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Ref ICH/SADA-2014-15

Date 14th June 2015

To

Shri Amit Saxena
Intangible Cultural Heritage Section.
Sangeet Natak Akademi
New Delhi

Subject: Submission of 1st progress Report for the project on **Growth of Manipuri Theatre During 1902-1943** under the scheme for **Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India.**

Sir,

With reference to your letter no.28-6/ICH-Scheme/33/014-15/12760 dated 12th March 2015, I have the honour to submit 1st report of the project **Growth of Manipuri Theatre During 1902-1943**, this period is known as the *Pre 2nd World War Manipuri Proscenium Theatre*. The first report contains three chapters viz:

Chapter I - The advent of Western Theatre in Manipur and its up growth
Chapter II - Pre Second World War Director's View, Thought and Contribution
Chapter III- Study on Pre 2nd World War Play Production Technique and Style

In the 2nd and final report, I am going to submit two more chapters and more rare photographs of Manipuri Proscenium theatre during the period from 1902-1943, also, planning to publish a book on this subject.

Regarding this particular project, I have met more than 15 resource persons, read related 17 English book, read related 14 Manipuri books, read 16 Manipuri Journals. Also I have taken around 30 rare photographs. The bibliography of this project is attached at the last four pages. Hard copy of this particular project report is sending by speed post tomorrow.

Yours Faithfully



Enclosed: as above

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Manipur

Chapter I

The advent of Western Theatre in Manipur and its up growth

Prior to the study of the advent of Western Theatre (Proscenium Theatre) in Manipur, a look at the native Manipuri theatre is vital. Lai Haraoba has been existing in Manipur since time immemorial and has served as the provenance for the all forms of Art. Theatre is no exception. Almost all the elements of theatre – music, dance, witty snip-snap, body motion communication, games and sports, story, festive elements, dress and costume, proper space for show etc. are also basic entities of Lai Haraoba. So it would not be extravagant to say that the Manipuri Theatre in its own style and character come in to existence since time immemorial. Noticeably Ukaikappa, Hiyang-Tannaba (boat race), Mukna (wrestling), Mukna Kangjei, Kang, Thang-Ta (Martial- Art) etc. are province for entertainment and recreation of the land. Such abundance of festivals and entertainment source was further enriched after the advent of Vaishnavish in the year 18th century during the reign of Maharaja Gambhirsingh (1709- 1748). The Hindu religion brought with it numerous festive occasions which in due course amalgamation into the then existing festivals of the land. To mention some – Raas Leela, Nata Sankirtana, Udukhol, Gostha, Sabhaparva, Biratparva, Dronparva, Khubak Ishei, Kaliyadaman, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Goura Leela etc. are all festive occasions of the Hindu cult. The impressions left on the Meetei Kings was great Maharaja Chandrakirti (1851-1886) arranged an Open Air Theatre by the riverside of Chandranadi Turel (river) for staging Kaliyadaman. The play was a grand success and is still remembered for its performance space and the dedication of the actors. With these the Manipuri folk theatre viz Phagi Leela (Comedy), Sumang Leela, and Moirang Parva grew up. Such trend of theatrical movement laid the ground clear for the introduction of Proscenium Theatre in Manipur and its growth and development.

The year 1891 is significant historically for the decline of the Manipuri Kingship and the British occupation of Manipur. In the succeeding years they gradually accumulated the national power and in 1902 they achieved a steady government. It was in this year that the Bengalis for the first time introduced the Western drama Proscenium Theatre in Manipur (It is probable that there might have been some spirit of the said theatre before this time but with no evident trace/proof, the general acceptance favours this year). The idea of Proscenium Theatre normally goes with a stage/podium which faces the audience on one side only. The basic structure includes the curtain, rolling screen, back drop, light and wings (exit and entrance for

the actors and actress). Briefly Proscenium Theatre can be defined as a theatre where the drama staged is designed so as to face the audience on one side only. The year 1902 is significant for the growth movement of theatre also. It was in this year the first stage was erected at the Govindaji temple (Purana Rajbari of one time, at present land estate of Raja Dumbra Singh) where Religious Play '*Pravas Milan*' was staged. Shri Biharilal Chaterjee was the playwright. With the consent from Sir Churachand Maharaja, the play was performed by the Manipuris in Bengali script. By that time a large section of the Manipuri populations spoke Bengali which they considered as being courteous and cultured. So, there was little difficulty for both the audience and the actors. The pioneering actors of this first proscenium theatre in the history of the growth of theatre in Manipur are Sarvashree Rajkumar Chinglensana (in the role of Basudev), Lalgopal Sharma (in the role of Nanda), Guru Kulabidhu of dancers' school (in the role of Krishna) etc. In the initial stage there was no actress. So the actors had to take the female roles too and remarkably Sarvashree Chingsubam Gopalsana enacted the role of Smt. Radhika in the first ever staged, Proscenium Theatre *Pravas Milan* in Manipur with Lalji Sharma (Lakpa – a post in the court of kings) as Jatila, the then Head Pandit of Pettigrew School as Kutila and Shri Nongmaithem Thanil Singh as Rakshini. As mentioned in the *Manipuri Sumang Leela Amasung Theatre* of the renowned theatre activist Shri Ayekpam Shyamsunder Singh, the directors of the play were 1) Leihaothabam Rehati Sharma, 2) Nambam Khonglen and 3) Chingakham Jatishwor respectively. However Sukumar Bagchee's statement is on the contrary, he mentions:

The first drama played in Manipur was a Bengali drama -Pravas Milan. The drama was directed by two persons; one was Gopal Singh Selungba and the other one, a Bengalee - Saratchandra Ghosh.

One may note that *Pravas Milan* is not the work of one guru only but is the unsurpassed product of a collected effort of many renowned gurus. Therefore the aforesaid gurus too might have had rendered contributions on their own parts. However controversies in opinion still linger. But the fact that Ayekpam Shyamsunder Singh was greatly privileged with Shri Nongmaithem Thanil Singh's intimate acquaintance and help in writing *Manipuri Sumang Leela Amasung Theatre* marks the possibility of *Pravas Milan* being the work of the combined effort of the three gurus acclaimed by Shri Ayekpam Shyamsunder Singh.

After *Pravas Milan*, the first event that marked the development and growth of Proscenium Theatre in Manipur was the construction of a theatre hall Bamacharan Mukhopadhyaya Bandhav Natyashala at Bapupara previously known as Haobam Leikai in the year 1903. The hall was thatch roofed and faced eastward. *Mewar Patan* a historical play in Bengali script was the first to have been performed in that theatre. In due course the

Bamacharan Mukhopadhyaya Bandhav Natyashala developed rapidly with the enthusiastic zeal and relentless effort of the Bengali officers. Mention might be made of Rohinikumar Sharma (B.E.M.D.O - P.W.D), Naranchandra Mukherjee, Hemantakumar Ganguli, Jaminisundar Guha, Binodchandra Sen etc. These Bengali officers appealed to the then Political Agent Colonel Shakespeare for construction of a school, club, and a cultural hall. The appeal was readily granted. Above it the political agent himself assisted the group by making a list of their government servants for contributions. The glory of the movement was marked by the support from the then Maharaja of Manipur Sir Churachand and Political Agent who themselves became great patrons. Thus rapid growth and change was evident in Manipur Proscenium Theatre. In 1904 the Bamacharan Mukhopadhyaya Bandhav Natyashala was renamed as Manipur Friends' Dramatic Union. In the succeeding years the pace of development gained momentum and in 1917 contractors and businessmen of the time contributed a more proper hall with tin roof that faced southward. Till 1937 there wasn't another hall besides this. Numerous folk and historical plays in Bengali were performed in this hall e.g. Reziya, Bangebarjee, Pandava-Kourava, Jayadeva, Ranidurgabati, Anudhavjer, Hari Sudh, Sita, Iraner Rani, Karna-Arjuna, Rrithiviraj Sanjukta, Bilvamongol, Kedar Rai etc. All these plays were based mainly on Bengali themes. Till 1921, there had been no Manipuri playwrights, the actors were mostly Manipuris, though some Bengalis too took some roles. Some popular actors of the time were Ningthemchamayum Birchandra Singh, Chingakham Mayurdhavja Singh (1888-1944), Nongmaithem Thanil Singh (1888-1974), Hijam Irabot Singh (1896-1951), Dr. Kirti etc. Among the Bengalis are may note Rohinikumar Sharma, Jaminisundar Guha, Jugol Mukherjee, Phanibhusan Mukherjee, Bhabhaniranjan Ganguli, Rebatimohan Chaturjee, Dr. Bomkesh, Shasank Bhusan Mukherjee etc. One remarkable feature of the dramas of the period was that though played in alien scripts on alien themes, the Manipuris took vital roles.

The directors were Jaminisundar Guha and Hari Chaturjee from amongst the Bengalis and Chingakham Mayurdhavja from the Manipuris. Thus the Manipuris and the Bengalis jointly put enviable effort to manifest Proscenium Theatre in Manipur. Today the Bamacharan Mukhopadhyaya Bandhav Natyashala exists as an idolatry ground for the worship of goddess Durga.

After this followed a period of rapid magnification of Phambak Leela (Proscenium Theatre). Many temporary halls were erected in localities where numerous dramas were staged. In 1905 Shri Bihari Singh from Cashar Kanhailalpur, the then head Pundit of Pettigrew School translated *Paglani*, Bengali drama into Manipuri and staged it in the temporary local Phambam Leela. As stated in *Manipuri Meihourolgi Wari Matek Ama*, Shri Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh (1892-1955) acclaims *Paglani* as the first drama played in Manipuri language. The fact

though undisputed, the need for an analytic discourse is indicated by Ayekpam Shyamsundar in his book *Manipuri Sumang Leela Amasung Theatre*:

Despite the variant opinion, one may assert that *Paglani* though with magnanimous Bengali, is the first play with a little Manipuri language in it. In this play Manipuri's pioneering actor and director Shri Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh (1893-1955) in his early childhood (at the age of 13/14) introduce himself in the drama playing the role of a tuberculosis pneumatic patient. According to him Shri Guru Bihari Singh, the translator and director of *Paglani* was his guru both in his academic education and drama.

The year 1910 is significant in the history of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre. Since then on drama, both in Bengali and Manipuri were played annually on Sarswati Pujah. Above it the Manipuri State Education Department started to produce plays under the guidance of four theatre enthusiasts – 1) Kshetrimayum Munal Singh, School Sub-Inspector; 2) Chingakham Jatishwor, Head Pundit; 3) Khwairakpam Nabakishwor Singh, Head Pundit; and 4) Chongkham Khamba, Master. This elite group may be asserted as the first school of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre. As the guru from Cashar (a district of Assam) they tend to lisp in their speech and this defective speech was regarded as the speech for drama.

For the first time in the history of Manipuri Theatre Sir Churachand Maharaja, in the year 1917, under his gracious discretion sent Shri Khwirakpam Nabakishwor to Calcutta for research and study on theatre. He was the first to have attained such a privilege. Besides being a good actor himself, he took immense interest in touring round the state to teach and propagate the art of theatre. As a part of his endeavour he organized a theatre group in his own localities Yumnam Leikai and started to produce by erecting temporary stage for the purpose at the lawn of sylvan deity Yumjao Lairembi. He may be regarded as a unique theatre director and actor.

By this time the pace of the growth of Proscenium Theatre in Manipur gained momentum rapidly. Around 1914 Shri Khaidem Nongyai Singh (1887-1953) of Uripok Khaidem Leikai, the then school teacher of Johnston School translated the Bengali play *Partha Parajoy* into Manipuri enliven it with music. The drama was performed in his own Sangoi (out house with three wall face). The very drama was performed in Johnston School on Sarswati Pujah. Not only did translate the drama, he himself acted the role of Arjuna. In fact *Partha Parajoy* was the first drama in proper Manipuri language with Manipuri songs and music in it.

Succeeding to this came out Akoijam Amubi Singh's *Bijay Maloti*. It was the first social play in Manipuri. Though the drama was the translated Manipuri version of the Bengali play *Kanhar*, the playwright's distinctive individuality was vivid.

In no time the Proscenium Theatre movement spread far on wings and covered the rural areas. On November 25, 1923 theatre enthusiasts of Nambol formed the "Leela Samiti" and on its first foundation day the group performed a Bengali drama *Prahlad Charit* based on Hindu myth. The drama was directed by Shri Okram Ibomcha Singh (1899-1983).

The most remarkable and significant stage in the growth of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre is the performance of *Narasingh* organized by the staff of Manipur State Police Department at the Shri Shri Govindajee Mandap. Under the gracious franchise from His Kingship Sir Churachand Maharaja a stage was erected at the Govindajee Mandap on 30th September 1925 and exactly at 8.30 p.m. the drama *Narasingh* in the gracious presence of his Lordship was glamorously performed. Everyone in the field of theatre is in dept of Shri Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh (1895-1966) who in the year 1922 wrote this drama that marks the beginning of Manipuri Natya Sahiya. This is thus asserted for *Narasingh* was the first historic drama in the true national spirit of the land written by a Manipuri in Manipuri language. As mentioned in the introduction of the drama, every detailed information and data was thoroughly studied and carefully handled.

Many prominent actors of the time put their collective effort in the play. One could witness Shri Khomdram Dhanachandra Singh in the role of Narasingh, Shri Nongan Singh as Gokul Sharma, Shri Hijam Irabot Singh (1896-1951) as Kumud, Shri Akanta Subedar as Awa Senapati, Shri Mayanglambam Jatra Singh in the role of Maharaja Gambhir Singh and many others. Regarding the preparatory arrangements, the drama being the franchise of His Kingship, followed detailed procedures that was magnanimous in itself. In matters like dress, costume and make-up one could witness a liberated style from the realistic trend. All the characters stick to a fixed make-up, dress and costume regardless of the tone, action and mood of the drama.

However the drama enlivened with melodious patriotic songs could appears the audience and acclaims a historic place on its own account.

The period could witness rapidity and vigour in the growth of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre. Such rapidity accounts from numerous factors. Public enthusiasm appeals significant importance. People (preferably men folk) considered themselves privileged in taking part in theatre performances. Another important factor is the numerous playhouses that cropped up during the period and dedication of the theatre groups with their relentless effort to shape the movement. In fact the growth of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre is an orderly though rapid event in which many men bore a part. For a more comprehensible account, one may look into the footprints of these theatre groups.

Manipur Dramatic Union:

It was the glorious year 1928, the seed of Manipur Dramatic Union was sown on the soil of Manipur. Under the keen leadership of Shri Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh, the “Yaiskul Nupimacha Drama Party” came into being at Yaiskul, Imphal. As a part of the Yaoshang (Holi) festivities, the group performed *Sati Khongnang* the first historic drama from the pen of Shri S. Lalit Singh, at Shri Ngangbam Shyamkishwor Singh, (brother of Maharani Dhanamanjuri) the then Cheirap (court) member’s frontal outhouse. The drama may be noted for the ignominy of Shri S. Lalit Singh. His contribution was indispensable. Besides being the playwright he was also the director cum actor. Every possible energy was put into for vivid realization of Nature in the real material.

Another unique figure in the drama was Mahakavi Hijam Anganghal Singh (1892-1943). Besides being an actor in the play, he took a vital role in the overall production as an organizer. Mention may also be made of Shri Ayekpam Gourabidhu Singh, Angom Basanta Kumar Singh, Ngangbam Jugolchandra Singh, Irengbam Tilak, Leimapokpam Chaoba who took important roles in the drama. Characters associating song sequences are taken by Nilakanta Sharma. After this the group successfully performed Mahakavi Hijam Anganghal’s *Thabal Chongbi* and *Nimai Sanyas*. Compliments rallied one after another. The previous concept of esteeming the Bengalis only as skilled dramatists dimmed.

The success of these performances had a great impact on the theatre activities of the time. On 17th April, 1930, a lengthy discourse on the formation of Manipuri Dramatic Union took place at Ngangbam Shyamkishwor’s residence at Yaiskul, Imphal. Among the members were Shri Chingakham Mayurdhavja (the then Cheirap member), Ngangbam Shyamkishwor Singh (Cheirap member), Hijam Irabot Singh (Sadar Panchayet member) and Nongmaithem Thanil Singh (Preskar). In the discourse that followed, Shri Ngangbam Shyamkishwor Singh moved a proposal for ticket performance. The idea behind his proposal reflected the disturbances caused by the crowd during the performance. According to him, a ticket performance would not only limit the disturbances during performance, it would enhance the fund of the group. Almost every member present in the meeting opposed the motion on the ground that the strategy would not meet the present standard of Manipur audience. However Shri Shyamsundar, despite the strong contrary opinions, was determined in his objective to raise the mutual fund of the group. He was even ready to meet all the expenses for the show and if needed he would buy all the tickets and be the sole audience of the show. At the force of such convictions, none could stand long. The arguments subsided gradually and all the energy focused on the sole object – “when a few Bengali could build a playhouse, why can’t the Manipuris build one on the own effort?” Everyone in the meeting unanimously resolved to execute the proposal i.e. to show ticket

performance and with the hauled up money start the foundation for a stable playhouse. For a minute discussion on the details of the project they invited Shri Khomdram Dhanachandra Singh (the then Inspector of Police) and subsequently a six member committee was formed. Except for Shri Kh. Dhanachandra Singh all other five members belonged to the Yaiskul area. Then the meeting followed a rally on the naming of the group. The five members from Yaiskul proposed "Yaiskul Nupimacha Drama Party". However Shri Kh. Dhanachandra Singh could not abide to such a name that confined to a small span of space. Considering the truth in his words and the far sighted vision, the committee resolved to name their group "The Meitei Dramatic Union". As a follow up, the group for the first time, on 15th March 1931 organized a ticket show at night of Shri Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh's *Areppa Marup*, a social play by erecting a stage at the outhouse of Shri Ngangbam Shyamkishwor Singh, Yaiskul with sitting arrangement for the audience at the frontal court yard. This opened a new chapter in the history of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre. The remarkable encouragement in the form of financial assistance came from royal sources. One may acknowledge here gracious Maharajkumari Tamphasana who bore all the production charges and Angom Dorendro Singh who supported two scenes. An amazing feature of drama was the use of western clarinet. Previously the Manipuris considered the western musical instruments (e.g. clarinet) as being unholy. Breaking such prevalent notion Shri Ngangbam Shyamkishwor Singh made his son Ngangbam Nimai play on the clarinet in the drama. The audience reflected satisfactory at the new taste. Practically the drama was success in all respect and this account to exhaustless collective effort of the group and strong determination of Ngangbam Shyamkishwor. Thus the "Meitei Dramatic Union" came into existence in the history of Manipuri Theatre and 15th March, 1931 is remembered as the foundation day of the Union.

About the ticket show, Maharani Dhanamanjuri reaction was peculiar. She had no restraint on it. However considering on how the Manipuri crowd would reflect on her part showing ticket performances at her own maternal home, she expressed her discomfiture regarding the design. In no time words reached the ears of the committee. Ashamed they decided to shift the hall led by Hijam Irabot, the group then erected a stage on stilts over the small pond at Chingakham Mayurdhavja's house in Yaiskul. The stage faced the outhouse where sitting arrangement for the audience were set. From 1932 to 1936 drama after drama were staged in that playhouse. The first amongst them was Shri Ashangbam Minaketan's *Bhagyachandra* directed by Shri Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh. By 1937, the group completed building their hall at Yaiskul Police Land and shifted there for permanent settlement. The question that lingered then was the appropriateness of the name of the group. Considering the variant ethnic groups inhabiting Manipur, the committee renamed as "Manipur Dramatic Union". As mentioned in the book *Manipur Dramatic Union* Ngarang Amasung Ngasi, the group from

1931 to 1942 i.e. just before the Second World War produced 34 dramas. By 1954 the relentless effort of the group paid itself. In that year the group participated in the National Drama Festival held at Delhi. In that competition their drama *Haorang Leishang Saphabi* from the blooming pen of Shri Sarangthem Bormani, directed by Shri Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh won the first prize in folk category. Thus the Manipur Dramatic Union attained the privilege of introducing Manipuri Theatre in India.

The Aryan Theatre:

On 23rd September 1935, another distinguishing theatre group The Aryan Theatre (pronounced as Aerean by the Meiteis) steered by Shri Phurailatpam Atombapu Sharma Sagolband Meino Leirak, Thongbam Gokulchandra Singh, Arambam Dorendrajit Singh (1907-1944), Sagolband Meino Leirak; and Haobam Ibungoyaima Singh was established. Later on many other theatre lovers joined the group namely Khumanthem Modumangol Singh, Sagolband Moirangmayum Leirak Machin; Phurailatpam Gouramani Sharma, Sagolband Meino Leirak; Haobam Ibotombi Singh, Kangabam Leikai; Mayanglambam Biramangol Singh, Kangabam Leikai; Arambam Lalmani Singh, Konthoujam Dinachand Singh, Chongtham Benudhar Singh, Keishamthong Top Leirak; Wahengbam Gourachandra Singh, Keisham Yumjao Singh, Khaidem Leiren Singh, Mutum Koireng Singh ect. Prior to the establishment of this theatre, this group of theatre enthusiasts from Kwai Pana (the western part of Nambul River in Imphal) following the prevalent spirit of theatre movement in Manipur had in the year 1928 performed *Sita Banvas* at the mandap of Shri Phurailatpam Atombapu Sharma at Sagolband Meino Leirak. This movement paved the way to the establishment of Aryan Theatre and when it was founded on 23rd September 1935, the group successfully performed Shri Arambam Dorendrajit's translated Manipuri version of D.L. Roy's Bengali historical play *Reziya*, directed with skilled craftsmanship by Shri Th. Gokulchandra at the Mandop of Bidyaratna Shri Phurailatpam Atombapu Sharma.

In succession to this, the Aryan Theatre group produced the Bengali drama *Devla Devi* in Manipuri, translated by Shri Kh. Dhanachandra Singh. After this came out *Shahjahan* play, translated into Manipuri by Shri Arambam Dorendrajit Singh. In 1939 Shri Arambam Dorendrajit wrote a historical play *Bhagyachandra* which in the same year performed on the stage by the Aryan Theatre group. All the above mentioned dramas were directed by Shri Th. Gokulchandra Singh. Inspired by the national spirit, this prominent figure of the Khwai Pana wielded his pen to produce *Bhagyachandra* (1939) and *Moirang Thoibi* (1935) thus contributing his lot to the development of Manipuri Natya Sahitya. By 1945, the group completed their hall at Wahengbam Leikai which has remained till today. Before 1942 i.e. prior to the first bombing of Second World War at Imphal, the group had produced five plays altogether. However after the

Second World War the troupe exhaustlessly produced plays: Historical drama, Social drama, and Mythical drama came out one after the other endlessly.

Chitragada Natya Mandir:

Chitragada Natya Mandir was established in the year 1936 at Ngangbam Shyamkishwor's house, Yaiskul. In fact the foundation of the Mandir was resultant to an ambiguity amongst the artistes members of the Manipur Dramatic Union before the acquisition of its proper settlement and working at Chingakham Mayurdhavja's house. That was a time when the members of actors, actresses, playwright, directors, theatre workers and enthusiasts rose like tidal waves in Yaiskul, Imphal. The Manipur Dramatic Union being the sole playhouse in the area could not produce all the dramas in demand at a time. Interestingly there came a conflict over the production of Mahakavi Hijam Anganghal's drama *Ibemma*. Disheartened at such contradictory opinion on his work, Mahakavi Anganghal resigned from Manipur Dramatic Union and contributed himself as one of the founder members of the Chitragada Natya Mandir. This group worked at Ngangbam Shyamkishwor's house at Yaiskul, Imphal. They made a stage on still over the Pukhri (pond) with the audience facing it from the Sangoi (outhouse). Here the group worked exhaustlessly and produced plays one after another since 1936. Some dramas that are worthwhile and appreciated by the public are *Jayadeva*, *Karna-Arjun*, *Sabhaparva*, *Harichandra*, *Ibemma* etc. The main actors on the stage were Shri Hijam Anganghal Singh (1892-1943), Yaiskul; Aykpam Gourabidhu Singh, Yaiskul; Angom Basantakumar (Sajou), Bamol Leikai; Ningthemchamayum Madhurjit Singh (1912-2002), Yaiskul, Janmasthan; Nongmaithem Sudhir, Yaiskul; Laishram Netrajit Singh, Bamol Leikai; Khwairakpam Momon Singh (1913-1999), Yumnam Leikai; Samom Lukhoi Singh, Yaiskul, Janmasthan; Mongjam Tilak Singh, Keishampat etc. Amongst the actresses are may recollect with dignity Sairem Keinya (1899-1961), Wangkhei Ningthem Pukhri Mapal; Laimayum Thambalngoubi Devi (1930-), the Manipuri crowd in appreciation of her role in *Ibemma*, addresses her still by this name, Nagamapal Kangjabi Leirak; Anoubi Devi, Thangmeiband; Hemo Devi, Uripok; Gouramani Devi, Keishampat; Ibeyaima Devi, Wangkhei; Rohini Devi, Wangkhei; Ibetombi Devi, Bamol Leikai; Punyabati etc. The group relentlessly went on their work under the strict supervision and overall management charge of Shri Hijam Anganghal with play directions by Shri Ayekpam Shyamsundar Singh (1913-1992), Yaiskul. Important characters in almost all the plays were enacted by Shri A. Shyamsundar Singh and Laishram Netrajit Singh (1914-1992). Readers may note that Shri A. Shyamsundar Singh's contribution to Manipuri Theatre extends towards the translation of Bengali script into Manipuri also.

Society Theatre:

This is yet another group that crapped up amidst the peril of growing tide of theatre in mid forties. In 1937, an elite group of theatre enthusiasts from Sega Road, Takhel Leikai emerged as Revolutionary Theatre. The fore runners were Takhellambam Iboton Singh, Babudhon Singh, Huidrom Sharatchandra Singh, Konthoujam Indrajit Singh, Potsangbam Kala Singh, Thokchom Mangoljao Singh, Thokchom Birchand Singh and G.C. Tongbra. The group enforced their task to generate a new pattern in theatre with Sanjenbam Nodiyachand Singh as Chairman and Takhellambam Ingoton Singh as Secretary at the head. Before the onset of the Second World War, the group successfully produced five plays viz. Mangoljao's *Devjani*, 1937; Sorokhaibam Lalit's *Sati Khongnang*, directed by playwright himself, 1938; *Prafullo*, written and directed by M.Ningthemjao, 1939; *Laman Khumba* in 1940, a social play, written and directed by G.C. Tongbra, who from the very beginning was managing and steering the group. *Laman Khumba* may be asserted as the first drama that reflected the true spirit of the group. Successively in the same year the group produced Shri Lairenmayum Ibungohal's historical drama *Narasingha* with skillful directions from Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh and Khomdram Dhanachandra Singh. In 1941, came out Khomdram Dhanachandra's Manipuri version of the Bengali play *Devla Devi* which the Manipuri crowd received appreciatively. As mentioned in the journal *Anisuba Lanjao Mamangi Manipuri Theatre* published by the Panthoibi Natya Mandir of Yumnam Leikai, Shri Khomdram Tolhal Singh expressed recollections of G.C. Tongbra's *Eka Train* produced before the onset of the Second World War.

In those days, the group had no theatre of its own. Whatsoever contributions, they made were credited to their keen enthusiasm, hard work and dedication to the art. For every production the group used to subscribe a bearable amount from their own pockets and for the performance stage, they depended either on Anoubam Mandap at Sega Road, any open maidan or Sangoi (out house). The very name of the theatre group is suggestive of the insight and intending revolution in the prevailing style. Due to the onset of the Second World War in the year 1941, in Manipur, the group, for some years hence ceased work. Though they could not do much before the war, their earnest endeavour in the field became vivid after the reinstatement of peace in the state. Remarkable feature of the group is the uniqueness of G.C. Tongbra's style, technique that swept the prevalent existing form to a new direction. Regarding significant limitation in the number of acts and scenes is favoured. Thematically, Tongbra targets at the exposure of social evils through ironical and satiric humour. Readers may note that the group in the course of its growth and development underwent change in its name twice; firstly in the year 1945 with the proposed name "National Theatre" and secondly in the year 1955 as "Society Theatre" which remained till today.

Leela Samiti, Nambol:

About 30 km. away westward from the Imphal valley is a pleasant village Nambol with its distinctive taste of art. As in other parts of Manipur, the movement of proscenium theatre reached the land at a very early stage of its growth. On November 23rd, 1923, the “Leela Samiti” was established under the leadership of Shri Okram Ibomcha Singh (1899-1983). The name however underwent changes in the course of its growth and development – “Nambol Dramatic Union” (1946) and “Sangeet Natak Mandir” (1961) respectively. On the very first day of the foundation, a Bengali play *Prahlad Charit* directed by Shri Okram Ibomcha Singh was successfully performed. The play reflected the prevalent technique of Bengali theatre which Shri Ibomcha had acquired from his contact with Jorhat Union Theatre and Badanchansing Jatradal, Silet. [When Shri Ibomcha Singh worked on Prahlad Charit, on his retirement in 1923.](#) While in Assam (he worked in the Excise Department, Assam) he joined the Jorhat Union Theatre, Jorhat (formed by the members of Tea Bagan) in 1911 and from 1917 onwards he worked with the Badanchandsing Jatradal of Silet and thence the Bengali theatre had a deep impact on him. Here readers may take note of the encouragement from the royal patronage. Maximum production change in respect with stage arrangement, dress and costume, stage set and props, light, music etc. accounted to his Lordship, the king of Manipur Sir Churachand Maharaja.

In 1925, Shri Ibomcha translated *Prahlad Charit* into Manipuri and produced the same in Manipuri version. It was performed in the same year at Chairen where the crowd received appreciatively. After this, followed a period when theatre directors from Imphal congregated there for imparting thorough training of art. Amongst them was Shri Chongtham Mayurdhavja who in the year 1926 was invited there for imparting his unique direction in the play *Sabha Parva*. Interesting enough, Shri Mayurdhavja also acted in the play. The extraordinary reception of the play by the general audience or crowd inspired the group to organize a ticket show of the same play in the year 1935 and hereby opened a new chapter in Nambol organizing ticket shows. Then came out numerous plays in succession – *Meghanath* (1928), *Saktisen* (1929) directed by Phanjoubam Iboton Singh; *Devla Devi* (1933-34), directed by Shri Khomdram Dhanachandra Singh; *Areppa Marup* (1938-39), directed by Shri Chongtham Mayurdhavja. The group contributing seven plays altogether before the outburst of the then impending Second World War. Their keen enthusiasm and dedication to the art is marked by the exhaustless, endeavour they put even during war.

Narasingh Drama group (the group of Sana Janmasthan):

Sana Janmasthan – by this name, there are two places in Manipur (Sana means royalties, Janmasthan means birthplace). The one that the present generation is acquainted with is located in the National Highway No.39 where Rajashree Bhagyachandra was born and is

presently known as Yaiskul Sana Janmasthan, Imphal. The other is located by the bank of Nambul River, Keishamthong, Imphal, where Churanchand Maharaja (1885-1941) born and is presently known as Keishamthong Moirangningthou Leirak/Leihaothabam Leirak. The Narasingh Drama group/Sana Janmasthan group founded under the gracious conscientious of his Lordship, Churachand Maharaja of Manipur. The very name of the group is suggestive of its location i.e. "Sana Janmasthan Group". For ten years in succession the group gave performances on the birthday of Churachand Maharaja.

Leading actors taking main characters in the drama were Mongjam Tilak, Chongtham Mayurdhavja (Ningthemjao) Singh, Lairikyengbam Gourirai, Lourembam Kamdeva, Takhellambam Damudar Singh. Others in accompaniment were Chongtham Benudhar, R.K. Chourajit, Ningombam Ibochouba, Lairmbam Gouro, Konthoujam Joykumar, Leihaothabam Surjamani Sharma, Pukhrambam Jugindro, S. Kulabidhu, Laishram Roudra, Ningthoujam Tombi, Sagolsem Kulabidhu etc. Actresses in group were respectively Sairem Keinya, Thiyam Amumacha, Kabrabam Ibeton, Tejbati, Yaimabi, Tombi etc. As yet none is sure of the exact date where the group started its production. However, critics assume that the group might have started their production work around 1929-30. After the sad demise of Churachand Maharaja in the year 1941, the group subsided and soon after the impending Second World War set forth. While in its glory, the group produced *Narasingh* written by Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh, *Sabha Parva*, *Hiranyakashipu*, *Sita Banvas*, *Prahlad Charit*, *Vrishketu*, *Dandi Parva*, *Lava Kush*, *Kangsavadh*, *Uttara* etc. Shri Khonbantabam Tolhal Singh who had witnessed the performance of *Narasingh*

Recollections are still cherished in the hearts of the witnesses of the profundity in arrangements and the glamour of the production.

Nabayug Theatre:

The Nabayung Theatre was established in the year 1937 at the residence of N. Komol Singh, the then Lakpa of Uripok Baschaspati Leikai, pioneered by Khaidem Nongyai Singh (1887-1963), a great figure in the history of Manipuri theatre whose contribution regarding translation of Bengali plays into Manipuri can never be underestimated; Shri Nongthombam Kamal Singh, the then Lakpa of Cheirap (Legal Court); Konjengbam Amu Singh, Khaidem Rajmani Singh, Nongthombam Modu Singh, Haobam Kala Singh, Yambem Bandhu Singh, Surjamani Singh etc. Other members from the younger generation of the group were Thiyam Narendra Singh, Khaidem Ranjit, Konthoujam Iboyaima etc. In 1938, the group launched their first production of Nongmaithem Thanil's *Shahjahan*, directed by the playwright himself, the performance was spectacular and received warmly by the audience. The production however was not easy. The group erected a temporary stage joining the three Meitei courtyards

(Shumang) adjacent to that of Shri Nongthombam Komol Singh and the audience seated on the mattress spread at courtyard. In the succeeding year 1939, the group arranged a ticket show of Khwairakpam Chaoba's *Madhu Malti*. That time the group set the stage at the outhouse of N. Komol Singh with the audience at the courtyard. On every production the group underwent great difficulties. The actors themselves contributed from their own pockets. How far could such a system go? Above it, the group was pressed with anxieties of the impending Second World War.

Imphal Theatre:

Around 1936/1937 (authentic figure not yet known) a group of theatre enthusiasts – Ranjkumar Binod, Ashangbam Mineketan, Khongbantabam Ibotombi, Krishnachandra, Kunjabihari, Mani Sharma etc. founded the "Imphal Theatre" at Uripok Khwai Brahmapur, Imphal. At that time a gruesome incident took place in the Aryan Theatre. Some students who were the members of the theatre group started working on Hwaibam Nilamani's play *Basanta Bimola* provoking the elder members who blocked the process. The controversial opinions irritated the youth. Subsequently these youth led by Phurailatpam Devkishore Sharma and Thingujam Pishak left the Aryan Theatre to join the "Imphal Theatre" where they pursued their work on *Basanta Bimola*. Their dedicated effort paid reward. And in 1938 the play was staged at the mandap of Shri Pariksha Sharma, the then Cheirap member of Kwaibrahmapur. In fact the incoming of these students enhanced the shaping of the group for the better and in strengthening it.

With the hope to propagate and practice in a larger scale, these theatre enthusiasts planned proper play house and reserved an estate in the east of the open lawn in front of Cheirap (Legal court) but proved in vain. The dreadful Second World War struck a dead blow on the group and it could not rise again.

Other theatre group:

Contemporary to the acquainted theatre groups were individuals who were good-looking and well to do people. Their interests in theatre opened up blooming apprentice in the art and organized groups in their own locality. They extended their individual estate for the purpose and erected temporary playhouses at their own out houses. Some worth mentioning groups of the type are: 1) Cosmopolitan, Elangbam Leikai, Imphal; 2) Nava Natya Mandir, Yumnam Leikai, Imphal; 3) Singjamei Dramatic Union, Singjamei; 4) Star Theatre, 5) Paradise Theatre, Wangkhei; 6) Prabhat Theatre, 7) Rangshree Theatre, 8) Raja Dumbra Singh Memorial Theatre, 9) Rokshi Theatre etc. Aside these were groups known under the head of

the leader or the area. Mention may be made of Keisham Amuba Party and Charu Hall of Khamnam Keithel.

Pre Second World War Manipuri Theatre may be studied in three parts. The first part is an assessment of the period 1902-1914. The period significant in staging only the Bengali plays in Bengali script. Almost all the plays of the period were either historical drama or mythical drama. The second part is the study of the period 1914 to 1924 in which the playhouses besides the play production of Bengali dramas in Manipuri version. The third part ranges the period from 1925 to the outset of the Second World War in Manipur; a vibrant period marked in the history of Manipuri theatre. The period is significant from the point that many Manipuri playwrights were born who wrote skillfully social and historical plays with distinct vision and craftsmanship. The playhouses besides giving performances in translated Manipuri version of Bengali dramas imparted Manipuri dramas. Another remarkable feature of the period is the use of Manipuri exact language respective of sound, tone etc. in dramas instead of the defective Manipuri previously used. The pre Second World War Manipur was deprived of economic soundness. Most people were wage earners working hard for a lively hood. And every theatre it was the common phenomenon that for any production, the expenses were borne by the actors themselves. It would not be an exaggerated assertion that the theatre activists of the time were the school teachers, government servants and students. Besides there were many well to do individuals who showed intense enthusiasm in Theatre.

Chapter II

Pre Second World War Director's View, Thought and Contribution

The movement of the Pre Second World War Manipuri Proscenium Theatre actually began with the production of Pravas Milan (1902) and extended upto the period of heavy bombing (1942). Although Manipur is known for its rich and composite cultural heritage, Proscenium theatre is an alien cult newly introduced into Manipuri soil. Later on, educated Manipuri theatre personalities from Cachar (Assam) who came to Manipur as teachers or as government servants took on extensive practice of the newly introduced cult. Those who associated them further developed and strengthened it. In the first chapter a lengthy discourse had been taken on the view, thought and contribution of the Bengali babus.

The most popular festival enjoyed by the Bengali is the Durga Pujah, which is celebrated for five days with great pomp and show. During these five days the Bengalis used to erect temporary play houses and perform plays. The tradition is still in vogue. In those days cinema didn't exist and hence theatre was the most popular and acclaimed entertainment programme. For a detailed and comprehensive discourse on the view, thought and contribution of the pre second world war theatre directors, the chapter may be studied under the following sub-titles.

- (a) Bengali Directors
- (b) Meitei/Meetei Directors from outside
- (c) Original Meitei/Meetei Directors

(a) Bengali Directors:

Remarkable contribution of the Bengali Directors is observed over the period from 1902 to 1914. Some worth mentioning directors of the period are – Saratchandra Gosh, Jaminisunder Guha, Jugol Hari Chatterjee, Rebati Mohon Chatterjee, Bamacharan Mukherjee etc. Production style of the then directors took after that of Kolkata (Calcutta). The form resembled the Bengali theatre of the late nineteenth century. Major dramas of the period were pouranik (historical). There was heavy music content in the play; notable speech stretches in dialogue and

exaggerated gestures in acting were prominent; characteristic loud scale shouting or bombastic mouthing could be observed; sari, dhoti, and typical adornments characteristic of supernatural entities were the main costume. The above stated features are assessed from the discourse between Khwairakpam Nabakishore (1877-1961) and Sorokhaibam Lalit (1892-1955).

The acting style deployed by the early Bengali Directors had great impact on Lalit Singh's "Sati Khongnang" (1928). It would be vital to state that the view and objective of the then Directors was not in the spirit of theatre as an open art form. Rather theatre then, served as an entertainment programme during the Durga Pujah festival for the small populace in the Imphal centre. Precisely the main object of theatre in those days was to entertain the audience during festival. Obviously the most popular form of drama was the masque.

b) Meetei Directors from outside:

After the British occupation of Manipur in 1891 great changes took place in the socio-political scenario of the state which contributed greatly into the growth and development of Manipuri Theatre. On September 18, 1891, the British put six year old Churachand Singh, the only remaining descendant of Maharaja Narasingh on the throne of Manipur. Unfortunately for the young king there was no one in the court who was educated with the knowledge of courtly matters. So Maharaja Churachand was sent to Rajasthan for his education. By the by educated persons from outside were invited to teach the people to serve /work in the government departments and the mass populace at large. Amongst those persons there were some from Cachar (Assam) who had practiced theatre and were allotted jobs in the Education Department -1) Bihari Singh, Head Pandit; 2) Khwairakpam Nabakishore Singh, Head Pandit; 3) Kshetrimayum Munal Singh, Inspector; 4) Chingakham Jatishwor Singh, Inspector; 5) Chongkham Khamba, Master. The Manipuri Proscenium theatre is indebted to these five personalities. Unfortunately relevant documents regarding the contributions of Kshetrimayum Munal Singh, Chongtham Khamba to theatre are not yet recovered. But we have some about Bihari Singh and Khwairakpam Nabakishore Singh whom we shall discuss individually.

Oja Bihari:

Guru Bihari was the head master of Pettigrew School. In theatre he was the first guru of Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh. As a theatre director, he translated the Bengali play *Pagalini* into Manipuri and staged it in 1905. In that play renowned theatre director Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh took the role of a person suffering from consumption. Remarkably Lalit at that time was only 13/14 years old and besides theatre, in education too Bihari was his teacher. What Guru Bihari had in his vision about the Manipuri Proscenium theatre was 'a play in Manipuri language

played by the Manipuris. He also thought that besides being a mode of entertainment, theatre can communicate valuable messages to the mass. His vision and thought was executed by the forthcoming theatre activists. Mention may be made of Manipuri play *Arjun Maithiba*, (1914) led by Khaidem Nongyai; *Narasingh* (1925) patronized by Maharaja Churachand. Following the steps, Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh started writing plays in Manipuri and many others after him. The little that has been discussed about Guru Bihari Singh is evident in Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh's book – 'Manipuri Drama Meihourolgi Wari Matek Ama'.

Khwairakpam Nabakishore Singh:



He was born in the year 1877 at Durpagram in Cachar, Assam. He completed his education with I.A. (presently XII standard). He was about seventeen when he came to Manipur as a school teacher teaching in the LP (lower primary) and UP (upper primary) schools. He wrote 'Anka Mayol', a book on mathematics which was introduced into the schools as textbook. However he came to be known as a pioneer of Manipuri Proscenium theatre. As an actor and director, his contribution to Manipuri theatre is remarkable. Around 1902-1928 Manipur witnessed a significant change in theatre movement. The period may be estimated as an age of transition. Over this period, instead of previous Bengali plays, theatre started staging Manipuri plays. During this period Khwairakpam Nabakishore attained great popularity in theatre both as an actor and director. As an actor his chief parts were Harinayakshipu in *Prahlad Charit*, Ram in *Sita Vanbas*, Duryadhon in *Kaurav – Pandav*, Tarnisen in *Viratparva* and *Sabhaparva* etc. When Khaidem Nongyai translated the Bengali play *Partha- Parajoy (Arjun Maithiba)* into Manipuri in 1914/1915 and staged it, Khwairakpam Nabakishore took a role in it. In 1917 he was sent to Kolkata (Calcutta) by the then king of Manipur, Maharaja Churachand for further studies in theatre. Such gesture sealed his great importance in theatre. It would be worthy to note that he was the first among the Manipuris to have gone abroad for theatre education. Apart from him there is none recorded to have been sent or gone abroad for theatre education during the reign of Churachand Maharaja.

Khwairakpam Nabakishore wandered in and around Manipur to direct plays. He established the Yumnam Leikai Natya Mandir in Yumnam Leikai, Imphal. Almost all the plays steered by him were acknowledged by the Maharaja. He was the chief organizer of the annual theatre festival of Education Department. During the First World War Maharaja Churachand sent him to the German War as Zamandar of the Labour Core. Khwairakpam Nabakishore had a multi-faceted personality- as a teacher, as a warrior and as a theatre activist. But his theatrical works are by far his most substantial claim to fame.

His death occurred on June 8, 1961 at his residence in Yumnam Leikai, Imphal. He had conceived that theatre is a part of education and extraneously worked for the development of Manipuri theatre. There can be no dispute in asserting that the Manipuri Proscenium theatre is indebted to him.

Original Manipuri Theatre Directors:

The association with the Bengali and Manipuri Theatre directors from outside resulted to the creation of numerous original Manipuri Theatre directors whose theatrical endeavour consummate in astonishing development of Manipuri Theatre.

Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh (1892-1955):



Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh was a rare theatre director of Manipur who had a great zeal for the development of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre. In the early period of his endeavour in theatre he was faced with many typical ideological considerations. One was not allowed to stamp his foot on the stage or act with his back turned to the audience. But Lalit was regardless of such considerations. He was a level-headed and practical man who went for reality and photographic accuracy in theatrical presentation of life. His contribution in the establishment of Manipuri Dramatic Union in 1931 can not be ignored. He became the first Secretary of MDU (Manipur Dramatic Union) and till his death in 1955 he had relentlessly worked for the development of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre.

Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh was born on Sunday , the 5th June 1892 at Yaiskul to Sorokhaibam Ningthouba Singh and Yengkhom Ningol Kombi Devi. He was formally educated upto the 'Mangasuba' (Class II) from Pettigrew School, Imphal. At a very young age he started earning his livelihood as a drafter at the Cheirap (court). Later on he became a clerk and finally promoted to Panchayat Member. His interest in theatre developed at a very young age of fourteen when for the first time in his life he joined the drama. This is reflected in detail in his book 'Manipuri Drama Meihourolgi Wari Matek Ama'.

There can be no dispute in the reflection that Lalit's greatest ability lies in direction. His insight into the characters and understanding of the actors, his patience and deliberate nature contributed to his success as a theatre director. In his life he had directed around a hundred plays all of which were greatly acclaimed. Besides MDU he associated himself with many rising theatres of the time. He wandered around and earnestly worked for the growth and development of theatre.

Lalit adopted various methods in his direction. He would try to draw out the creativity inherent in the artist enabling him to act skillfully. Another method was that of demonstration; set the example by doing the act himself. Regarding the stage set, props, costume and in all the theatrical properties Lalit had a realistic approach. One good example of Lalit's ability in direction is set by Sarangthem Bormani's *Haorang Leishang Safabi*. The play won the first prize in folk category in the National Theatre Competition held at New Delhi in 1954. No doubt Lalit faced great difficulties in giving direction to *Haorang Leishang Safabi*. Putting together his realistic insight and constructional skill he worked into the play. He actually brought water on the stage in a tarpaulin, put hydrilla floating in it where the actors would fish with net. The play was a great success which showed the innovative skill of the Manipuris. Besides, it introduced Manipuri Theatre to the National Theatre arena. On December 25, 1954, an article in the national newspaper "The Statesman" came which read:

"The production showed a praiseworthy striving after realism. The stage setting was simple and effective, the costumes, colourful and genuine and the effect of the piece was altogether charming. The groupings on the whole were also commendable. But surely the most pleasing aspect of the play was the songs and dances, adaptation from the ancient Manipuri tunes, which heightened the effect of the piece and were instrumental in giving it an authenticity which it would have otherwise lacked."

Besides being a theatre director Lalit was also one of the early Manipuri playwrights. His works consist chiefly of historical plays; the first being *Sati Khongnang*, 1928. It was staged the same year during the Holi Festival at Ngangbam Shyamkishore's outhouse with himself giving the direction. His other works were *Areppa Marup*, *Mathur*, *Khamba Samu Khongyetpa*, *Mainu Pemcha*, *Bhagyachandra* and *Puran Meithaba*. It should be noted that his *Areppa Marup* is the first Manipuri social play. Acknowledging his contribution to Manipuri theatre the Government of Manipur included his two plays *Sati Khongnang* and *Areppa Marup* in the textbooks for the Intermediate and Matriculate standards for a long time.

As an actor too Lalit was widely acclaimed. Though he was physically of short stature, every role allotted to him was acted skillfully.

Precisely, Lalit conceived a faithful vision for the newly introduced cult. Manipur is a land rich with composite culture. He thought when a few Bengali babus could practice the new theatre, why can't the Manipuris do it or build a playhouse on and of their own. Further, he did not like to restrict to the early style, faith and ideological considerations. He wanted a restyle suited to Manipur.

History is witness of Lalit's vitality in executing his vision. He endeavoured to implement his view and thought regarding the Manipuri Proscenium Theatre. He steered the establishment

of 'Theatre Centre Manipur' and worked for it as President. As an actor, director and administrator he endured for days to advance the Manipuri Proscenium Theatre.

October 21, 1955 the renowned director, Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh breathed his last breath. However, what he fostered in his life still remains. To commemorate his life and work Theatre Centre Manipur observes his death anniversary, October 21, as 'Manipur Theatre Day' every year. In 1960 Manipuri Sahitya Parishad conferred the title of Natya Visarat and in 1977, the title of Natya Ratna upon him as recognition of his work.

Khaidem Nongyai Singh (1888-1953):



Khaidem Nongyai Singh was born on February 28, 1888 at Uripok Khaidem Leikai, Imphal, the son of Khaidem Angangjao Singh and Thiyam Ningol Ibeyaima Devi. He completed his matriculation but dropped further education in the middle of Intermediate Arts. He started earning for a living as a teacher. Later on became a Cheirap Member (member of court). He was one of the eminent actor, director and translator in the history of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre. He had significant contribution on the growth and development of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre. He knew that howsoever well the Manipuris knew Bengali, being an acquired language they lack extensive comprehension. What credits his place of great importance is that he could not delight himself with a borrowed language and wanted to demolish the mental lumber of the Manipuris who delighted themselves with an acquired language. At that time Bengali was culminating and Manipuris took pride in using it in every sphere – in Drama, in Sankirtana, in Holi etc. Nongyai was repulsive to this spirit; he wanted a change – to use mother tongue in Drama, in Sankirtana, in Holi, in Education etc. His new spirit left the ground clear for new and fresher creations.

In 1914/15 Kaidem Nongyai Singh translated the Bengali play *Partha Parajoy* into Manipuri as *Arjun Maithiba*. On Saraswati Pujah, the same year, it was staged at Johnston School. Beside translation, he did the direction of the play and himself took the role of Arjuna. Regarding the efficacy of his translation Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh states in his 'Manipuri Drama Meihourlgi Wari Matek Ama' :

“Khaidem Nongyai Singh started off on using Manipuri songs in Manipuri Drama for the first time in Partha Parajoy which was staged at Johnston School led by himself. It would be beyond dispute to say that it was the first complete Manipuri Drama. Before Nongyai, in 1905 Bihari Singh, Headmaster, Pettigrew School had translated Paglani into Manipuri. However scholars assess that the translated version lacked efficacy.”

Besides the Manipuri Proscenium Theatre, Nongyai took roles in Gostha Leela, Udukhol, Goura Leela etc. He also took part in the Holi choir and sang in Manipuri in praise of Govindajee. He summoned the rising writers of the time at his house and initiated the ‘Mitra Samiti’ (friends’ forum) where they would read out their writings for critical discourse. He died on September 27, 1953. A condolence on his demise presided by Lairenmayum Ibungohal was held at Vidyaratna Shri Atombapu Sharma’s residence on October 7, 1953. Truly Khaidem Nongyai Singh was the leader of the New Spirit. The exaggeration is not quite misplaced. He had a powerful and aspiring mind. His New Spirit aroused ‘swadesh prem’ in rising writers. (refer to Shokprakash/Condolence, 1953).

Chingakham Mayurdhwaja Singh (1888-1944):



Chingakham Mayurdhwaja Singh popularly known by the name Angoubi Member was one of the eminent theatre personalities of Pre First World War Manipuri Proscenium Theatre. He was born in 1888 at Yaikul Chingakham Leirak, Imphal, son of Chingakham Atomba Singh and Lourembam Ningol Chaobiton Devi. He was formally educated upto the sixth standard. Later he became Sadar Panchayat and Cheirap Member (member of court). His theatrical endeavour may

be assessed through two different phases:

- i) Firstly, his association with the Bengalis in Bengali dramas.
- ii) Secondly, his association with the Manipuri Meetei in real Manipuri plays.

His first play which constitute the 1st phase of his theatrical endeavour was *Mewar Patan*, a Bengali drama which was the first production of Bamacharan Mukhopadhyaya Bandhav Natyashala (estd. 1903; later renamed Friends Dramatic Union) situated at Babupara (former Haobam Leikai). In the next production of the same playhouse *Reziya* he not only gave direction but also was the chief cast.

After his allegiance to the old order of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre, he became engaged with the other five eminent Manipuri Meetei Theatre personalities – Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh, Khomdram Dhanachandra, Ngangbam Shyamkishore, Hijam Irabot and Nongmaithem Thanil in their endeavour for a Manipuri playhouse where real Manipuri drama could be

performed. Their movement was a new force that was gathering strength and in 1931 their vision was realized as Manipur Dramatic Union at Ngangbam Shyamkishore's frontal outhouse; the first performance there being Sorokhaibam Lalit's social play *Areppa Marup*.

Some of the widely acclaimed cast he had performed was Gambhir Singh in *Narasingh* and Yudhisthir in *Karna Arjun* which still are remembered by the present generation.

Another important sphere of Mayurdhwaja's contribution to the development of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre was that of stage design and lighting design – a fresh interest that delighted the audience. Regarding stage and lighting design he had powerful innovative mind. Telem Upendra states in the book 'Manipur Dramatic Union Ngarang Amasung Ngasi' :

“.....enhanced the beauty of the play and bewildered the audience. He was an artist who knew the importance of stage and lighting design in theatre”

Besides being a theatre activist, Mayurdhwaja was an educationist. He wrote poems which were collected in his book 'Seireng Anouba' which till date remains an important composition of Manipuri literature. He was also involved with many social activities. Great though he was he ignored talking about his achievements. He died in 1944.

Khomdram Dhanachandra Singh (Thambou) (1898-1970):



Dhanachandra was born on October 21, 1898 at Kwakeithel, Imphal – son of Jitchandra and Lokmanjuri. In education he was a bright student. In those days there was no provision for matric examination in Manipur. So he went to Shillong for the purpose and passed out in first class. He was the first first-class holder in Manipur. After completion of I.S.C. he joined Johnston School as a teacher for mathematics. Later on he became Assistant Commandant in State Military Police.

From his very childhood days Dhanachandra had an inkling desire for theatre. When he was reading in the sixth class, he frequently visited the rehearsal space where drama rehearsal was going on for the Saraswati Pujah and hideously watched the rehearsal. An interesting incident happened on the day of the performance. The person in the cast of Mahadeva didn't turn up. Dhanachandra opted to play the role. To utter amazement of the organizers he did the cast of Mahadeva in the performance.

He was one of the six eminent theatre activists who steered the establishment of Manipur Dramatic Union. At the time of establishment proposals came to name the playhouse – Yaiskul Dramatic Union, Dhanachandra deliberately reacted to that proposal. He argued that if the drama organization was to center in Yaiskul only he will drop himself out because he did not belong to Yaiskul. That discourse is inferential of the fact that if it were not for Dhanachandra, the MDU would have been initially named Yaiskul Dramatic Union concentrating only in the Yaiskul area and would have dimmed from the scene. Dhanachandra's foresight and the truth in him bore fruit and the organisation was established in 1931 with the initial name Meetei Dramatic Union which was later renamed Manipur Dramatic Union. Dhanachandra became the first president of MDU and worked at that post for forty long years till his death in 1970.

As a theatre director, his commendable works were: *Devala Devi* (1933-34) performed by the Leela Samiti, Nambol. Later in 1940, he alongwith Sorokhaibam Lalit gave joint direction to L. Ibungohal's historical play *Narasingh* which was performed by Society Theatre. Other works by him, though he did not take the credit of the title himself were his assistance in numerous early plays of Society Theatre, and other rising theatre organizations of the time. Precisely he had no repulsion in extending his assistance to all his associates.

As an actor his chief plays were: *Narasingh* (1925) in which he played the cast of the protagonist Narasingh. The performance was organized with the royal patronage of the then king of Manipur, Maharaja Churachand; *Karna Arjun* in which he was given the cast of Bhim; *Devla Devi* in which he played Khijirakhan; *Areppa Marup- Jugol*; *Shakuntala- Kanva Muni*; *Shabitri- Ashwapati*; etc.

As a translator too, Dhanachandra's works are commendable. He had translated around twenty-five Bengali dramas into Manipuri. However, he could not publish them all. Except for Rabindranath Thakur's *Bisarjan*, his other works remained unpublished. Some dramas translated by him and staged by MDU were- *Devla Devi* (1933), *Sabitri* (1934), *Sarm* (1937), *Mandir Pradesh* (1936), *Nipa Ani* (1964), *Durgeshnandini* (1949), *Alexander* (1962), *Tapsi* (1964), *Bindugi Macha* (1962), *Makhoisu Mini* (1965), *Ramesh Sumati* (1966), *Mewar Patan* (1965), *Davi*, *Yumgi Mou*, *Amangba Nong*, *Sada Shivagi Mang*, *Vishwamitra* etc.

In recognition of his vast and extraordinarily commendable works in theatre, the Manipuri Sahitya Parishad bestowed on him the title of 'Natya Visarat' in 1966. In 1967, the Rupmahal Theatre, Imphal felicitated his achievements by conferring on him the title of 'Abhinand Patra'. In 1977 after his demise, the Manipur Sahitya Parishad crowned him with the title 'Natya Ratna'.

On February 18, 1970 the great soul departed for his Heavenly abode. On his demise Manipur Proscenium Theatre suffered a great loss.

Okram Ibomcha Singh (1899-1983):



The general uprising of Manipuri Proscenium Theatre showed its sign in Nambol, a village about 10 Kilometers away from Imphal city, as early as 1923. At that time there was no hall and no recognized organization. Above it no theatre activist from Imphal had visited there. However, it would not be wrong to say that the idea of proscenium theatre was conceived in the area as early as by that time because on November 25, 1923, some enthusiasts organized themselves to form the Leela Samiti. The person who steered this formation was Okram Ibomcha Singh. Ibomcha was born on July 25th, 1899 at Nambol Kha-Jiri Leikai and died in the year 1983.

Chapter III

Study on Pre 2nd World War Play Production Technique and Style

The discourse in this chapter shall deal with the processes involved in production of plays during the pre Second World War days. Those who contributed significantly to the production of plays in this period were the 'Leelarois' (alrouder artiste). By 'Leelarois' the definition broadly covers all individuals involved, namely, the director, performers, playback singers, musicians, stage managers, translators, and the audience. In those pre war days, the economy of the State was rather in a poor condition. There was hardly any patronage from the State, represented by the monarch. The population in those days was also not much. During 1901-02 the total population in Manipur was around 2,84,874 only. Out of this total population, 1,91,207 lived in the plains. During 1940-41 the total population rose to around 5,12,127 out of which 3,43,694 lived in the plains. Of this figure, a rough maximum population of 1,10,947 lived in the Imphal urban area. The local people were involved in their own businesses, earning a meager livelihood. There were only a very few people who were employed by the Government or in the service of the King. In this scenario, it was not an easy task to produce a play. It was the dedication of the Leelarois of those days that made it possible to stage proscenium performances, given the condition of poor economy and lack of patronage by State. In fact, they even committed to social services in the localities to garner the support of the local communities. They contributed amongst themselves to manage a performance. Among the prominent personalities who contributed generously to production of plays in those pre war days, mention may be made of the then ruler Sir Churachand Maharajah (1891 -1941) and the then British Political Agent Colonel Shakespeare. A significant contribution was made by the Princess, Maharajah Kumari Tamphasana in the production of Sorokhaibam Lalit's play Areppa Marup which was staged at the out-house of Shyamkishore in 1931.

In discoursing on the play productions of the pre war days, the discussion has to be done from different aspects. Plays in those days were normally of 5 hours duration. If a play was of shorter length, then the time gap was filled in by popular short comedies as 'Prahasan'. Other artistes were engaged for these comedies. The plays usually commenced at dusk and ended by daybreak. Before the commencement of a play, the practice was to announce the play by an opening song and this was known as 'prastab'. As the duration of the plays was too long, the plays were normally performed in five or six segments. Each of the segments was further

divided into various scenes. For instance, in S. Lalit's *Areppa Marup* and in L. Ibungohal Singh's *Narasingh*, there were five segments. Each of the scenes further had five to ten segments. When it was inconvenient to quickly continue the scenes, the usual practice was to hustle in a scene of a beggar or a blind man singing on the road. Prof. N. Tombi writes about this:

As the stage craft and the necessary accessories were not of a proper manner, it was usual to find an unrelated scene of a roadway to buy time between the two scenes. It was usual to find a blind man singing on a roadway as an 'intermission' between two scenes.

In addition, it was normal to find three to four intervals during a play in those days. With time, however, this changed. Around 1928, S. Lalit introduced the practice of giving only one interval during a play. Gradually, everyone adopted it.

In discussing the production of a play, it means discussing the various aspects necessary in the production of a play. That is, it means discussing the total visual arrangement of the play. For example, 1) Acting, 2) Stage and stage property, 3) Light, 4) Sound, 5) Costume, 6) Make-up, etc. a successful play is one that has a rational incorporation of all of these elements. Each of these requirements is discussed at length in this chapter.

1) Acting:

Acting can be viewed in two different perspectives. Firstly, acting style between 1902 and 1927, and secondly, between 1928 and 1942-43. The plays up to 1913 were characterized by their historical themes played in the Bangali language. In 1914, Khaidem Nongyai translated the Bengali play *Partha Parajay* into Manipuri and directed it himself. The language used was Manipuri but with an accent. The reason was that the language of the play was taught by directors who were from Cachar speaking Manipuri with an accent. Of the play directors from Cachar, mention may be made of (i) Kshetrimayum Munal Singh, School sub-inspector, (ii) Chingakham Jatishwor, Inspector, (iii) Khwairakpam Nabakishore, Head Pandit, and (iv) Chongkham Khamba Singh. Up to 1927 the plays used Manipuri language with an accent. Interestingly, there was a practice of the actors coming on stage in a slanting manner. The reason was that when the actors came out on stage they considered it improper to turn their backs on the audience. In addition, the actors in those days indulged in loud stamping of their feet on the stage and speaking in a loud voice. The exhibition of masculinity as defined by 'Bira rasa' accounted for this manner on stage. In this play *'Meihourolgi Wari Matek Ama'* S. Lalit describes this manner as:

Manipuri plays up to 1927 used a different language and the actors moved in a slanting manner with the concept that they are not to show their backs to the audience, and they stamped their feet on the floor of the stage. The audience appreciated when the actors exhibited 'Bira rasa', stamping their feet hard on the wooden floor and speaking in a loud voice.

During 1927-28, a new trend developed where the actors in pure Manipuri without accent, and they started coming on stage in a free manner without the pre-occupation of showing disrespect to the audience by showing their backs. The trend of playing only historical plays slowly gave way with the introduction of plays dealing with social issues. It can be said here that it was the singular contribution and dedication of the actors which made the plays successful, although they had a helping hand from the stage managers. Dr. Gojendro comments on this:

Though there was contribution of the persons off the stage, it was actors who made the plays successful, as opined by the elders of those days. This was because they paid attention to the lessons taught by their teachers, and they carefully analysed the character they were to portray. This was learnt when interviewing the actors of yesteryears.

In successfully enacting a play, it is important that the actors speak their dialogues without mistake. Sometimes, when too much attention is given to the performance, actors tend to forget their lines from nervousness. For this, prompters are needed behind the wings. Prompters also play an equally important role in making a play successful. They were considered the second line of directors since their full involvement in the actors' proper presentation made their service invaluable.

In the presentation of historical plays, it was important to mould the actors carefully to provide taste to the play. The directors used a wide range of techniques to shape their actors. Commenting on this aspect, the veteran theatre director of Manipur Dramatic Union, Khaidem Bihari told:

In those days, the director carefully taught the character of the different roles. It was necessary to learn the lines by heart. The directors of those days were (a) demonstrators, (b) instructor, and (c) directors all rolled into one. Much effort was given in moulding an ordinary person to fit the character in the play. For instance, I played the role of the villager Meina Singh in the play 'Thambalnu'. The character was a simple villager with a flute in his hand and a stick stuck into his waistband. From the day the role was assigned to me, I went about with these

props on my person. Not for a day or two, but for up to three months. Since the play was not a social one, we endured quite a lot hardship playing the characters.

To be an actor in the true sense, one had to have a good sense of breathing technique. This was known as 'swar sadhana'. The lesson of 'atangkhasi' or 'the sudden burst of laughter haplessly' was taught with care. 'Dikkar' or the lesson on suppressed crying as done by Kings in an expression of suppressed emotion, was discussed threadbare. The emotion of 'Karuna rasa' had to be realized in earnest in expressing such emotions on stage. Broadly speaking, it can be said that the principles of acting as described in Bharat Muni's Natya Shastra was followed during the pre war days. Kshetri Ibohal who learnt the principles of acting on these lines from S. Lalit told of the hardship he endured the learning process:

I found it hard to grasp the principle of 'dikkar'. My teacher could do it easily. I was unable to express the suppressed emotion of crying like a monarch. I remember that when I had to learn about shringar rasa, he told me to declare everything I had learnt to Bamon Ibeyaima. I learnt hard to express everything naturally, in exact manner of a Meitei life culture. He scolded me often that I had not learnt the play's dialogues. I was surprised that although we had learnt the dialogues, he always said we had not learnt enough. We could however understand everything teacher taught us. Teacher did not want us simply to learn the lines; we had to fulfill the character we were to portray.

2) Stage property:

Proscenium plays are performed on stage. Props and other arrangements on the stage are done to supplement the performance. By stage set we understand the properties on the stage used during a performance. When the articles on the stage are used by the actors from one space to another, then these are known as props. In the earlier days, the production unit labored much to prepare the stage sets. The stage properties changed according to the need of the times.

The use of painted backdrops was a trend in the pre war days. It was also common to find the curtain with paintings. This perhaps was an attempt to please the audience with a splash of colour and design. Recollecting the use of such painted curtains and scenes, Rajkumar Ratan Singh says:

The first drama that I saw in my life was at the courtyard of Sougaijam Ibochouba. My mother took me there. I was a kid then. I was bewildered by everything I saw. One of the most interesting things to me was the folding up of the curtain before the play.

In a play, at the most four painted screen were used. In those days, rolling screens were used. They were dropped or rolled up as required. Painted scenes of a building or of a tree was attached to the rolled screen or curtain. Effort was made to present pleasing stage sets. In the days on the eve of the Second World War, there were more paintings of a house on fire, or a moonlit scene, or a scene of water, or a scenery. On this note, Ayekpam Shyamsunder says:

Although in those days the painting were not of standard as of today, effort was made to present realistic paintings of a staircase, a throne, or courtiers' seats, etc. When depicting a scene of forest, the practice was to paint a few trees on the rolling scene and to cut out holes among the branches to give impression of space between leaves so that when an actor moved it appeared that he was moving in the forest. This scene was known as 'cutting scene'. The cloth suspended on the jhalur to hide the upper portion of stage, were also painted to give impression of floral patterns.

Commenting on this, Nongmaithem Tombi writes:

The drop scene in proscenium theatre was part of the theatre property. The painting of a picture of a woman fishing with net painted by Lourembam Kamdev for the Chitragada Natya Mandir at a cost of Rs.200 was used as the drop scene. The audience commented much on this particular drop scene. It served as an attraction to the audience before the play. In those early days, it was a burden to have the drop scene and other painted scenes. When the drop scene was raised at the signal of a whistle, opening song praising Ganesh or Mahadev was sung on stage. During plays of Janmasthan with the King in attendance, it was usual to have song sung in praise of the king. In those days, the song rendered by Nilakanta Sharma was quite popular. He was much in demand with the audience. After the prologue, the play started.

In Manipur the one who contributed much to development of stage sets was Chingakham Mayurdhawaja (1888-1944) of Manipur Dramatic Union. He worked in stage sets,

lights and other arrangements of the stage. Following him, several others from the MDU also came forward in this line. Commenting on this, Asem Prasantkumar says:

He decorated the theatre with flower, twigs and branches in such a way that pleased the eyes of the audience. During the pre war days, Chingakham Mayurdhwaja did the stage and lighting arrangements, and he was later followed by Leimapokpam Guni Singh, Sorokhaibam Dhanendra Singh, Chingakham Amubi Singh and Rajkumar Ratansana Singh.

He also worked hard to arrange the sets and other stage arrangements of the Aryan Theatre. He strove to make the design different from others. Commenting on this Arambam Lokendra says:

Before the war, the stage set was somewhat simple. The plays staged at Aigya Atombapu's mandap did not have much of scenes. The practice was to paint a picture of a hill, a palace, a planter, etc. The pathway to the palace was also painted. Senior actor of the Aryan Theatre used to be displeased at the way distorted scene of palace and buildings were painted by the Bengalis of Victoria Club at Babupara. There was a new trend of conceiving the pictures to be painted. Three disciples of the noted painter namely Ojha Bhadram, Hurem Aton Singh, Mangsidam Kalachand Singh, and Lourebam Kamdev painted pictures for the Aryan Theatre. These three master artists painted pictures of hunting scenes, warrior wielding spear, fights with the tiger, etc. on the outer screen. This provided a pleasing view to the audience before the commencement of the plays. It is said that the Aryan Theatre introduced the practice of removing a painted scene to reveal another different scene on the wings during the plays.

The use of accessories such as fishing basket, fish nets, swords and daggers, walking stick, etc. can also be considered as using props on stage during the plays. Using props was considered an essential thing in proscenium theatre in Manipur. In the earlier plays, props were used as in actual life. For instance, in 1939 at the performance of the 'Ibemma' play produced by the Chitragada Natya Mandir, props were used imitating actual use in life. In one of the scenes, the actor Khwairakpam Momon (Ranjit) Singh portraying the character of a coolie held a bag in his hand and a bundle of cloth on his head. The actor Ayekpam Shyamsunder who played the role of Bijoy held a walking stick in his hand and slung a bag across his shoulder. In historical plays, the actor portraying the role of King and courtiers held swords (made from bamboo split) in their hand.

In this way, during the year between 1902 and 1942, props were extensively used and the staged was set in proper manner. Without these, it can not be said that the theatre is complete in the real sense. For this reason, in producing a play, stage sets and props are essentially required. It can then be fairly concluded that plays in the earlier days used stage sets and stage props.

3) Light:

When proscenium theatre first made its appearance in Manipur around 1902, there was no electric power supply in the state. Patromax and Half-Lanterns were used to light the stage and the audience's space. Commenting on this, Ayekpam Shyamsunder says:

As electricity was not available then, two or three patromax were hung up on the scaffold above to light the stage. For the foot-light, three or four half-lanterns were arranged to the front of the stage. The screene were folded up and down in full glare. The lights in the audience' space was kept lit for the whole duration.

Gradually, the general lights became unsatisfactory and emphasis began to be given on changing of lights now and then. When the MDU was established in 193, boxes with doors were made and the patromax were put in it. So, when sufficient light was required, the door was lifted with rope to let out the light and when not required the door was shut. In this way, lighting technique in plays began to be used by the theatres. A major contribution was made by Chingakham Mayaurdhwaja towards this effort. Commenting on this, Ayekpam Shyamsunder says:

Using boxes with lid to filter the lights as required, capped with different colours or green, red, and blue, Chingakham Mayurdhawaja designed an ingenious technique of using lights on stage. The light effects he used for the MDU play 'Bilabmangal' made it appear as if it was raining on stage, or of floods, and this had a great impression on the audience. Though it required some handling, it perhaps was not less effective as today's stage lighting. Since then, the other theatres picked up this new trend of stage lighting.

4) Sound:

In discourse on the play production of the pre war days, sound is also an important factor. Interestingly, during this time there was no electrical device to produce the required sound on stage. Naturally, plays of this period did not use sound system of any type. It is said that to produce the sound of rain and thunder, backstage hands scrapped metal on corrugated zinc sheets and iron chairs, and beat on the wooden planks, drums and cymbles.

5) Music:

Music played an important part in the successful performance of plays on stage during the years before the Second World War. However, music of those days was apparently different from contemporary times. Music was primarily used at the opening of the play and during the play when the actors sang songs. During the forty years of proscenium theatre between 1902 and 1942, it was in 1914 when a song was composed in Manipuri for the first time in the play 'Partha Parajay' produced by Khaidem Nongyai. Before this, songs were sung in Bengali language. Commenting on the use of songs to delight the audience, Ayekpam Shyamsunder writes:

In the play 'Savaparvadd' during the scene when Dushashan drags Draupati by her hair, she sings thus "Let go of me, let go of me, Juvaraj, do not touch your sister-in-law's hair". In the play 'Sita Banbash' when Luv-Kush comes to confront Rama, they sing "We know your strength, O, Rama. You, who claim to be strong by killing the woman Tarka"

The musicologist Laishram Birendrakumar had recorded several songs that were sung in different plays. Some of these are:

*Here is Charan Chihu
Prahlad's wish has been realized
My heart's wishes had been fulfilled
In play with Harinaam
..... And so on.*

In 1923 the play 'Savaparva' was staged at Sana Janmasthan. In the play the actor playing the role of Draupati sang this song:

*Let me go, let me go, Juvaraj
Please leave me be
You are the Crown Prince
.....And so on.*

The one person who contributed to lyrics and music was Chingakhom Jatiswor. His were mainly songs rendered in the Bengali language. From 1927 onwards, there was a trend of light music and Laghusangeet in the performances. This was an imitation from outside. Commenting on this Laishram Birendrakumar says:

From the earlier trend of performing conventional plays like Savaparva, Prahlad and Sita Banvash, a new trend developed where themes on social and historical aspects were enacted, such as Hijam Anganghal's 'Thabal Chongbi', Sorokhaibam Lalit's 'Sati Khongnang' and 'Areppa Marup'. During this time, gramophone records made their entry into Manipur, and a newer trend of light

music and Laghusangeet made their presence felt in proscenium theatre. Themes on Ramprasadi songs, Kirtan songs, Najrul-giti, Atul Prasad, and Rabindra Sangeet were popularly song. Music came to be used as an expression of ideas, of the undercurrent in contemporary society.

In the earlier days, the use of musical effect in the play was not done. The trend picked up after MDU experimental with stage music around 1931. Commenting on this, Laishram Birendrakumar says:

It was not usual to provide background music in plays in those early days. Just before the outbreak of the war, a trend developed of providing stage music. I used to play the flute, and started experimenting with flute music to supplement the dialogue, based on appropriate raga and sur.

In the pre 2nd world war days, it was customary to open the plays with an opening song. This was known as 'Prastavana'. The song basically paid obeisance to the gods, praised the monarch paid respect to the audience.

After MDU was established in 1931, there gradually developed a trend of performing concerts, immediately after the opening song and before the curtain was raised. This was done on an experimental basis. A few instances may be given. On March 15 in 1931, S. Lalit's *Areppa Marup* was performed at the courtyard of Ngangbam Shyamkishor at Yaiskul, Imphal. In the concert that followed, Shyamkishor and his son Nimai played the clarinet, a western musical instrument. Earlier, it was considered unorthodox to play western instruments. On that occasion, Ngangbam Shyamkishor played clarinet, S. Lalit played harmonium, Huiem Lala played the dholak, Lukhoisana played the cornet, Ratansana played Piklu and Hijam Anganghal played the mandila (cymbal).

From the discourses, therefore it is learnt that although music supplemented in the plays, it was the song rendering by the actor themselves that highlighted the essence of the plays. As most of the actors could sing well, it served as the music in the plays and this delighted the audience.

6) Costume:

In a play, costume plays an important role in enhancing the essence of the play. Bharat Muni's '*Natya Shastra*' described this *Aryja Abhinaya*. Commenting on this, Nongmaithem Ibobi Singh says:

In a play personification of any object or exhibiting it as a part of the play, is known as Aryja Abhinaya. When an actor had dressed and is about to go on stage, he takes all his props in hand or his body and commits to Aryja Abhinya. Every object becomes personified in his character. When he fails to concentrate on this, he fails to be one with his character.

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