 at Wahengbam Leikai Prajamayum Ground, it was performed by Sagolsem Tolchao and Rajkumar Sanajaoba.

### **3.20 Kongpal Moirang Praba:**

According to the Brocheure of Traditional Drama Festival of Eastern India observed at August 28-29, 1986 it had been described as “Moirang Praba is a visual depiction in the form of the legendary epic of Khamba and Thoibi sung by the Pena Mintrels in a form of courtyard play. It was first performed in a grand style in the next few years of 1900 A.D. But it was learned due to court intrigues. By the year 1914 a professional group emerged which took up a chapter of Khamba Thoibi, known as

Shamu Khongyetpa. The play was able to have a huge influence to the mind of the public and the popularity spread like a wild fire.

Shumang Leela was used as a form of communication in giving announcement to the public and the voice of the public by representing the public. Shumang Leela is performed in a very simple style without any proper raised stage or any set designing or heavy props such as curtain, background scenery, visual effects etc. It can also be claimed as a theatre play through its way of performing as the play is performed in the middle of an audience which is surrounded from all sides leaving only one passage which serves as both entrance and exit connecting the performance space with the green room. Originally women were not permitted to participate in these events, however the female roles are played by the male artistes or nupishabis whom it is called male actresses.

### **3.21 Keishampat Moirang Praba:**

A new group of Moirang Praba was introduced in 1920 also popularly known as Keishampat group or about a character name Thonglen Saba by Eggya Nilkrishna, the performance is focused mainly on the self melody tune on the pena, khulang song (harvesting song) dance movement of Lai Haraoba. Moirang Praba was a unique play as it reflects the primitive culture of Meitei. It is custom and the tradition of Meitei culture before the expansion of Hindu religion

### **3.22 Chandrajeeni:**

Chandrajeeni was performed in the year 1933 the play was an adaptation from the puran.

### **3.23 Meraba Charan:**

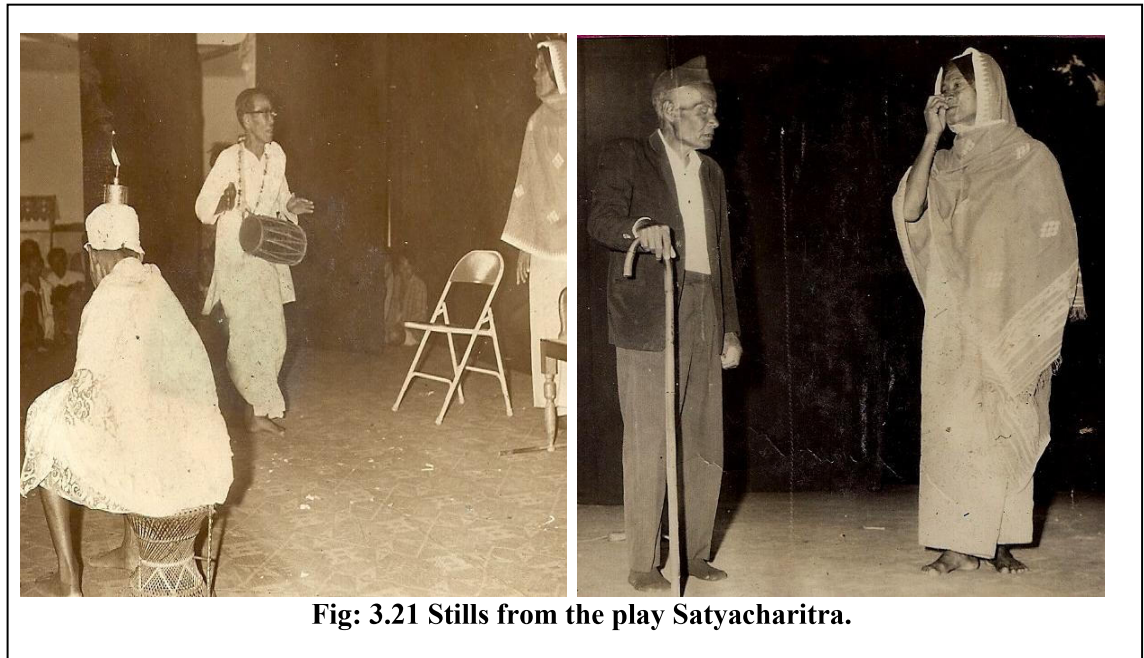
This is a type of play similar to Moirang Praba performed on the historic story, the play highlight the social status of the society.

### 3.24 Chandradas:

The play was adapted from the epic of Mahabharat which was considered to be one of the religious performances and considered to be holy.

### 3.25 Satyacharitra:

Satyacharitra was also one of the religious play started performing from Tiddim Road areas, within a fraction of time the popularity of the play was spread across the Imphal area in all the Meitei Community. It was a humorous play, but it also highlights the importance of woman, on the level of contribution made by the woman in the family and for the society. Till dated, the play is remembered by the public.



### **3.25 Thok Lila:**

The Thok Lila was also one of the well know popular play, though its origin and the artist who started it cannot be traced, it wins the heart of the public by its performance around 1932. The play highlights the religious influence of Hindu culture to the society by the leader and the social conflict faced by the society due to the political administration. The dialogues of the play provoke the social situation by making a humorous of it making the audience laugh.

### **3.26 Akayashim Swambar:**

The play was performed by the Yurembam group since 1942-1943, the popularity of this play was more emphasis at the rural areas rather than urban areas and presence of songs were important in this play.

### **3.27 Shubadra Suri Huranba:**

The play was performed at the religious aspect and at the part of the Cachar district. The play was directed and performed by Shree Kongbraikpam Nongmeijing. The play was not much perform comparing the other plays.

### **3.28 Shumang Leela in Post Second World War:**

The journey of Shumang Leela has experienced a wave of new dimension after the post of Second World War. Manipur had experienced the first strike of the war on the tenth of May 1942 Sunday, when a bomb was dropped in the Imphal areas. Manipur has experienced drastic changes immediately after the Second World War, at the prospect of the social and economic outcome and also the political perspectives. In a paper presented by Dr N Lokendra Singh for the Manipur State Achieves 1993 he had explained about the experience of the Second World War as “It brought a rapid but profound change in the consciousness as well as socio- economic life of the people. These changes have not only paved the way for the emergence of the new social forces, but also prepared the necessary precondition for a strong popular



movement for bringing about broad economic and political changes in Manipur during the immediate post Second World War period”.

The evolution of Shumang Leela started with the change of the society. At the earlier period of the era Shumang Leela performed plays which are related to religion. The big leap came when scripts were introduced with the plays like Puyameithaba and B.A. Mapa Lamboiba. It was a boost for literature loving people of Manipur and also it brought in professionalism in Manipuri theatre.

### **3.29 B.A Mapa Lamboiba:**

B.A Mapa Lambioba was the type of play to have a proper presentation in highlighting the important current status. It was performed by in the year 1945/46 by the Yurembam Leela troupe. The popularity of the party was addressed by the name of the area from where it belongs and not the name of the artist.

### **3.30 Puran Meithaba:**

Puran meithaba was a play that signifies one of the most dreadful and tragic event in the history of Manipur. The play was performed in the year 1950. It was directed by the well known teacher, in the field of art Ningombam Angouton Meitei from Khonga Laishram Leikai. The play was based on the incident of the burning of the Puran (records of the Meitei chronology) during the reign of King Garibniwaz due to the influence of Santidas Gosai a Vaishnavism fanatic. This was also a play that has a proper script; the play was suspended by the government as it defames the other religion or discriminates the Hindu religion. Some of the popular artistes of the play were Angouton as Santidas Gosai, Nimai as Khongnangthaba.

### **3.31 Nongpok Panthoibi:**

It is a type of play showing the cultural heritage of the Meitei community and preserving of the indigenous culture. The play was based on the story of the Meitie deity Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi.

After the Second World War the journey of Shumang Leela was in a lapse of a different genre, it acts as a boundary that distinguished between different waves in terms of its form, the prospect of its presentation and the realistic value. It could be strictly divided into two waves:

- The Old Wave
- The New Wave

Old wave consists of the religious and the historical plays. Since the early 60's the scope of Shumang Leela has a larger and wider perspective, became a platform in propagating the social issues. Plays based on the social issues were Nungshibi Leirang, Mantri Chakaoba, Chak Tangba, Wanom Sareng and Mapuna Huranba.

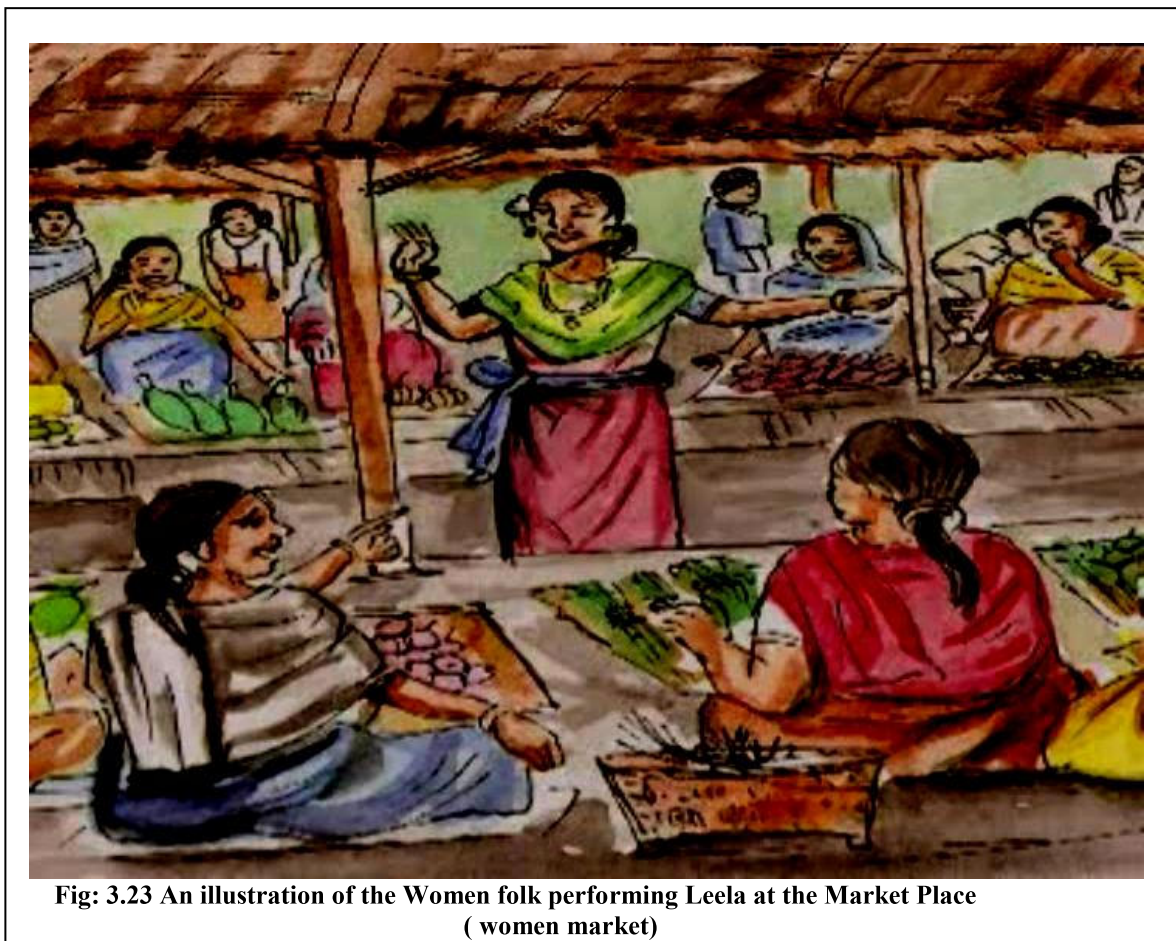
### 3.32 Epom Lila (Epom Play):

Epom was a type of humorous play started as a radio program by the Akashvani Imphal in the year 1967/70. Dr Nongthombam had stated that, “In the history of Manipuri humorous plays the new emerging Epom should have a space.” It could also be stated that it was performed in the traditional humorous play. The name Epom was given by the pioneer of drama of Manipur D.C Tongbra. Epom was directed by Oinam Babu.



Fig: 3.22 Still from the play of Epom, Artist: Babu, Achaoubi.

### 3.33 Nupi Shumang Leela. (Female Shumang Leela):



**Fig: 3.23** An illustration of the Women folk performing Leela at the Market Place ( women market)

It is a type of Shumang Leela play, which was performed by female artiste. At the early stage of Shumang Leela female artiste do not participate or take part in performing Shumang Leela due to certain circumstance prevailing in the society. The Shumang Leela performed by women, known as Nupi Shumang Leela was formed in the year 1975/76. Unlike the male Shumang Leela troupe, Nupi Shumang Leela troupe do not around the localities for performance. The Nupi Leela troupe performed a play based on the historic stories of the Moirang Kangleirol (chronicle of Moirang kingdom).

### 3.34 Eshei Leela (Song Lila):

The Eshei lila or the song lila comprised of song play, the Eshei lila consist of ten to eleventh songs in a play it has started adopting since 1976. It gives an opportunity for the song composer to utilized various phenomena of songs and musical instrument for the play. Songs and music are the main highlights of Eshei lila. Thadoi was the first Manipuri Eshei lila.



**Fig: 3.23 Illustration of song performance in the women's market by women folk.**

The Manipur State Kala Academy had instructed for the combination of dialogue Leela and Eshei Lila as a whole one Shumang leela play, represented in the Shumang Leela play in 1996.

The major phase came in the 1970s with the introduction of Eshei Lila an additional add ups of music and playback singing. The later phase was a turning point in the history of Shumang Leela. During this era Shumang Leela performed plays which are related to the contemporary issue of Manipur. Those plays were able to give more entertainment to the audience and at the same time give awareness to the audience. Through the simple play audience were able to acquire more knowledge and about the issues prevailing in the society.

### **3.35 Shumang Leela incorporating developmental and awareness campaigns in Manipur.**

The evolution of Shumang Leela developed with the changes of the society. At the earlier period of the era Shumang Leela performed plays which are related to religion. The later phase was a turning point in the history of Shumang Leela. During this era Shumang Leela performed plays which are related to the contemporary issue of Manipur. Those plays were able to give more entertainment to the audience and at the same time give awareness to the audience. Through the simple play audience were able to acquire more knowledge and about the issues prevailing in the society. It plays an important role in depicting the society and act as a medium of spreading messages, especially in rural areas of Manipur, most of the plays relate to the public sentiment. Shumang Leela performed plays which give awareness to the audience about the social consequence, such as AIDS, Leprosy, Cancer, Women Empowerment and issues about the armed conflict which is one of the burning issues in Manipur. Shumang Leela is an eye opener in Manipur Society, basically it is used to stir the curiosity and gather public interests which also give awareness on certain topic without suggesting any conclusion.

### **3.36 Role of Shumang Leela to the Manipuri society:**

When it comes to entertainment in Manipur, Shumang Leela is the best and effective tool with the right component in entertaining the people. It is performed

during the harvesting season where the audience could enjoy their leisure time and forget their hardship. During the month of December the State Shumang Leela Council conduct Shumang Leela Ningtham Kumhei (winter festival) to entertain the people, it is one of the biggest festivals in the state. It is conducted for almost ten days. The play is also performed at the spring season (Sajibu and Lamta Tha) to welcome the spring and have a good and prosperous year ahead. The popularity of Shumang Leela is so much intense that today, it has become a basic part of a program on occasion such as child birth, inauguration and in festival seasons, Holi, Lai Haraoba, Durga Puja. The popularity of Shumang Leela is more in the rural areas, people in rural areas prefer traditional media more than the modern media because of its intelligibility and familiarity of languages, gestures, music and rhythm. Besides entertaining the audience, Shmang Leela has become a medium in educating and reforming the society. Both the state government and NGOs are using this medium to convey messages and ideas to the people which is necessary for the rural development. Various Government Department of Manipur utilizes this medium for spreading awareness and implications on sanitation, polio immunization, adult educations, HIV/AIDs, family planning, child marriage, etc. Some of the distinguished play that was successful towards generating awareness among the people is as follows.

| Name of the Play       | Theme              | Performed By  |
|------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Meekap Thokpa          | Family Plan        | Takhellambam Chandro's City Jatra Mandal.           |
| Chakyam Pokpa          | Family Plan        |   |
| Anouba Mangal          | Family Plan        | North Imphal Manipur Jatra Mandal.                  |
| Singareina Kenkhrabada | Polio Immunization | Meitei Leima Cum Drama Association (Cheitei Party). |
| Kanagi Maralno         | Polio Immunization | Bir Tikendrajit Artistes Union..                    |
| Anouba Mangal          | Sanitation         | Shining Star Union.                                 |
| Amambada Meingal       | Sanitation         | Kamakhya Sangeet Mandal.                            |
| Anouba Lambi           | Sanitation         | Kamakhya Sangeet Mandal.                            |
| Anouba Yenning         | Environment        | Sponsored by The Science &                          |

|                         |  |   |
|-------------------------|--|---|
|                         |  | Technology Department.  |
| Senphu Hangba           | National Saving Insurance                | Compositional Artistes Association.   |
| Makhong Taragi Cheingak | Animal Husbandry Services                | Manipur Co-artistes Association produced under the State Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Department, Manipur. |
| Naitom Satpi            | Leprosy                                  | Peacemaker Artists Association.   |
| Opium War               | Against drug abuse & illicit trafficking | Peacemaker Artists Association.   |
| Ugandagi Maraibak       | Against drug abuse & illicit trafficking | Sana Leibak Nachom Artists Association.   |
| Amamba Leichil          | AIDs awareness                           | Written by Congtham Samarendra.   |
| Matamgi Helloi          | Street play on AIDs awareness            | Tamna Artists Group under the Manipur AIDs Control Society.   |
| Lambi Manga             | Street play on AIDs awareness            | Romantic Artists Association.   |
| AIDs Ta Nokphade        | Street play on AIDs awareness            | Produced by Thoudam Ruhinikumar.  |
| Khuntak Lanshidringeida | AIDs awareness                           | Written by Rupachandra Gosh by Dedicated World Artists Association.   |
| Ngashigi Nonglei        | AIDs awareness                           | Written by Chana Lukhoi by North Imphal Manipur Jatra Mandal.   |
| Swargagi Lambi          | AIDs awareness                           | Written by Thangjam Birchand performed by Imphal Jatra Cum Drama Association.                                 |
| Monalisha               | AIDs awareness                           | Written by Rupachandra Gosh performed by North Imphal Manipur Jatra Mandal.                                   |
| Matamgi Khoimu          | AIDs awareness                           | Written by Chana Lukhoi performed by Naharol Khongthang Artists Association.                                  |
| Thengmankharae Thabalse | AIDs awareness                           | Written by Thokchom Prafullo performed by North Imphal Manipur.   |
| Thinjur                 | AIDs awareness                           | Written by Hiyang Manisana performed by Meitei Leima Jatra Cum Drama Association.                             |
| Eidi Luhongjararoi      | AIDs awareness                           | Written by Manaobi MM   |



|                         |                |  |
|-------------------------|----------------|--|
|                         |                | performed by Imphal Jatra Cum Drama  |
| Djuko Lily              | AIDs awareness | Written by Niladhwaja Kuman performed by Bir Tikendrajit Artists Association.  |
| Minungshigi Mityeng Ama |                | Written by Niladhwaja Kuman performed by Bir Tikendrajit Artists Association.  |
| Punshi Khongchat        | AIDs awareness | Produced by Gouradhaja Sharma.   |
| Under Arrest            | AIDs awareness | Written by Ranjit Ningthouja performed by Bir Tikendrajit Artists Association. |

**Table: 3.1**

Tribal Dialect plays:

| Name of the Play                     | Theme          | Performed by  |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|---|
| Ajawui Tuishot (Tangkhol Dialect)    | AIDs awareness | Written by Ranjit Ningthouja performed by Bir Tikendrajit Artistes Association. |
| Khangban Sham Doh Ei.(Paite dialect) | AIDs awareness |   |
| Heo Neigadamin (Thadou dialect)      | AIDs awareness | Performed by United Rural Youth Artistes Manipur.                               |
| Paikan Kathan (Kabui dialect)        | AIDs awareness | Performed by All Zeliangrong Art & Cultural Organisation.                       |

**Table: 3.2**

Manipur is one of the high prevalence states in India with HIV/AIDS. Since its geographical location lies between Myanmar and India, there is a high risk of infection of HIV/AIDS in this area. Out of the 49 AIDS prevalence states in India, Manipur lies in the 4rd place. The National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) has classified Manipur as High Prevalence with 5% of the high-risk groups and more than 1% of the women in antenatal clinics tested HIV- positive. The Manipur State AIDS Control Society has utilized the medium of Shumang Leela in conveying awareness to the public by associating with the Songs and Drama Division Manipur. The project

has been organized annually for the past decade. The NACO evaluates the script; it is then proceeds to the Song Drama Division and thus the play is developed. Most of the plays are shown in the rural areas of Manipur the Hill Districts and especially to the high prevalence district of Churachandpur. From the target of 150 troupe or shows 122 troupes was shown in 2013-14.



**Fig: 3.25 The Nokphade group performing Street play.**



**Fig: 3.26 Street play performed by The Nokphade group.**