

**Brahmacharimayum Gyaneshwari Devi**

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**Ref. File No. 28-6/ICH-Scheme/2015-16/71**

**Dated the 1st June 2016**

To

The Secretary  
Sangeet Natak Akademi  
2nd Floor Rabindra Bhawan  
(Opposite Mandi House Doordarshan Kendra)  
35 Feroz Shah Road  
New Delhi - 110001

Subject: Submission of Blue Print, National Inventory Register and 1st Project Report.

Sir/Madam,

With reference to your **File No. 28-6/ICH-Scheme/2015-16/71** dated 21/04/2016, I have the honour to furnish the 1st Project Report on "FOLK THEATRE THOK LILA OF MANIPUR: SATIRE, WIT AND COMEDY".

In the first phase of the project, I have done research work and documentation. I met many old age theatre personalities, artiste families to collect valuable data of the proposed project. In the 2nd and 3rd Report I include more details on the proposed project.

The contents of the 1st project Report are as follows:

- a) Blue Print- Page 2 to 4
- b) National inventory register- Page 5 to 8
- c) 1st Project Report - 9 - 18
- d) Rare photographs - Page 19 to 22

In this connection i request you to kindly release the 2nd installment to implement the remaining project.

**Yours faithfully**



**B. Gyaneshwari Devi**

M.Phil in English Literature  
Yumnam Leikai Lairembi Maning, Imphal West  
795001-Manipur

## **BLUEPRINT OF THE PROJECT ON**

### **"FOLK THEATRE THOK LILA OF MANIPUR : SATIRE, WIT AND COMEDY"**

under the scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage  
and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India 2015 -16

#### ***1) Brief introduction of the Project:***

Manipuri Folk Thok Leela is a comedy satirizing the social conditions, the courtier and king. The actors with their repartee are talented in producing satiric, comic and rollicking effects. Literally, the word *thok* means 'at random'. The Manipuri colloquial *thoka thakka hek touradana* means 'doing something at random'. This Folk Theatre Thok Leela is original product of the Manipur. Hence, it can be inferred that Thok Leela is a satirical comedy at random with neither a written script nor, amazingly, a director. The only guidance was the advice of the elders and the gurus. However it has a beautiful story and theme. The performers of this folk theatre is performed by the Manipuri Meitei community in the valley area of Manipur. Now we have no one actor of this performance.

#### ***2) Objective of the research, data creation or documentation of the project:***

The proposed project is the part of the intangible cultural heritage of India. The research work will find out the contribution of our forefather in the field Manipuri folk Theatre. And main objective of the research, data creation or documentation of the project is to know the real story, its value, actors talent and their contribution in the society.

**3) Implementation of the project:**

For proper implementation of the project work we will initiate the following works

viz:

- 1) Data collection from different old/veteran sumang leela artiste, theatre artiste.
- 2) Data collection from different Theatre groups of Manipur.
- 3) Data collection direct from the artiste and artiste family
- 4) Conclusion (to show the findings and submission to SNA)

**4) Time frame of the project:**

The project will take a minimum of one and half year.

The time frame of the project will be during 2016-17

**5) Specific areas of the respective state in which the art form (s) is practiced- Geographical, typographical and other related aspects that the project may cover:**

The respective state in which the art form Folk Theatre Thok Leela of Manipur is practiced in Manipur by the Manipuri Meitei Community only.

So the present research work is to be concentrated to the valley area of Manipur. The project is emphasizing to research and document on Folk Theatre of Manipur particularly Thok Leela

**6) Photos (preliminary level) related to the project/art form:**

Attaching herewith some selected and related photos (preliminary level) to the project.

**7) Conclusion of the project as you have envisioned:**

In the conclusion, I have envision to find out the main role and contribution of Manipuri Folk Theatre Thok Leela in Manipuri Theatre. This particular subject is intangible art form and very important.



**Scheme for “Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India”**  
**Form for National Inventory Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage of India**

A. Name of the State : **Manipur**

Name of the Element/Cultural Tradition (in English): **"FOLK THEATRE THOK LILA OF MANIPUR: SATIRE, WIT AND COMEDY"**

B. B.1. Name of the element in the language and script of the community

Concerned, if applicable : **(in Manipuri) Manipurgi Folk Theatre Thok Leela : Faagi amasung heithoi singthoina karemnaba**

C. Name of the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned (Identify clearly either of these concerned with the practice of the said element/cultural tradition) : **Manipuri Meitei Community**

D. Geographical location and range of the element/cultural tradition (Please write about the other states in which the said element/tradition is present **Valley area of Manipur.**

E. Identification and definition of the element/cultural tradition of the India

(Write “Yes” in one or more boxes to identify the domain(s) of intangible cultural heritage manifested by the element. If you tick ‘others’, specify the domain(s) in brackets.)

- i. ( **no** ) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage
- ii. ( **yes** ) performing arts
- iii. ( **yes** ) social practices, rituals and festive events
- iv. ( **yes** ) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- v. ( **yes** ) traditional craftsmanship
- vi. other(s) (

- F. Provide a brief summary description of the element that can introduce it to readers who have never seen or experienced it: **Thok Leela is a popular Satire, wit and comedy folk theatre of Manipur. An original product of this land. Intangible Cultural Heritage of India.**
- G. Who are the bearers and practitioners of the element/Cultural Traditions? Are there any specific roles or categories of persons with special responsibilities for the practice and transmission of it? If yes, who are they and what are their responsibilities? : **Manipuri theatre practitioner. Their relentless effort is to promote, preserve and propagate the element.**
- H. How are the knowledge and skills related to the element transmitted today? **Through Public performances**
- I. What social functions and cultural meanings do the element/cultural tradition have today for its community? : **Entertainment, social media**
- J. Is there any part of the element that is not compatible with existing international human rights instruments or with the requirement of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, or with sustainable development? I.e. describe any aspect of the element/cultural tradition that may be unacceptable to Law of the country or may be in opposition to practicing community's harmony with others. : **Does not arise**
- K. Your Project's contribution to ensuring visibility, awareness and encouraging dialogue related to the element/cultural tradition : **The project shall help enhance the elements.**
- L. Information about the safeguarding measures that may protect or promote the element/cultural tradition
- a. (Write "Yes" in one or more boxes to identify the safeguarding measures that have been and are currently being taken by the communities, groups or individuals concerned)
- i. ( "Yes" ) transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education
- ii. ( "Yes" ) identification, documentation, research
- iii. ( "Yes" ) preservation, protection
- iv. ( "Yes" ) promotion, enhancement
- v. ( "Yes" ) revitalization

- b. Write about the measures taken at local, state and national level by the Authorities to safeguard the element/cultural tradition? : **a few workshop, seminar, training, festival, performances by local organisation and private enterprises**
- M. Write about the threats, if any, to the element/cultural tradition related to its practice, visibility and future longevity. Give facts and relevant reasons based on the current scenario. **Modernisation affects folk theatre of Manipur today losing its aesthetics - a major threat to the elements.**
- N. Safeguarding measures proposed  
(This section should identify and describe safeguarding measures to protect and promote the element/cultural tradition. Such measures should be concrete and can be implemented to formulate future cultural policy for safeguarding and promoting the element/cultural tradition in the state) :  
**Scholar, non-government organisations, state governments, practioners to do research, organise workshop, seminar.**
- O. Community Participation  
(Write about the participation of communities, groups and individuals related to the element/cultural tradition in formulation of your project):  
**Resource persons, project director, artiste families, from Manipuri Meitei community**
- P. Concerned community organization(s) or representative(s)  
(Provide detailed contact information for each community organization or representative or other non-governmental organization that is concerned with the element such as associations, organizations, clubs, guilds, steering committees, etc.)
- i. Name of the entity :
- ii. Name and title of the contact person : **B. Gyaneshwari Devi**
- iii. Address: **Yumnam Leikai Lairembi Maning Imphal West -795001**
- iv. Telephone number : **9485272042**
- v. E-mail: **gyanecult@rediffmail.com**
- vi. Other relevant information
- Q. Give information of any Inventory, database or data creation centre (local/state/national) that you may be aware of or of any office, agency, organisation or body involved in the maintenance of the said inventory etc.  
**Archival Centre for Performing Art**

- R. Principal published references or documentation available on the element/cultural tradition  
(Books, articles, audio-visual materials, names and addresses of reference libraries, museums, private endeavours of artistes/individuals for preservation of the said element, publications or websites)

**Books:**

- i) Ayekpam Shyamsundar Singh, , Manipuri Shumang Leela Amasung Theatre, Manipur Sahitya Parishad, Imphal, 1980
- ii) Dr. Khomdon Singh, Preservation and conservation of the cultural heritage of Manipur, Manipur Library Assn, Imphal, 2000
- iii) Sanakhiya Ibotombi, Manipuri Theatre Amasung Drama, NTS Publication, Imphal, 1987.
- iv) Anjum Katyal, Theatre in Manipur Today, Seagull foundation for Arts, 26 Circus Avenue, Kolkata, 1997

**Article:**

- i) Panthoibi Natya Mandir, Imphal Seminar paper, Folk theatre in India
- ii) Poknapham News Paper, Shumang Leegi Khongul Liba, by Dr. Rajen Toijamba.
- iii) Poknapham News Paper, Takhellambam Nabakumar, by Dr. Makhon Mani

**Artistes/individuals for preservation of the said element :**

- i) T. Nabakumar
- ii) T. Manikchand Singh
- iii) Irom Rashi Singh
- iv) Y. Rajendra Singh

Signature: .....  


Name & Designation: **B. Gyaneshwari Devi**

**Individual Project Director**

Name of Institution (If applicable): **NA**

Address: **Yumnam Leikai Lairembi Maning**

**Imphal West -795001 Manip**



## 1st Project Report on

### **"FOLK THEATRE THOK LILA OF MANIPUR: SATIRE, WIT AND COMEDY"**

under the scheme for Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage  
and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India 2015 -16

The Manipuri folk theatre *Thok Leela* is one of the most popular *Faagi Leelas* that was produced by Takhellambam Thambalngou Singh in 1919. Besides its wide range performances in different parts of Manipur it was invited to Assam, Silchar, Tripura and Sillete in Bangladesh. What accounts for its finest achievement of running successfully for more than 30 years is worth a thorough research.

What characterizes the Manipuri *Faagi Leela* is the wit of the artist, his intellect the cross word war, humour, harsh satire on the scandal of public life or of the court. In short *Faagi Leela* is a play in which the actor uses laughter as a weapon against a butt which may be an individual, a class, an institution, or a nation. In a *Faagi Leela* performance the space is surrounded by the audience. Scholars opine that such performance has its origin in Manipur. In 19th century, during the reign of Iningthou Chandrakriti (1851-1886) Durga Puja was celebrated with great pomp and

show lasting for ten days. A special feature of the Pujah was Nata Sankirtana - both Nupa Paala and Nupi Paala. Above the Nata-Sankirtana comedians like Abujamba Saiton and Kharibam Laisuba were summoned by the king for Faagi Leela performance. This was followed by performances at Kaalimai Mandir, Yaiskul. By this time *Faagi Leela* popularized. It was invited at local functions and honoured with a small amount 'dakshina' (performance fee). From here Manipuri *Sumang Leela* or Shumang Kumei (Shumang = courtyard; Kumei = festival: Shumang Kumei is a popular Manipuri folk theatre) was born.

Interestingly *Faagi Leela* was known by virtue of either the leading artist's physical appearance, his name, the clan he belongs, or the part /role he played. For instance the leading artist of 'Yotsubi Faagi' was Phanjoubam Chaoba who was dark complexioned (Yotsubi means iron tripod blackened with soot that the Manipuris use as a stand for cooking pot). Chaoba being dark the Faagi Leela he led came to be known as Yotsubi Faagi. On the other hand the Faagi Leela led by Pangambam Chaoba came to be known as 'Pangambam Faagi' after the name of clan Chaoba belonged. Another interesting instance is that of 'Chengba Faagi'. Its leading artist Fijam Bokul possessed a ridiculously queer posture. His chest was narrower/smaller than his waist. (\*chengba means thinned small). Hence the Faagi Leela led by him came to be known as 'Chengba Faagi'.

By 1910 *Faagi Leela* started to be performed under the banner of companies like Kabul Pala, Fadabi Pala etc. Around 1919 Shri Takhellambam Thambalngou of Kongba, Imphal produced '*Thok Leela*'. Literally Thok in Manipuri means spontaneous/on impulse when used as adjective or adverb. When used as noun it means nonsense or ludicrous. Interestingly Thok Leela did not require a fixed text. Within the thematic structure the actors exercised their wit and intellect.

The Leela is about a poor orphan called 'Thok' who later became a king. In the words of Shri Takhellambam Nabakumar, son of Shri Takhellambam Thambalngou , the play is full of laughter. Actors deploy *hasya rasa* throughout the play. Even while enacting serious, emotion or sorrowful lines the actors preferred *hasya* to *karuna rasa*".

Unfortunately *Thok Leela* had no written dramatic text. It was a spontaneous exercise of the artist's skill, humour and intellect concentrated to the story/theme. The story is about a poor orphan who later became a king. All the events through his venture from orphan hood to the throne manifested censors for the ludicrous throwing audience to bursts of laughter. The vice and folly of the king, the lazybones are lent to mockery. In fact *Thok Leela* is a fusion of the critical and the humourist rendering itself a great satirical temperament.

Pastiche is a common feature of *Thok Leela*. Whatever is ridiculous or unseemly, is targeted through this composition.

*In Manipuri Meiteilon/language*

|                                    |                               |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| All meitei thikadars (contractors) | Thikadar meitei macha pumbase |
| On his contracts                   | Thika toubani haiduna         |
| Boasting on false state            | Phutani pokhairubadagi        |
| Lay struck by the arrow of income  | Incomgi tenna palladuna       |
| Show freckles on temple            | Mamaida maihing karakle       |
| Why why why !                      | Karinano karinano karinano!   |

|                          |                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Craze for the cigarette  | Mixture churut pamluduna    |
| Love for hotel pakoura   | Hotelgi bora nungshibana    |
| It bound him to its grip | Ashina fajin punsinduna     |
| Show freckles on temple  | Maida maihing karakle       |
| Why why why!!            | Karinano karinano karinano! |

The above pastiche is known as jamuk (chorus) sung at the opening of the play while offering Goutamani Pujah. This is followed by

*In Manipuri Meiteilon language*

|                    |                                  |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Where do we live   | Hingpham leiroidoumalle          |
| What means we have | Karamba upai touthiba.           |
| No food, no water  | Chaningai thakningai leiroidouri |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| The earth sold away   | Prithivi maru loina yonkhare  |
| What means we have<br>For man to live.  | Karamba upai touraga<br>Jibol upai oigadage   |
| Life of woman<br>Dark with sins<br>Look for souls so poor<br>There is none poorer than woman<br>She who left the parents<br>For love- Is now a bonded labourer. | Nupi oibi mapok ase<br>Papki mapeina tillabani<br>Tonbadagi tonba khallubada<br>Nupibu heba leikhidare<br>Gurujonbu thanamlaga<br>Premtana minai oirabani |
| For he keeps women high<br>The west is the victor   | Nupi luna thamkhibana<br>Maleshna joy oi  |
| In other countries<br>Horses carry burdens.<br>In our country<br>Woman are burdened<br>For he keeps woman high<br>The west is the victor                        | Migi deshtadi<br>Shagolna bojai pui<br>Eikhoigi deshtadi<br>Nupina bojai pui<br>Nupi luna thamkhibana<br>Maleshna joy oi                                  |
| Oh you meiteis<br>Make a shop each<br>Let meitei buy from meitei<br>And foreigner from foreigners.  | Meitei macha pumnamak<br>Dukan amamam sabiyu<br>Meiteina meiteida leinarasi<br>Mayangna mayangda leinarasi  |

|                              |                               |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| You sell at Dimapur          | Dimapurda nakhoina famlo      |
| We sell in Manipur           | Manipurda eikhoi famge        |
| You take our lots            | Eikhoigi potsu nakhoina louro |
| We take your lots            | Nakhoigi potsu Eikhoina louge |
| And this is all I want       | Hairibase thawaina pamjei     |
| Let the meiteis sell         | Meitei mach dukan famhallo    |
| A....A..... Re.....          | A....A..... Re.....           |
| M.A., B.A. think and discuss | BA MA tanaduna                |
| Let the meitei sell          | Meitei macha dukan famhallo   |

Many interesting instances are found in *Thok Leela* that ridicule the absurdity of man. One such story is that of a man who has two wives. The man is seriously ill. In spite of being concerned for the dying husband the two woman fight for the property. The dying husband on the other hand sets out to leave more to the second wife. There is a tingle of humour in the play that provokes laughter at the folly of human nature. The acting of Chungkham Ibohal in the role of dying husband is still well remembered today.

In all forms of *Faagi Leela* neither the king nor the capital/court of Manipur is mentioned. Instead the court of Kabo (Now Myanmar) and the Kabo king are significantly used. It may be understood that mere mention of

the king and court of Manipur could be accountably punished. Hence *Faagi Leela* portrays the Kabo king and his court and in such portraits conceived significantly the typical. Before the play opens/starts the artistes enter the space with a song in chorus. Remarkably the song is a clear make-believe of the idea that the play is about Kabo and not of Manipur.

*In Manipuri meiteilon/language*

Come along, lets enter

Chatsi lao changlasi lao

All countrymen

Leibak khwai pumnamak

The capital of Kabo

Kabogi konungda changlasi

On this day

Ngsi korou nongjada

In the court of Kabo

Kabo darbar konungda

The kindly king

Thoujal heiba mapugi

Lets serve for the king

Sanagi thougal tourusi

Come along, lets enter

Lao lao chasi, changlasi lao

Live all Beauty; All love

Pammu ningthi khibikna

In this capital

Tillibadi konungni

Come along, lets enter.

Lao lao chasi, changlasi lao

Nectar flows ceaselessly here

Amirtya ichel chelliba

Here grows the immortal tree

Sidaba upal houriba

Come along, lets enter.

Lao lao chasi, changlasi lao

One of the finest achievements of *Thok Leela* is that of mass communication. It has already been mentioned that *Thok Leela* has no written script. The thematic structure provides the ground for the artistes to exercise their wit and intellect. Any event or incidence they come across either at home, at the locality, village or at the market place which they think could be news to the public they would put it into the structure. Hence a meeting/rehearsal was done prior to every performance either at the residence of Shri Samurailatpam Nityaichand Sharma, Wangkhei Keithel Ashangbi Imphal who took the role of Minister in the play or at the residence of Shri Chungkham Ibohal, near Khurai Keithel. All artistes followed a principle -to keep irritation or anger under control and laugh in a well mannered way the vice and folly. This could have been the reason for the long period of more than 30 years successful performance.

Some renowned artistes of *Thok Leela* whose relentless effort to administer a remedy for the vices and follies in the society through their wit and intellect are cited herewith:

- 1) Shri Takhellambam Thambalngou Singh, Kongba Standard College Gate, Imphal: Initiator of *Thok Leela*, A renowned guru for Nata Sankirtana, Gostha and Gouraleela
- 2) Lairikyengbam Gourachandra Singh, Khurai: Actor in the role of kings servant, and occasionally the role of 'Thok' the protagonist.



- 3) Samurailatpam Ibotombi Sharma, Wangkhei Ayangpali: In the role of cook making puri and occasionally cast as 'Thok' the protagonist.
- 4) Irom Rashi Singh, Nongmeibung Imphal: In female cast.
- 5) Chungkham Ibohal Singh, Khurai Lamlong Bazaar, Imphal: comedian casts mainly as 'Thok' the protagonist.
- 6) Takhellambam Nabakumar Singh, Kongba Standard College Gate, Imphal : took the role of Juvaraj (king's younger brother)
- 7) Takhellambam Manikchand Singh, Kongba Nongthongbam Leikai, Imphal; In the role of 'Thok' s mother.
- 8) Samurailatpam Nityaichand Sharma, Wangkhei Keithel Ashangbi: took the role of minister.
- 9) Longjam Goura Singh, Thangmeiband Hijam Leikai: In the role of Thok's mother

In a word to add Manipuri *Thok Leela* was a censure condemning whatever was not approved. Every set of vice and folly, knave and fool was ridiculed. *Thok Leela* held the mirror up to nature and lashed out at contemporary follies - the king, the court, the society, and individual types all alike in a firm but well -mannered laughter.

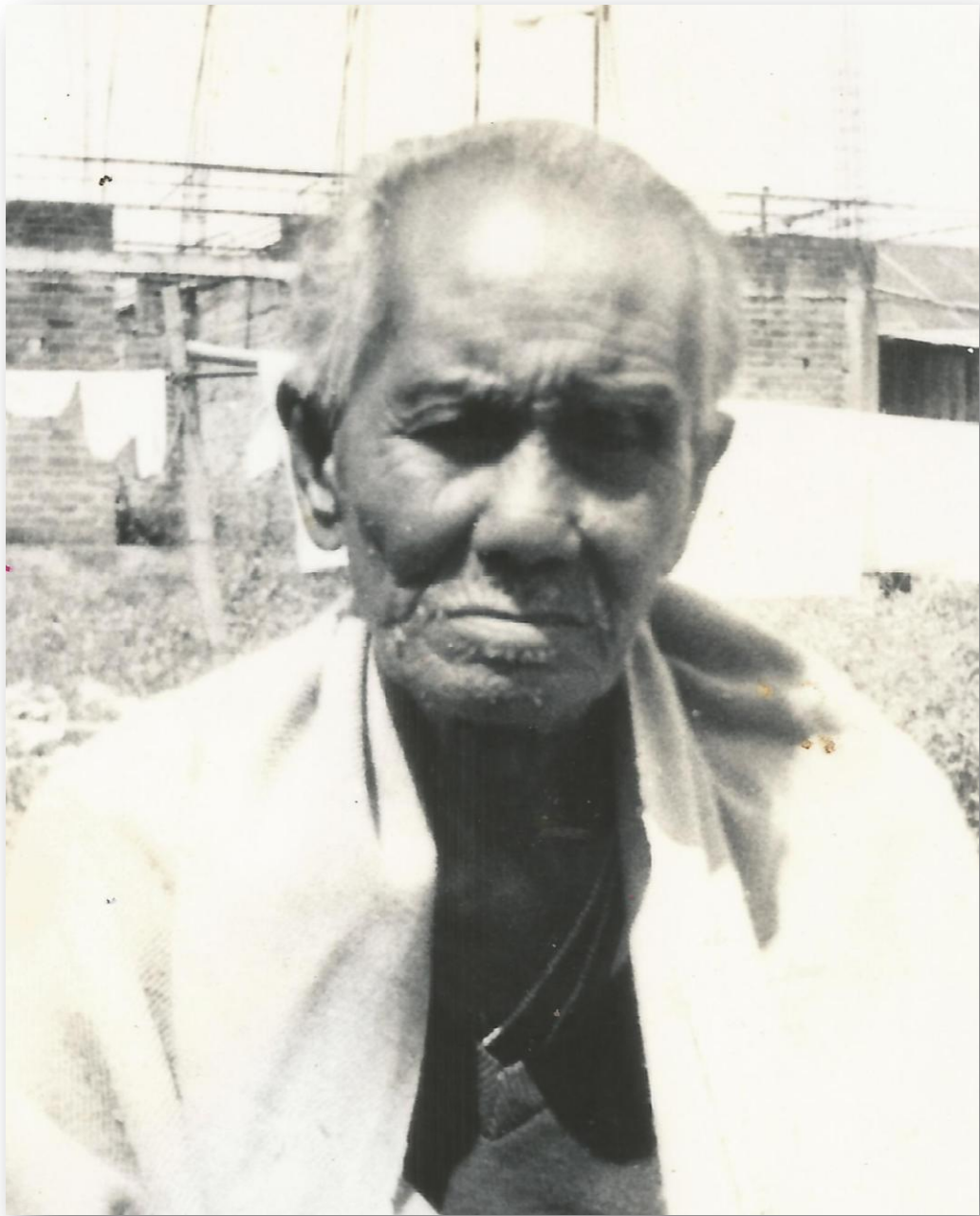
It is necessary to examine here in detail the methods of treatment and the production style by which Manipuri *Thok Leela* had been running successfully for a long period of more than 30 years. **And this section will be dealt with in the second report.**



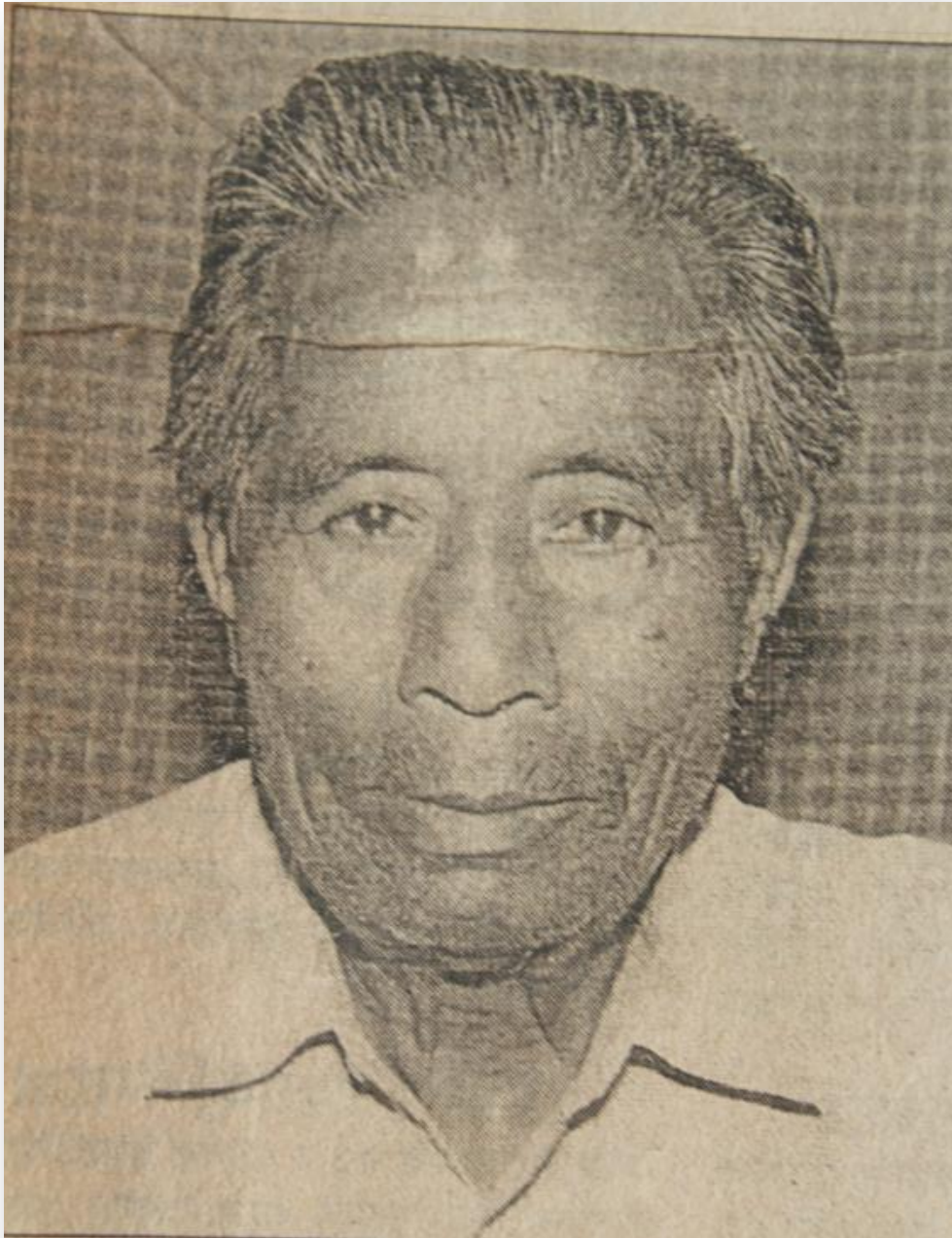
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**Late Takhellambam Manikchand Singh:**  
who took the role of thok's mother  
in the play Thok Leela  
add- Kongba Nongthongbam Leikai, Imphal East

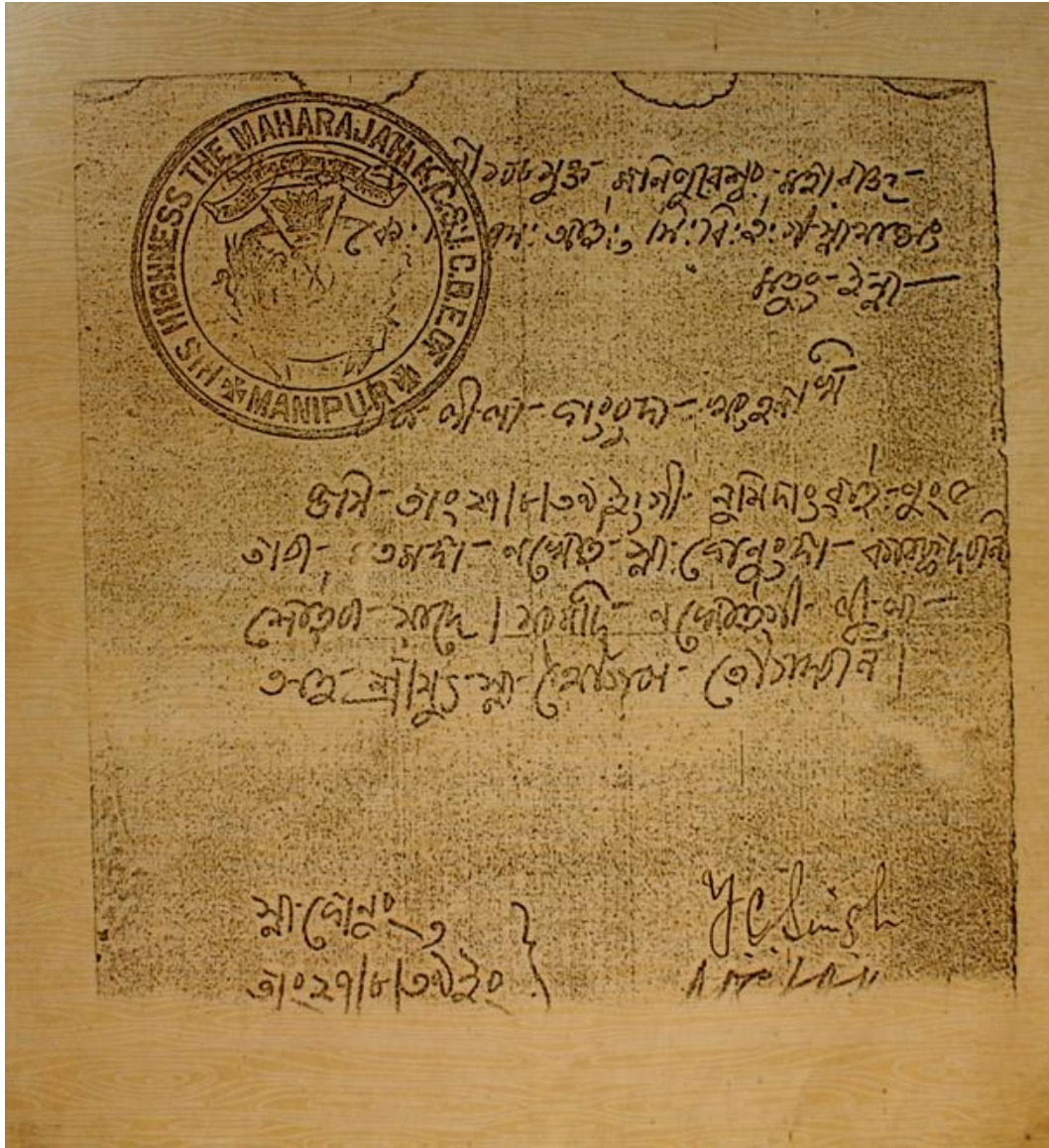


**Late Irom Rashi Singh:**  
acted in a female cast  
in the play Thok Leela  
add- Nongmeibung Imphal East



**Late Takhellambam Nabakumar Singh:**  
took the role of Juvaraj (king's younger brother)  
add- Kongba Nongthongbam Leikai,  
near Kongba Standard College Gate, Imphal East





**An Order of His Highness the Maharajah of Manipur,**  
 given to the Thok Leela Party to perform  
 Thok Leela on 27/08/1939

this document is collected from the family of  
**Late Takhellambam Nabakumar Singh**