

## Chapter IV

### 4.1 Socio-economic, mass media factors and structure and form of Shumang Leela

The development of Shumang Leela can be broadly classified into three stages:

- The early stage during the reign of Maharaja Chandrakriti up till the Second World War.

Shumang Leela at the early stage performs plays related to the Hindu religion. Under the patronized of the king, plays such as Ramlila, Prahlad Chariti, Mahabharat, Ramayan was performed. Around 1907 Manipur witnessed some new form of Phagee Lila such as Kabul Pala and Phadibee Pala. It is assumed that the Harichandra play was flourished sometime in 1907 with the fading away of Phadibee Lila as the artists who took part in Phadibee Lila performances were found playing roles in Harichandra play. These were cheap forms of comic skit which do not have a storyline, but ridiculed the Britishers and other foreigners who came to Manipur. The language was an unintelligible mixture of English, Hindi, Manipuri and Brajaboli etc. This mixture of language was used to appeal to the audience with an amusing sound produced through the articulation of the mixture. Under the leadership of Chandrakriti Maharaj, the festival of Durga Puja was observed in a very elegant extravagant way with pomp and joy. On this account, Dr M. Kriti have stated that, “ He (Chandrakriti Maharaj was reported to have introduced the idol of goddess Durga to be worshipped on the tenth day of the Mera which marks according to the Manipuri lunar calendar and falls between the month of September/October of 1851. On 9 April 1868, the king had made an arrangement for the construction of the Durga temple at the police station of Jiribam which locates at the western region of Manipur.” After the arrival of Vaisanisam in the Meitei society, the Meiteis adopts the culture and the tradition of the Hindu religion naturally by its choice or forcefully imposed by the higher authority. The meiteis residing in every hooks and corner of the state were forced to

worship the Hindu deities. A wave of development was observed during the leadership of Maharaja Chandrakriti (1850-1886) especially in the field of art and culture which is associated with the dance, song and festivals of the Hindu religion. So as a part of an entertainment, Phagee Leela was shown during the Durga Puja and Swaraswati Puja which add a spice to the festival.

The early stage of Shumang Lila was performed orally without any written script based on its dramatic realization. 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. The year 1918 was one of the most important years in the context of the Shumang Leela, Harichandra the first scripted play that was performed in that very year. It was reported that Harichandra was the first play that was performed having a script and a plot which is one of the important ingredients of a play. Shri Arambam Somorendro has stated that in this play Shri Aribam Amubi had come up with an idea of utilizing the courtyard or the area while performing the play. He, along with Shri Lairenmayum Chaoba had performed the play Harichandra utilizing the courtyard in full fledges.

The influence of Hindu religion was a deep impact in the Meitei society during that particular period, the society was more confined to the religious activities and practices of Hindu religion. Epics of Mahabharat, Ramayana and stories about good over evil were scared and very important for the Meitei people. The Harichandra play was performed by different groups in almost all the parts of Manipur till the post World War, unfortunately it cannot be traced about where and which group of people have started performing the play, one of the most prominent and famous group was Sagolband Harichandra Party lead by Oja (teacher) Aribam Amubi.

At a point of time, King Churachand felt that Harichandra play was too bored and not much entertaining, so he banned the play for some few years. Harichandra is a play taken from the epic of Ramayana, to entertain the audience some of the contemporary issues was also highlighted in the play, various kinds of humorous

proverb and riddles was incorporated in the play to entertain the audience but overall it happens to be a serious play.

According to the account of Arambam Somorendro, he had stated that, “In the Harichandra play, along with the narration of the story, the play projects the social conditions of the time with a bit of sarcasm. It was the time when the Manipuri society was in the grip of the Brahma Sabah and the king himself was the member of the Sabah patronized to the British rule. The oppressive character of the then regime was projected in the exploitative nature of Brahamin in the play. This character became to be known as Bamon Phattaba (evil Brahamin). The bad Brahamin by the audience of the time, the comic tradition of the Phagee plays was highlighted with character portraying the tribe and the Muslims”.

From this context, it could be observed that the society during that period was patronized by the Bharma Samaj, if anyone happens to offend the law or the norms laid down by the Brahma Samaj organization, severe punishment was imposed through taxation. Thus the play Harichandra was the only platform that could highlight the social condition faced by the public by making the play to be more realistic as not just another religious play. The artists make sure that the issues are highlighted appropriately and at the same time do not offend the king or the administrative directly.

- Post World War – The second phase of Shumang Leela

The evolution of Shumang Leela developed with the changes of the society. The performance was introduced to the public only on the religious occasion. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the 1930's till 1950's there was a great change of social and political situation in Manipur. People became deeply aware of the importance of individual freedom and the ideals of democracy. Political parties were formed and educated urban elites were led by man like Hijam Irabot who was a pioneer of Manipur who initiated the social and political movements. The Nikhil

Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha was founded by the king Sir Churachand who presides since 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1934. However, later 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. During this period, Nupi Lal, a very important event in the history of Manipur had occurred on 12 of December 1939, in which the Manipuri women revolt against the British government and the king of Manipur for exporting rice while the people of Manipur was in famine. Another important aspect of the first half of the 20th century was the emergence of news magazines like Yakairol, Deinik Manipur Patrika, Lalit Manjuri, Anouba Yug etc. And it has become a medium for the people to express their opinion.

War had also brought a drastic change to the Manipur society, on the prospect of the lifestyle, the socio-economic status and the political structure. In a paper presented by Dr N Lokendra Singh for the Manipur State Archives 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 the socio-economic life of the people. These changes have not only paved the way for the emergence of new social forces, but also prepared the necessary pre-conditions for a strong popular movement for being about broad economic and political changes in Manipur during the immediate post Second World War period”, Audience were more keen to observed plays based on the social and economic status of the state. Thus Shumang Leela plays were involved in reflecting the social milieu.

Thok Leela was one of the initial plays that present a visual representation of the social consequences, yet the play was not able to balance its responsibility to the social issues as it was able to highlight only some few of the social issues.

The big leap occurs on the journey of Shumang Leela during 1950's, powerful scripts like Puyameithaba, B.A mapa Lamboiba gave a proper presentation about social issues, it also paved a gateway for the literature loving people of Manipur to express their ideas and in bringing a professionalism in Manipuri theater. Oja Haobam Tomba's Tamna, Chengba Phagee, Yoshubi Phagee are some of the old Shumang Leela play. Chengba Phagee was originated from Charangpat (Imphal East, Thoubal District), it was based on two character Cheng and Yaibi. The play is about their beauty. Another important aspect was the introduction of comic interludes based on a far-fetched character like Khongjai (a member of a hill tribe of Manipur) and Pangal (a Manipuri Muslim). With the introduction of these characters it has helped in the process of secularization of the play, because Khongjei and Pangal communities are regarded to be untouchability community by the orthodox Manipuri Hindus.

Since 1960's the scope of Shumang Leela could be observed having a wider and larger perspectives, it has transformed a stage or a platform in propagating the social issues, in highlighting the political phenomenon. Pioneers of Manipur support the medium by providing incredible good scripts for the play, eminent writer D.C Tongbra have contributed various dramas and Shumang Leela script. Some of the renowned works of D.C Tongbra consisted of Mani Mama, Metric Pass, Meitei Chanu, and Ningol Mawa. Plays which relates to the social issues are Nungshi Leirang, Mantri Chachaoba, Chak Tangba, Wanom Sareng and Mapuna Huranba.

Nungshi Leirang was a play highlighting about the modesty of a woman, it portrayed the degrading modesty of a Meitei woman. To make the play more intense and realistic, the troupe gave more emphasis to the costume.

The Chak Tangba play shows the economic and political status of the Manipuri society, it highlights the outbreak of famine in Manipur and the movement made by the student union against the government due to the outbreak.

Shumang Leela made a huge turn in the 1970s with the introduction of Eshei Lila an additional add ups of music and playback singing on the lines of Hindi movies. It introduced the tradition of male singing in a female voice for the female role. It gave a spark of entertainment to the form and structure of Shumang Leela giving a new taste to the audience and at the same time gave awareness to the audience. Through the simple play audience were able to acquire more knowledge and about the issues prevailing in the society

All these changes in the social and political life of Manipur were reflected in the play of Shumang Lila. Historical play such as Meriaba Charan, Thok Lila, Chandrajini etc. was performed which depict the kingship and the court intrigues. Plays based on the actual historical facts of Manipur like Bharyachandra Samu Phaba, Puran Meithaba were also performed. With the rise of insurgency in Manipur and the grant of statehood in 1972, politically the Manipuri society was a tumultuous era, it marked the beginning of militarization of civil space in the state. It was reflected in the Shumang Leela plays, the play “Halakhridaba (the one who never came back) in the year 1975-76 shows the brutal crime done by the State Armed Force. The play was based on rape case of an Ukhrul girl Charui Rose by BSF personnel in 1974 who later commits suicide; it shows the manifested power of the State as the play was banned. The play Eegi Nong (rain of blood) by Chana Lukhoi depicts the violence of the State force to the civilian. The writer was locked up in the prison due to this play.

Shumang Lila was originated at a time when the wave of Hinduism was at its highest peak. It had emerged as an important part of the Manipur culture of resistance carrying the voice of their plight for culture and political identity.

#### **4.2 Shumang Leela Festival:**

The Manipur State Kala Academy, an apex body of Art and Culture and the Manipur State Shumang Leela Council had organized the All Manipur Jatra festival at Mapal Kangjeibung (open ground situated at the heart of Imphal city) for the first

time on May 2, 1965, it was taken over by the publicity department as Plan Exhibition in 1968 till 1972, latter in the year 1973 the name Jatra was changed to Shumang Leela as it seems to be inappropriate for the name Jatra due to the introspection phase of the society by the name Jatra on this theater form. The main purpose of organizing the festival was to promote the art form, to nurture and develop it, to make this art form more refined. Since then the festival had been organized yearly in the month of December or January. Competition was conducted among the troupes, during the festival, in which prizes are also given to the best performance. The competition has been organized to make sure that the play is able to update the social milieu, to have more refine plays, to be more precise and projective. New waves of presentation could be observed in the Shumang Leela festival, which creates the popularity of the Shumang Leela play and also provides a platform for the young aspiring artist to show their talent. In a way it can also track down the number of troupe registered yearly.

Initially Shumang Leela was truly an entertaining medium; it was focused on entertaining the audience. Various developments could be observed in this phase of Shumang Leela in the manner of costume, dialog, make up, gait, acting style more emphasis was given to the story and the script of the play. The State Kala Academy has molded this art form by organizing the festival paving an opportunity for the expert and researcher to analysis this art form and attracts them to study on this art form.

With the inauguration of A.I.R, in Imphal in 1963 the dimension of Shumang Leela was more expanded, A.I.R started broadcasting Shumang Leela once in a week in one of the rural program(Khunganggi Thouram). It was aired for half an hour.

#### **4.3 Nupi Shumang Leela (Female Shumang Leela):**

Nupi Shumang Leela is a Shumang Leela play performance performed by the female artist only. Earlier female never participated in a Shumang Leela play, it was

only the male artist who performs the play, even for a role of a female was performed by male disguised himself as a female but only in a rare play of Harichandra 1918 a woman took part in it. In the Harichandra play the role of Leiba was portrayed by Yumnam Amubi Devi.

The Nupi Shumang Leela was started in the year 1975/76. The womenfolk of Manipur had initiated the play performed by women by marking a place in the society. Unlike the male Shumang Leela, the Nupi Shumang Leela troupes never mobilized in and around the locality for performance due to various domestic and social constraints. The Nupi Shumang Leela troupes (female Shumang Leela groupes) performed a play based on the historic stories of Meitei community, mainly on the Moirang kangleirol (chronicle of Moirang kingdom an area which lies in the south west region of Manipur), it was a movement to retrieve the tradition of Moirang Praba in Shumang Leela, which was replaced by the social plays since 1950's. Some of the play, which highlights the social relevance, was Ahingi Heloi, Matamgi Thouna, Nupigi Thoun, E Gi Sambal.

#### **4.4 Shumang Leela since 1980's till date:**

Since 1980, social criticism has become more clear and relentless, owing to the outlook of the Manipur society, Shumang Leela picks up the issues of insurgency, counter-insurgency, oppressed by the security forces, family affairs, state administration, rampant corruption, unemployment problems prevailing in the state, drug abused and women empowerment, also the social stigma against the upper and lower caste of the society. It endorsed the thought of the common people and the curiosity felt in the spectator's mind.

CID 117, a detective play, Daku Jagat Singh, Abir khan are some of the famous play that gave a new wave to the Shumang Leela journey. CID was the first play where electronic device was used in projecting the play, which added a new taste to the viewers.



Despite suppression done by the State, the Shumang Leela play always wins the heart of the audience by showing the corrupted politics of the state. The play Langpungi Pungkhoh (the sounds of the war drum) 1994-95, address the origin of insurgency in Manipur with threadbare analysis of the “Merger Agreement”. While the play, Natonchabigi Basanta (2004) projects the interference of the insurgents in the daily existence of civilian.

Plays based on the themes of corruption, extortion, the effect of alcoholism, drug abuse causing violence against women were projected, failure of law and order in the State, family dispute, communal harmony, women empowerment, degradation of culture and tradition with the influence of westernization were also depicted. The play “Sahergi Meiri” (the fire of the City) 1990-1991 shows the malfunction of the society due to drug abuse, extortion and corruption by the government with the promise of providing job.

The play E GI Mahao (The taste of the blood) was so popular that it inspired the filmmakers to remake it as a film. Various films were remade from the Shumang Leela plays, some of the films are Pizza, Leikang Thambal, Keishamthong Thoibi. Abir Khan etc. There are also plays extract from the context of nation and international platform and performed in a local way, such as Devdas, Lidisi GI Gulap (The rose of Lidisi), Opium War, World Trade Centers, Memsaab ki Saree.

It could be stated that, Shumang Leela is no longer confined to the tiny state of Manipur, the work of this art have touched the globe, it has crossed the boundary and the cultural barriers by exposing the platform to another state. The Sanaleibak Nachom Artistes Association has performed the play “Meigi Ching (volcano) at the Maghadoot Open Air Theater of National School of Drama, New Delhi in 2000. The troupe had participated in the 11<sup>th</sup> Indian People’s theater association (IPTA) in Thrissur (Kerala) held from January 12 to 12. 2001. Besides their performance at the IPTA conference the troupe was able to win the heart of the audience of Kerela by performing the play at remote areas of Kerela. The troupe performs 11 shows at

Kerela; they gave their performance at Darwad (Karnataka), Prithvi Theater (Mumbai), and IMA Hall (Pune), all together performing 24 shows during the journey. The troupe has also marked its place at the International platform, giving a performance at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow (Russia) in 2001. The play, “World Trade Centre” a compilation of 36 min by L.Somi Roy was screened at the 2002 Margaret Mead International Festival these are some of the remarkable achievements made this art form in presenting the state to the nation and to other countries.

Shumang Leela a traditional media is able to maintain its identity even with the introduction of electronic media. The medium of Shumang Leela was able to reach the audience through electronic media. The Doordarsan Kendra Imphal has broadcast the Shumang Leela play since the early 90’s which gives the audience to watch the play even at home in their television set even if they happens to miss out watching a live performance. The popularity of Shumang Leela has increased more with the raging prospect of digitalization, today Shumang Leela can be observed from any place or corner of the globe through internet. The Internet has made a larger and bigger platform for Shumang Leela.

#### 4.5 How is Shumang Leela performed?



Fig: 4.1 The Shumang Leela performed at the open space with a stage set up, surrounded by the audience. **Photo Credit: Siddharth Haobijam**

Shumang Leela was performed without a script initially; it was performed in a very simple style without any proper staged or any set. No heavy props such as curtain, background, wardrobe, or visual effect etc. where required. It can also be termed as a theater play through its way of performance in which the play is performed in the middle of the audience, surrounded from all sides leaving only one passage which serves as both entrance and exit. The stage is connected to the green room.

#### 4.6 Area/Space of Shumang Leela:



Fig: 4.2 The stage setup for the Shumang Leela play, at Thokchom Iboyaima Shumang Leela Complex (Shanglen) during the Shumang Leela Winter festival.

**Photo Credit: Thokchom Roshini Devi**

The Shumang Leela is performed in a courtyard or in an open space, near the river bank, at the mandap of the temple, outhouse of a house where the audience could gather or assemble covering an area of 13/13 to 16/16 of wide space.

A bamboo pole or a stick is erected in the centre of the stage to place the light in order to make the audience watch the play more clearly. Petroleum, hand lamp or electrical lamp was used as a source of light for the stage. A small altar (Tulsibong) which is symbolized by the Tulsi (sacred basil) plant is located at the middle of the stage below the bamboo pole, where an offering is made to the god. It is considered to be a custom or a tradition to offer the mandali puja (offering of fruits, flower, betel

nuts and leaves along with burning candles and burning incense) to the alter before the performance begins.

#### **4.7 Season:**

The Shumang Leela season begins from the Yaosang (Holi) festival/ Dol Jatra and continues performing throughout the year except the rainy seasons (June- July- August) and the school board exams (February). Shumang Leela is also associated with the marriage ceremony, the groom sponsor the play a day or two ahead of the ceremony. It is also performed as a part of celebration of new born baby (Soisti Puja), Na-Hutpa (a ceremony of piercing of ears of an infant which occurs in the fifth or six months of the infant), Lukun-thangba (secret threat wearing ceremony, which marks the adult of a boy). Shumang Leela is performed as an entertainment program during carnival time host by the Leikai (community) or khul (village). It is also performed at the Shraadha (death ceremony) and Phiroi (death anniversary).

#### **4.8 The Green Room:**

The Green room is set up as the partition at the corner of the room or at the verandah. The green room is located either in the northwestern (koubru) corner and the southwestern (Moirang Laiji) corner of the courtyard. It covers about 8/8 ft wide located approximately 60 or 70 feet away from the stage or the courtyard.

The troupes believe the green room to be an integral/sacred place since the early period till dated, the troupes treats the green room to be an auspicious place. In the green room, four mats (phak) are placed in the four directions, one on the right (Phamen) of the verandah, another to the opposite of Phamen the left side (Mangshok), and the other two mats are laid at the eastern side (Nongpok) and the southern side (Nongchup). The senior most among the artist of the troupe used the right side (phamen) of the mat, the artist playing the female role used the left side (mangshok) mat and the remaining mats placed on the eastern and southern side of the mat are used by the other artists of the troupe.

The artists pay homage to Khangjeng Lairembi (the goddess of theater), the deity of the locality, after paying homage the artist placed the mats. Water is sprinkled in the middle of the room to clean it. Some offerings are placed at the middle of the room to pay homage to the deity of the area seeking for blessings. The mat at the right side (phamen) is placed in a way that the other mat does not overlap it. The mat used by the Nupi Sabi (female impersonators) should not touch the other mats used by other artists. One should not cross the mat on his way for the performance and also the mats should not be rolled up until and unless the performance gets over. The troupe believes that the performance of the Shumang Leela begins from the green room.

The requirements needed in the green room consist of four mats, one bucket of water, hair oil, mirror, comb, towel or a piece of cloth.



Fig: 4.3 Shumang Leela artists getting ready for the performance in the Green Room. Photo Credit: Thokchom Roshini Devi.



Fig: 4.4 The female artists wearing makeup and using a different mat at the left side (mangshok) in the green room. Photo Credit: Thokchom Roshini Devi



Fig: 4.5 The most senior artist of the troupe (Oja Keirao Rajen) using the right side (phamen) mat in the green room. Photo Credit: Thokchom Roshini Devi.



Fig: 4.6 The partway of the entrance and exit from the green room to the stage.

**Photo Credit: Thokchom Roshini Devi.**

#### **4.9 How the Shumang Leela begins:**

The audiences are always aware of the Shumang Leela play before the day of the performance itself, the notification or the news of the show is spread in a traditional way through mouth to mouth communication. The audience's prepared for the performance since morning, every member of the house in the locality get ready for the show since ahead of the scheduled. Normally, the Shumang Leela play is performed in the evening hours; the housewife prepared the dinner early so that they could finish off their chores early and there on time for the show. The womenfolk and children carry their own mat, tool and assemble at the venue for the show. There is no seat arrangement in a Shumang Leela performance. It is based on the first come, first served process, sometime boys and teenagers used to climb trees which are grown nearby the stage/courtyard and watch the play.

The artists take blessings from the most senior person of the locality or from the teacher (guru) the director with the believed, that they are able to perform the play



with a clear mind and able to concentrate and focus on the play. It has been a tradition since the early period of Shumang Leela.



**Fig: 4.7 Illustration of how the Shumang Leela begins with the artist.**

Among the artists one plays the dholak (drum) while two or three of the artists plays the kritan and starts the play with an invocation song to the god, the king or the motherland. This is called Kouwaj, the leader of the troupe shouts, “O brethren, let us sing the glory of the motherland,” the other member’s answers, “Let us sing” by taking a procession towards the stage from the green room. After this, another song knows as Beitha is sung which shows as giving respect to the audience, until 1957-58 Kouwaj was sung based on religious themes as an invocation of lord Krishna and goddess Radha, but later on the lyrics and tune was transformed into a patriotic song

which was introduced by Mutum Bori. While the rest of the artists' who stays in the green room, also sings the song. After the song is sung, one of the artists from the sound section gives a formal welcome speech to the audience; a brief summary is made about the theme of the play and requesting the audience to be forgiven if any error/mistake is made by the troupes during the performances. The scenes fade in and fade out with the entry and exist of the actors. It is a tradition for the artists of the troupe who are in the green room to leave aside all the equipments, used by them and join in singing the invocational song.

As soon as the invocational song is finished the crowd cheers, whistles and clap their hands, as this is the indication of starting the play.

#### **4.10 The Audience of Shumang Leela:**

Shumang Leela has survived only due to the love shower by the audience, without the support of audience Shumang Leela would never be a complete medium. The Shumang Leela audience consists of women, children, elders, men, and educated/uneducated people.

According, to the theory of Brijit Ngamgomba (Director/pioneer of Shumang Leela), he has categories audience into four specified ways:

- An innocent child who is not biased or conditioned,
- A guru, critics who can reflect the play absorbed the theme and decides or reacts to it.
- A deaf person who only observes the play.
- A blind person who can only hear.

Shumang Leela is performed at the centre of the courtyard (Shumang), the audiences come from the surround locality occupying the whole courtyard leaving only the space for the performance. Women usually comes in small groups ahead of

the scheduled and meet the lady of the host, greets her and take their seat on the verandah and also on the steps, it is a customary for the womenfolk to greet the lady of the house and take their seats. The right side of the courtyard is occupied by the male and the left side of the courtyard by the female and the children. The orchestra of the troupes is seated at the northwestern corner of the courtyard just next to the stage, the playback singers are also seated along with the musician.

The overall public is the audience of the Shumang Leela; it could be classified into two groups based on the demographic location of the state.

#### **Audience in Rural Areas:**

The impact of audience is more in rural areas, comparing the urban areas. The Shumang Leela troupe prefers performing plays in rural areas than the urban areas as they receive a direct involvement from the audience, giving a deeper connection with the audience on an intimate level. The audiences are well maintained in rural areas, each and every member of the locality assembles in the venue to watch the play. The essence of festivity is more in rural areas, and they celebrate their fullest when it comes to entertainment like Shumang Leela.

#### **Audience in Urban Areas:**

People staying in urban areas watch Shumang Leela in festive occasion only, during Holi and Durga festival, also in certain ceremonies, the Shumang Leela festival organized by The State Kala Academy. Average population staying in urban area is confined with their busy schedule so it is quite difficult to watch or organized Shumang Leela in normal days rather than in festival seasons, moreover there are various modes of entertainment to keep themselves busy.

#### **4.11 Common Props of the Shumang Leela:**

Shumang Leela play is performed in a very simple ways with limited props; common props of Shumang Leela consist of two chairs, a small low table, and a

flower pot placed on the table. With the razing of time a telephone set is also placed on the table. The performing space is used to indicate house, hotel, office, bedroom, scenery build up as a metaphor/mime according to the environment created by the script. In the Moirang Praba a walking stick is used to treat as a horse. By climbing the table and chairs it signifies higher altitude.

#### **4.12 Presentation of Shumang Leela:**

Shumang Leela has a unique ways of delivering the dialogue; it is different from the proscenium theater. Since it is performed at an open space or mandap, the artist makes a full effort to deliver the dialogue in a louder and clearer tone so that it can be heard by the audience. In the early period, it is important for the artist to have a loud voice while giving the performance in order to reach out to the audience, even the dialogue was repeated twice or thrice for the audience to hear. But as time evolves, the microphone has brought to bring more clarity in the presentation. It has made a firm bridge of communication for the artist and the audience.

At present microphone are placed within the stage hanging down in the four sides of the stage, in a way where the artist can move freely and utilized the platform and yet the audiences are able to hear the dialogue.

Acting in Shumang Leela differs from Proscenium Theater, here the actor has to act in all the four directions, and the actors cannot hide anything from the audience, the emotions and the dialogue should be delivered equally to all the directions of the audience. Once the actor is in the performance space he/she is left to its own, which left to the complete mercy of the audience.

#### **4.13 Light:**

Shumang Leela is usually performed at evening, so proper set up of light was indeed necessary for the audience to watch the performance. A bamboo pole is placed at the centre of the stage to hold the lantern, in older days lanterns were used for

lighting, at least four lanterns were used for lighting up the stage, and petrolmax was also used by some well off family while hosting the show.



**Fig: 4.8** A still from the Shumang Leela performance, where lanterns were used as a source of light.

#### **4.14 Costume and make up of Shumang Leela:**

Costume can be discussed in three ways:

- Historical Leela costume
- Moirang Praba Leela costume
- Contemporary/Modern Leela costume

#### **4.15 Costume used for the Historical Leela.**

Historical Leela is based on the historic play, simple costume were used for the play. Costume for the king consist of a turban, dhoti and Kurta like shirt, a kind of long cloth is woven around the chin which is an extension of the turban. The material of the cloth consists of velvet and sequin stitched the tops and shirt. Colorful turbans were worn by the king with silk clothing dhoti. Garland was also worn by the king projecting the well off aristocrat class and usually carried a sword. The army or the common people wore black top and dhoti. The queen wears the traditional attire, consisting of phanek mayek naiba (traditional attire of Meitei women wore at the bottom of the body woven around from the waist till the ankle), Innaphe (dupatta) and ornaments, etc. The artists do not wear shoes while performing. The costume for the female role is provided by the lady of the host or by the womenfolk of the locality.

#### **4.16 Costume used for the Moirang Praba:**

The costume for the Moirang Praba was totally different from the other types of Leela. The character of the Moirang king, Chaoba, Thonglen and other dignitaries wore a type of scripted traditional dhoti (Khamen Chatpa) which is usually a long one along with an oversize printed shirt with a long button, a velvet shirt. The arms and wrists are decorated with ornaments such as Popchaobi (a type of Meitei bracelet). For the role of Khamba and Nongban, the costume consists of velvet shirt and Ningthem Samji with other ornaments, they were long cloths wrapped their body partially leaving it to sweep the floor or just lift the cloth lightly by their hand. Weapons are carried according to their rank of administration. The army and the common people wore simple plain black cloth. The king and other dignitaries wear garlands, the queen wear velvet material blouse with ornaments. Thoibi were Phanek (traditional attire used to wear covering from the waist till the heel) and a type of ornament on her head called the Kajenglei (tiara) having a bangs hair style at the front and long behind which is popularly known as Thoibi hairstyle, a sign of unmarried female in the Meitei society.

#### **4.17 Costume of the Contemporary/Modern Shumang Leela:**

The character of the play wears the costume according to the demand of the role. The costume makes the artists more realistic, reflecting the society in terms of the elite class people and the working class. Costume plays an important role in the Shumang Leela play, it gives a different vibrant to the atmosphere of Shumang Leela. At present, the Shumang Leela gives more emphasis to the costume; there is indeed a competition on the presentation of the costume among the troupes.

#### **4.18 The Make Up of the Shumang Leela:**

Earlier, at the initial period of Shumang Leela make up does not give much significant in the Shumang Leela play. The artist wore simple make up with indigenous materials like powder, zinc, shoot, sandalwood paste, vermilion, mustard oil. Vermilion is mixed with coconut oil, which is applied to the lips and cheeks. The importance of makeup and costume has made the artist look more appropriate for the demanding role.

#### **4.19 Transportation:**

Since the olden days, the Shumang Leela troupes have arranged their own means of transportation. The troupe traveled their own to the destination, the artists used to travel by bicycles in a group. They packed their costumes, dholak and their requirements and carry along with them. At the certain occasion they even hold for the night at the venue after the performance since it may be too risky for them to travel back to their home at night. But with the evolving of time and development of road systems today the troupes hire a minibus and travels in it. Thus, it saves time and they can at least perform more shows.

#### **4.20 Duration**

There wasn't an appropriate duration of the Shumang Leela play at the initial period, since there was not a proper script the main purpose of the play was to

entertain the audience; it could go on for hours and hours. As stated by one of the eminent Shumang Leela scriptwriter Moirangthem Imo saying that the Shumang Leela play used to perform the entire night during the pre World War and audience used to stay up the whole night for the show, the Eshei Leela (song leela) used to have ten to eleven songs in a play which can stretch up to a long duration. With the development of the form and the structure of Shumang Leela and also with certain reformation made by the State Kala Academy, which in a way has groomed this art form, the Shumang Leela play is performed for two and half hours. During the Shumang Leela season the troupes usually performed 5 to 6 shows in a day, starting since 10am till morning 2am.

#### **4.21 Songs and music in Shumang Leela:**

Song and music had been part of Shumang Leela since its origin, Dholak, Ramtal and Kartal are the important music instruments for a Shumang Leela play. The actors used to sing their own song; it is replaced by playback singers. The songs for the female actors are sung by the male playback singers, in a feminine voice, it is indeed one of the unique features of Shumang Leela.

In the earlier period, dholak was used as background music in delivering the climax situation of the Shumang Leela play, also movement of animals, birds etc. Artists had to sing a song of their own and the rhythm was given by the dholak and ramtal.

Musical instrument such as tabla, harmonium, piano, patdum, violin, guitar, mouth organ, flute, marcus, dulki, pena, saxophone, mandolin etc were later adopted to create more climax to the play and define in creating the emotion of the actors, which completes the whole package of acting according to the situation of the theme. In the two hours of play there are at least two or three songs.



#### **4.22 How the troupes are invited for the performance.**

The invitation of the Shumang Leela troupes was done in a very simple way earlier, the host goes to the residence of the member representing a particular troupe, whom, the host would like to invite and make the invitation ahead of the days or month of which the host prefers to play. The show It is a tradition for the hosts to place a Dakshina (offering) Rs 1 or Rs 10 along with betle leave and nuts (Kwa tanga) decorated in a banana leaf.

The troupe issue a slip, giving details about the name of the play, the location of the organization terms and condition of the troupe, the materials required for the play.

There are no ticket system or entrance fees for Shumang Leela except for the Shumang Leela festival. Anyone can go and watch the performance, which is done in the open ground. Around 1977/78 at rural areas Shumang Leela was performed through ticket system in this way the money received could be shared by the troupe and the organizer, but it didn't survive.

The rate of the performance differs from one troupe to another and also the distribution of fees among the artists in a troupe differs from one to another troupe. At present, the standard charge of the performance is Rs 25000 or less, but in most of the occasions the troupes end up getting less amount than they have charge. Shumang Leela is performed in a locality platform, it survives only with the supports of the public, so it is very important to have a good and firm relation with the public, and it grows only with the interest of the public, so the Shumang Leela troupes are always open for a negotiation in the matter of the performance charge. Thus the troupe never receives the actual amount of money which they have set up for the performance charge.

The troupe, which gets the first and second place in the Shumang Leela competition are hired more than the other troupes throughout the year, even the performances charges are also higher than the rest of the troupes.

#### **4.23 The Shumang Leela Troupe:**

The Shumang Leela troupe consists of a group of artists forming a small group and performing a play. The outcome of a good Shumang Leela play is achieved through the contribution of the each and every member of the troupe. The actors, the musician, the playback singers, the driver in charge of transportation, they cooperate and work together.

Earlier, the troupe was named according to the name of the locality/community where it was set up such as Sagolband party, Khwairakpam party, Keishampat Moirang Praba, Kongpal Moirang Praba, etc. the name of the troupes were names of places situated in Imphal. With the evolving situation and the development of Shumang Leela, the troupes have transformed into a governing body, making this art form more professional. The first registration was done in 1960 by Nabakumar of Eastern Jatra Cum Drama Association. There are 20 registered groups of Shumang Leela Nupa group (Men's group) and 22 registered Nupi Leela group (women's group) but among the registered group hardly 5 groups are known by the audience. Sangai Artist Association, Peace Marker Artist association, The North Imphal Jatra Mandal, Lamjingba Artiste Association, Naharol Khongthang Artist Association Sana Leibak Nachom Artist Association etc. are some of the famous names of the troupes.

There are 10 to 12 artists in a troupe, in which 4 or 5 of the artist plays the female role known as Nupi Sabi (female impersonators) basically the male actresses. They have various similarities of feminine quality in terms of their looks, bodily gestures and facial expressions. Shumang Leela is a medium that travels from one community to another, regardless of the day or night, the role of the female is done by the Nupi Sabi as it would be difficult for the female to participate in the late hours. The popularity of the troupes depends upon the beauty of the Nupi Sabi, the audience looks forward to the play if the troupe represents to the most beautiful Nupi Sabi.

The activity of the troupe is to gather and practice the play distribute the performance fees, to select the best artist, select the script and writer, select the cast, the director and work on the sponsorship for the play.

Most of the actors hail from the rural and semi-urban areas, the actors have to be physically fit and should have a high potential of stamina as they have to perform more than 3 shows daily. Most of the Shumang Leela actors are age between 18 to 60 years.

#### **4.24 Shumang Leela Complex:**

The Thokchom Iboyaima Shumang Leela Complex (Shanglen) was inaugurated on 12<sup>th</sup> of February, 2004, for the opening of the 32<sup>nd</sup> All Manipur Shumang Leela Festival. It was inaugurated by the then Governor of Manipur, Shri Arvind Dave, which was sponsored by the Manipur State Kala Academy, at Hapta Kangjeibung, Palace Compound, Imphal. On this occasion, Shri Dave spoke of the importance of the art form and play, which was intertwined with all facets of life. Over the contemplating culture of Shumang Leela, he referred to it as antique or relevance from day of the year, since the time of the rule of the Kings, and its development as being remarkable, becoming a substantial mass media.

The late Thokchom Iboyaima Singh was a person who loves this art form and had helped in raising the standard of the Shumang Leela. His wife Smt. L Sanatombi Devi worked on the vision of her foregone husband by constructing the Shumang Leela Complex with the full cooperation of the Manipur State Shumang Leela Council. To encourage the work of the artist, she has instituted the award, “Thokchom Iboyaima Singh Award”, a cash award of Rs. 10,000/- (Rupees ten thousand), a citation along with a shawl since 2002 onwards.

#### **4.25 The Shumang Leela Script Writer:**

There is always a close and interrelation between the writer and the Shumang Leela troupe. The success of a play depends upon the story of the play, Shumang

Leela script writer is the backbone of a Shumang Leela play. Initially, the script writer gets paid with some money for the hardship of writing, but presently the Shumang Leela troupes hired their own script writer and provide an equal amount of money as received by the artist in the troupe or either the troupe had to pay the amount demand by the script writer.