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HERITAGE EXPLORER

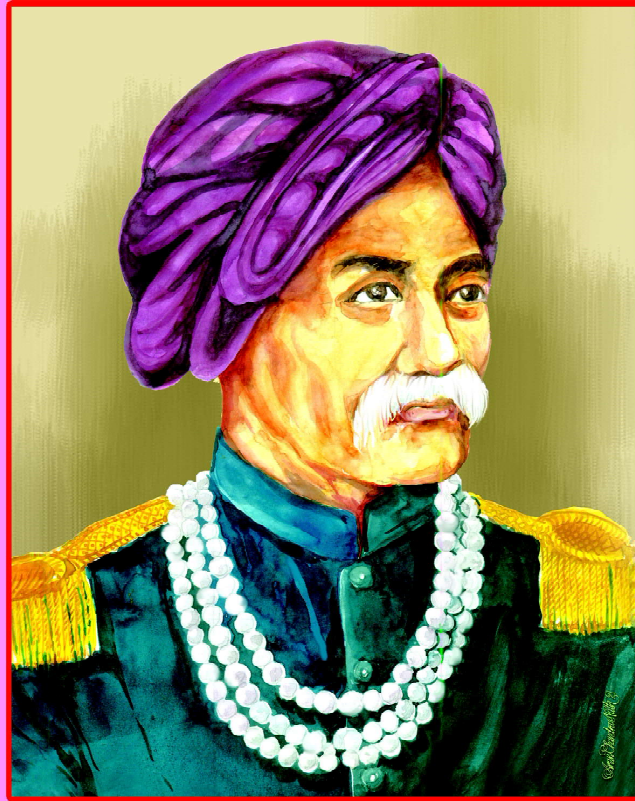
"LET KNOWLEDGE COME FROM ALL THE SIDES"

A Monthly News Bulletin

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India's Unsung Heroes



Lungthoubu Thangal, better known as Thangal Major, was a legendary hero of Thangal tribe. Since his childhood he had a peculiar character and appearance along with extraordinary strength. He was bold, active, intelligent and fond of playing and hunting. His courage and bravery attracted the eyes of the elders and was admired by all the villagers. He was the most experienced and capable administrator in the days of Maharajas who ruled for a long period of about 60 years from the reign of Gambhir Singh Maharaj to the reign of Kulachandra Maharaj. The longest and most exciting period was during the reign of Chandrakirti Singh Maharaj who ruled for 35 years strating from 1851 to 1886. He and his army fought bravely against the British to repel their invasion of Independent Manipur State. He was captured by British in 1891. He was tried and sentenced to death by British for 'waging war against the British Crown and abetment of the murder of European officers'. He was hanged on 13-08-1891 at Keithel Achouba.

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Let us fight Drug use and abuse

For last several months the most common news that occupies news space in each and every news paper is related to supply of drugs and its easy availability. The large quantities of various drugs that are seized by the Railway Protection Force of the north eastern sector of Indian Railways clearly indicate that the number of drug addicts is on the rise and the drug cartels are busy in supplying their merchandise to all corners of India including the north east.

It is really heartening to note that immediately after Himanta Biswa Sarma led BJP government came to power in Assam, a war against drugs use and abuse was launched most effectively. This fight was complemented by the Government of Manipur under the leadership of Biren Singh and the result was quite outstanding. It was evident that the joining of forces by Assam and Manipur was not a mere rollout of legislation or an election slogan, but a sincere and substantive endeavour on their part. Both the states buffed up their intelligence and detection network which resulted in grabbing the drug traffickers in a choke-hold.

When we look at the drug menace scenario at national level, we notice that the honest efforts of the world body of UNO, the central and state governments of our country, the national and international NGOs and well intentioned individuals failed to achieve any perceptible success, rather the menace continues to be on the rise. It is a common refrain amongst the drug menace observers of North East that the main cause of drug addiction is its easy availability which are supplied by the illegal drug traffickers and the close proximity of north east to the Golden Triangle, the second largest site of opium production. Easy availability of drugs may be one of the reasons but it is definitely not the only reason. There must be some other reasons behind the rising surge of Drug menace, HIV/AIDS and Human Trafficking etc in this resource-rich, infrastructure-poor, conflict-scarred north east region.

The apparent causes behind the upsurge of the drug menace are perhaps modern day glare of material acquisitions, frustration arising out of unemployment and poverty, lack of parental guidance and control, lack of knowledge about the consequences of drug addiction, unconcerned attitude of the teachers of schools and colleges, and last but not the least – lack of the societal supervision. This unfortunate combination of apathy and negligence is making it easier for the people engaged in peddling of drugs and narcotics to poach our juveniles.

The governments of the past attached much importance to catching the poachers of Kaziranga and Manas forest reserves, but paid very little attention to the poachers who are snatching away our school and college going youths. There are another section of youths, mostly of non-Assamese origin, who play a vital role in the supply chain of drugs and trafficking. They identify the victims, lure them to the dens of the drug peddlers, and ensure that they never slip away. It is not that these denizens of darkness are always invisible, but the police and the people who can play a positive role in identifying and eliminating these villains, do not have the time or the will. A society can never flourish if its constituents, the conscious citizens, do not exercise their guardianship responsibilities. This is what is happening in and around us. It is very sad to say that the most unfortunate and disastrous role in the matter of drug addiction is being played by the parents and the elders of the families. The behaviour, the demeanour and the unreasonable monetary demands of their wards never spur them to look deeper.

We should give a rethink to what we are doing to combat the rising trend of drug menace. It has already been proved beyond any reasonable doubt that the present remedies of celebrating the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking once in a year with pomp and grandeur, arranging rallies and processions, organising awareness campaigns, distributing pamphlets, booklets and posters is not helping us in achieving our objective. Since our people in general subscribe to the theory that all difficult jobs are the responsibility of the government and they have no role to play. The philosophy must be revised otherwise the families of those unconcerned individuals will also be poached and their happy homes will turn to hell. At the same time, without wasting money on unproductive pompous celebrations and publicity, which never reaches the eyes and ears of drug addicts, the government should order compulsory lessons on drug addiction in schools and colleges, highlighting the consequences of drug use. At the same time government should prepare educative literature on drug addiction for parents and flash them on TV and mass media. The Theme of the literatures should be “Drug destroys the present as well as the future. Drug destroys the only one life the god has given to us.” Let us unitedly fight the drug menace with all our might.

Romen Chakraborty

Chief Editor

Tumyehang System in Limbu Community

Sandhya Subba (Singzango)

Limbus are one of the autochthonous tribes with its own distinct culture, traditions, and religious belief. Limbus are scattered throughout the different parts of world like Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur States of India; Bhutan, Nepal, United Kingdom, Singapore, Japan, Korea, United States of America, Hong-Kong, Myanmar etc.

Limbus has a long tradition of narrating or reciting Mundhum (oral scripture) and performing certain rituals and observing ceremonies in their own distinctive ways.

Who Are The Tumyehangs?

They are the most notable, respected and resourceful people amongst the Limbu community. They are a socio-religious body consisting of community elders. They are the people who are good at Mundhum and rich in customary knowledge.

The Mundhum says, the Limbu people used to arrange meetings/Chumlung to discuss on various issues and solve many problems. They used to work via work divisions. Later, they began to be called the sons of soil, LUNGBONGNA KHAMBONGBA. In this way, the people, who bear responsibilities in the society, are recognized as Tumyehang too. They seem to have been acknowledged as an institution within the community. They use to call for Chumlung/Sabha/Council for the judicial works. The Tumyehangs in our community still settle the disputes related to marriages, wedding ceremonies, death rites and almost all rituals and customs of the Limbus. They play a very important role during rituals like YUMSA (touching salt and oil), and KHA?OMA (death rituals). Tumyehangs also play the role of judiciary in disputes related to household shares, sharing land among siblings, land border disputes and determining areas of lands.

Few Examples of Rituals Where Their Role Is Important:

CHOKPHUNG: It is a process of adoption of a person from outside in order to include him/her in one's lineage in Limbu community.

SHASING LAPMA: It is a process of adopting child. Tumyehang has a great role in this process.

KAAI SODHOK: It is invalid marriage/wedding within siblings or relatives. Such marriage/relationship is considered illegal in Limbu community. Tumyehangs do hear such cases and decide the punishments for such act.

Tumyehangs have a very important role in wedding rituals. Limbu Shamans conduct LAGAN (wedding rites) under the presence of Tumyehangs during the wedding ceremonies in Limbu community.

They are the ones who guide and check the work of Phedangma, samba and Yebas in our community. These days we see diminishing role and respect given to our Tu Tu Tumyehangs. Our Tumyehang system is getting weak due to less importance and encouragement given to this system. Our ritual works remain incomplete in the absence of Tumyehang, who are responsible for the rites as well as Judicial system..

There are many incidents in Mundhum highlighting the role of Tumyehangs and how they take the decisions coming from Almighty TageraNingwaphuma.

Today, our Tumyehang system needs more attention and importance. All Limbu scholars need to initiate more research and study of the system. Restoration of Tumyehang system in Limbu community opens door and scope for further research and explorations on Limbu culture, ancient knowledge, customs and Mundhum.

Our Tumyehang system needs to be more

(Contd. to Page 24)

Yoga for Humanity

Sumant Chandwadkar

Expansion is life and Contraction is death, says Swami Vivekananda. What is expansion? There are many ways we can explain expansion but what was in Swamiji's mind when he made this statement. Swami Vivekananda was a multidimensional personality possessing immense spiritual enlightenment. His whole life was dedicated to the cause of upliftment of the humanity across the entire world. He could foresee the role of India in this regard and stated that 'If India dies the whole world will die.'

India is not only the piece of land or a geographic entity, India is a vibrant storehouse of abundant wealth of knowledge and amongst this the crown jewel is Her spiritual and yogic knowledge. Our scriptures always says that human life can't afford to be selfish, the human being must think and act for happiness of the entire world, Humanity means plant kingdom, animal world, all Human beings and unseen and un-manifested world. This thought and action is alive in India alone from time immemorial. This thought will perish if India dies. To activate and materialize this thought expansion of mind, emotion and intellect is necessary. Anything against this is contradiction and contraction.

Rishi Aurobindo stated that journey from Animal man to Normal man to Great Man to Divine Man and finally to perfection is YOGA and this journey is nothing but the expansion of life. To achieve this one need to have a sincere and right approach.

As we are aware Yoga is a practice that brings joy, good health, and peace from within, and it deepens a sense of continuous connection between an individual's inner consciousness and the external world.

Yoga can be defined in many ways and one of the definition of it is 'Expansion'. There is no limit for expansion. Let us see what the 'Expansion' means.

Family is the smallest unit of an ideal society.

Within the family there are family members. The members of a family will follow the discipline and do the work as per family need and requirements. This helps individual to expand, respond to family needs in accordance with the social and community laws and disciplines and act accordingly. Community and society harmoniously work with Nation in a disciplined manner, always in the interest of National. The nations further cohesively work together for the betterment of world. This approach and attitude helps us to have HARMONY amongst all. Another side of expansion and better harmony is individual personality development. Yogi Aurobindo says that yoga is an all round personality development at physical, mental, emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels. He meant that by yoga one can methodically progress towards self perfection by development of personality at five levels. It is a process by which the imperfections and limitations can be washed away resulting in progression of human being from Animal man to Normal man to Great man to Divine man to Perfect Human. Let us try to understand this journey of development. The man who is slave to his natural instincts i.e. Food (Ahar), Sleep (Nidra), Fear (Bhaya), Sex (Maithun) is a Animal man. The man who stimulates his basic available intellect and uses it for controlling his natural instincts and strives to grow and expand is a Normal man.

The normal man with his will power start understanding and acting on the principle called 'Renunciation & Service' to do good for society and the Nation is called Great Man. See the life of all the freedom fighters, Social reformers, Political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Lal bahaddur Shati, Pandit Dindayal Upadhyaya, Shyama Prasad Mukharjee, and many more. The Great Man, who uses the power of emotion culture and get established in life with three pairs of qualities i.e. Health &

Happiness, Peace & Poise, Knowledge & Efficiency is a God Man. In this journey of expansion for Harmony, the God man uses his life to guide the society to protect the Dharmic laws and usher in spiritual enlightenment of an individual as well as of the whole society. If we follow the life of Sant Ramadas Swami, Srimanta Sankardev, Swami Vivekananda and many others, we will see that they harmonized expansion with ease..

The man who get established into blissful state of mind and always dwells with the Almighty and HIS creation is a '**Poorna Purush**' (Perfection). Each and every breath of Perfect Man's life is for establishment of harmony in society and to create the congenial atmosphere for following Dharma. We can see this in the lives of Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Jesus Christ, Gurunanak Dev, Thakur Ramakrishna Paramhansa and many others.

We often hear the spiritual greats define Yoga as the means to attain harmony. We should therefore understand the necessary practices and techniques to achieve this goal . The way, process, method or techniques by which we can achieve the Harmony and Expansion is called Yoga. There are four major streams. of Yoga i.e. Karmayoga, Rajayoga, Bhaktiyoga and Jnanayoga to follow the Yoga way of life for better harmony and expansion.

Karmayoga means doing action (Karma) with maximum perfection and with aesthetic sense. Along with it mind shall be in totally relaxed state having non-attachment to the fruit of action. The action shall be for betterment of family, society and Nation. This way of action elevate the mind and such a mind allows us to be in harmony with everything around us.

Rajayoga is a path of enhancing the willpower by using one's own naturally available will force. This is the path for one's own elevation towards perfection (Poornatva). This perfection can be achieved by following the path of Astanga Yoga i.e. Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahar, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi.

Bhaktiyoga is a path of culturing emotion. Emotion means intensified thought process. It is a law of physics that when an object rotates, it gathers

energy. The continuous association with particular thought creates attachment and the desire takes shape. This finally emerges as an emotion. An emotion has two sides; positive and negative. Positive emotions are motivated by love and concern and it supports life to create harmony, negative emotions are motivated by ego and it destroys not only one's own life but it is harmful for social and national harmony. Nava-vidha Bhakti based on Panch Bhava as well as all soft skill activities like dance, painting, singing, playing an musical instrument, hobbies are helpful for emotion culture.

Jnanayoga transcends our normal intellect and allow divine intellect to spread in our life. Organized and planned thought is called normal intellect. Intellect is the power of discrimination and analysis. Intellect is a very important force in life as due to this man progresses in all fields of life. Man has freedom and he is not programmed like animals and other species and can use his freedom by applying the intellect. He can create harmony and gain the eternal happiness.

Conventional and traditional yogic practices are based on four major streams of yoga and they are usefull for achieving harmony, peace and happiness in life and society. The practices can be Surya Namaskar, Yogasana, Deep Shavasana, Pranayama and Meditation so far as physical health is concerned, Besides these, using Karmayoga approach for doing action in daily life is perhaps the best way. Concept of Bhakti with right attitude helps us to strengthen the emotions and then Shravan, Manan and Nidhidhyasana (Listening, Contemplation and Dwelling on outcome of Manan i.e. authentic, right and nationalistic spiritual / religious thoughts) are the backbone of Jnanayoga. By using this one can understand the basic purpose of life and puts on an effort to achieve final status of yogic life. And through this alone harmony and happiness get established in society.

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Kushal Konwar – The unsung Hero of the Freedom Struggle

Mrinmoy Lahkar

When we think about India's struggle for Independence, the first name occurs in our mind is Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi. India gained Independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, who was the founder of Satyagrah, the non-violent way of protest. He is therefore called as the Father of the Nation. With him, many other freedom fighters like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Lala Lajpat Rai, Sardar Ballav Bhai Patel, Bipin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Subhash Chandra Bosh, Chandrashekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh etc have got identity in national level, but on the other hand some other freedom fighters are rarely remembered. Their contributions were no less. This writing is about one of those freedom fighters who finds very little mention at national level. He is Kushal Konwar the Martyr, who was hanged by the British for revolting against the colonialists. He was the only martyrs in the entire country to be awarded with capital punishment during the quit India movement. Though by birth an ordinary citizen but he died a glorious death at the prime of his youth for the country. The present generation should emulate his patriotism and self sacrifice.

Childhood of Kushal Konwar:

Kushal Konwar was born on the day of 9th Chot, 1905, in a middle class family of Chaodang Chariali, Ghiladhari Mouza of Golaghat district (then Sivasagar district). His father was Sonaram Konwar and mother was Kanakeshwari Konwar. Kushal Konwar's ancestor was Laloi Konwar. He lived in Lakua Village, near by the Lakua train station. His elder son Nadaram Konwar came to Balijan village of Golaghat during the attack of Burmese armies and started to live there. The son of Nadaram Konwar was Khatang Konwar and his son was Sonaram Konwar. Sonaram Konwar's children were Senduri, Dharmeshwar, Sarumai, Kunti, Kushal, Mechanji, Purna and Sonadhar. Kushal Konwar's father Sonaram Konwar was interested in

independent business. He too had interest in both cultural field and education. At that time, he started his own Timber business in collaboration with a businessman named Mr. Meagre Wilson.

Kushal Konwar's formal education started in 1912 when he was about 7 year old. His father admitted him in Balijan Primary School of Changdang Chariali. At that time, two prominent teachers were teaching there. They were- Sayyad Muhibuddin and Sarbeshwar Sharma Rajkhowa. Both of them helped Kushal Konwar in every field of education and encouraged him too. Kushal was interested in games and sports in the school days. In the year 1918, Kushal finished his primary education and was admitted in Golaghat Government Bezbaruah Mid English School for his higher education. He studied in Golaghat living in a small room. The owners of the room were- Rajani Barua and Uma Barua. The other two students who lived with Kushal in the room were- Dimba Phukan and Bhadra Phukan. There were discussions about the various situations of the country among Kushal Konwar, Bhadra Phukan and other students. They were very much concern about the happenings in the country. In this way, change took place in their lives.

Kushal Konwar in Freedom Movement :

Kushal Konwar's life started to change while he was studying at Golaghat. The various incidents happening around the country adversely effected his imagination. At that time- the freedom movement of the country more intense and in 1921, Non-Cooperation Movement was initiated in the whole country. With the other states, this movement affected Assam also. Thousands of young boys and girls, students left their schools and colleges to fight for their country's independence. In 1921, Kushal Konwar too returned back to his village and joined the freedom movement.

After the notorious and horrific massacre of Jalianwalla Bagh in 1919, the freedom movement

spread like fire around the country. The perpetrator of Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre was Sir Michael O' Dyer, who was the Governor of Punjab then and Harry Dyer, Brigadier General of Punjab. To take revenge of this notorious incident of Indian History, a young, 20 years old boy Udham Singh took oath to eliminate the culprits, On 13th March, 1940, Udham Singh fulfilled his determination by shooting down Sir Michael O' Dyer in a meeting of Indian Association, in London. In that year itself, Udham Singh was hanged on 10th June.

The British rulers planned to dominate the Indian people by running 'Roulet Act' after watching the movements led by Indian people. The people protested against this Raulet Act of 1919 responding to the request of Mahatma Gandhi. Under the command of Gandhiji, all the people of India, young boys and girls, students gathered together under the National Flag and joined in the Freedom movements. Mahatma Gandhi travelled all over India after preparing all the plans and programmes of Non-Cooperation Movement.

In the year of 1921, Mahatma Gandhi visited Assam. He elaborated his plans and programmes of Non-Cooperation Movement in the meetings of Guwahati, Tezpur, Nagaon, Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Golaghat. The visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Assam ignited a new consciousness and new sense among the Assamese people. Provincial Congress Committee was constituted in Assam. In Assam freedom movements were led by Deshbhakta Tarun Ram Phukan, Karmaveer Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Chandradhar Sharma, Kuldhar Chaliha, Rohinikanta Hatibarua, Gopinath Bordoloi, Bishnuram Medhi, Hem Baruah, Mahammad Taibullah, Ambikagiri Raichoudhury etc. To support the movements, many lawyers boycotted the court, students also boycott their schools and colleges. In Golaghat, Maheswar Baruah, Taraprasad Baruah, Nabin Chandra Goshwami, Gakuleswar Hazarika, Gangadhar Borthakur, Kamal Sharma etc, who led the freedom movements, were imprisoned. Gunin Baruah left the job in British Army, Bhola Baruah went to jail after leaving the job. All these individual and collective initiatives spurred the agitation all over Golaghat. In the year of 1921 itself, a revolutionary at heart, Shankar Baruah took active part in the freedom

movement as enunciated by Mahatma Gandhi. He resigned from his Government job and joined Congress. Then he came to Golaghat and started living there permanently. Baruah sacrificed his whole life for our motherland by creating "Volunteer Bahini". During that time, Gandhiji requested the people to be independent by adopting Swadeshi philosophy. Shankar Baruah followed the words of Gandhiji in letter and spirit. The Ashramas he established were the camps of mass communication. Here different types of education like education of self-defence, self discipline, work culture, different practices and exercises necessary for independent living were taught. The camps executed different swadeshi activities and educated people about the expansion is designs of the British. In South Hengera, the first Ashrama of broadcasting the philosophies and ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi was established. Keshab Sonowal gave the land for the Ashrama established in Burhagohain Khat in 1924. The Manager of the Ashrama was Madhabi Sonowal-wife of Keshab Sonowal, Minaram Thengal, Ananda Baruah, Gerela Chutia, Tilak Sonowal, Kularam Koch. Shankar Baruah established an Ashrama in the midpoint of Golaghat town and he himself managed the Ashrama. Later the workers related to this Ashrama were- Bhola Baruah, Pratima Sundari, Kanak Das, Uma Das, Dhiren Dutta, Somkanta Baruah, Hemkanta Baruah etc. The Ashrama of Bakatiyal was managed by Thagiram Bora, Khaniram Kakati, Bhadreswar Bora, Nomal Bhakat and Bodheswar Bora. Kehoram Hazarika gave the land for establishing an Ashrama in Siyale Khati. This patriot was murdered by some wicked elements inside the Ashrama itself. Lokeshwar Bora and Baputi Kalita took the responsibility of establishing an Ashrama in Borkathoni on themselves. Nogora Ashrama was managed by Hireswar Kalita. Dhaneswar Phukan and Bhola Gogoi took responsibility of establishing an Ashrama in Ahomgaon. Haliram Patra Bora, Kanak Das and Uma Das managed the Sensowa Ashrama.

The workers participated in the non-cooperation movements were known as Congress Volunteer in the society. In the year of 1921, like the other students, Kushal Konwar also engaged himself in the activities of publishing the plans and programmes

of non-cooperation movement among the common people by finishing his education life. At that time Kushal Konwar was only of 17 years old.

Working life of Kushal Konwar :

Kushal Konwar's father Sonaram Konwar was engaged in timber business. At first he got lots of profit in this business and he was financially quite affluent. But gradually his business started incurring loss. At the same time his collaborator Mr. Wilson returned to his home country England. Therefore, Sonaram Konwar decided to go to Rengmai of Sarupathar in search of farm land by leaving his paternal base in Balijan. In 1924, the Konwar family of 11 members started to live in Rengmai by selling half lands of Chaodang Village. Kushal's father did cultivation there and also started a shop also. Kushal helped his father through the shop. Kushal Konwar was very much concerned and familiar with every people. In a very few days, Kushal became one with the social and religious lives of the people of his new place. Kushal started to publish the ideologies and philosophies of Gandhiji among those people as a social worker and organizer. Rengmai became a new chapter of Kushal Konwar's life. A primary school was established there with the cooperation of the common people. A school house consisting of three rooms was started by the donation and physical hard works of the local people. Classes were started after two days of Magh Bihu in January, 1925. People appointed Kushal as a teacher in that school. Kushal Konwar focused on teaching the students for a year. After that, he appointed another teacher as an Assistant teacher in the school. This new teacher was Jogeshwar Bora. Both of them did their duties without getting any salary. At that time, local people were financially weak and therefore both the teachers were working without any salary.

On the other hand, Sonaram Konwar's business did not yield much profit. They became financially very weak. Therefore, Kushal was advised to do some job in other place, but Kushal refused to comply. He later gave up the job in school. After that, Sonaram Konwar gave a job of clerk in the tea garden where the younger brother of Mr. Meagre Wilson, Mr. C. Wilson was the manager. After working there for some time, Kushal refused to continue working under a British. Kushal's father's plan did not work.

Kushal again started to search for a job in tea garden after being economically too much hard pressed. At that time, an Assamese businessman from Jorhat named Bisheswar Sharma started a tea garden in Balijan. Kushal Konwar's father tried second time for Kushal's job in the tea garden by talking with the Assamese businessman. Bisheswar Sharma appointed Kushal being attracted by his health body and personality. In that tea garden Kushal Konwar did his duties as a clerk for 9 years from the month of June of 1927 to 30th June of 1936.

Kushal Konwar's main aim to do this job was to escape the financial crisis of his family, but he was not satisfied with this job. Instead he gave much importance to fight for freedom of his motherland. He frequently interacted with the Congress workers and also participated in their meetings.

Kushal Konwar's father was worried about his association with with freedom seeking congress party. He decided to get Kushal married to make him more attentive to his family duties. At first Kushal did not respond as his father wanted, but later he agreed to this request of his parents and neighbours. On 24th of Fagun, in 1929, Kushal Konwar got married to Prabhabati, daughter of Premananda Duwara, of Marangi Konwar village of Golaghat. Later he became father of two children- Khagen and Nagen.

Many small incidents occurred in the tea garden life of Kushal Konwar which proved that he was more interested in working for freedom of his country. One day, 4 pm on 19th April, 1935 to be exact. the sounds of dhol-pepa, gogona of Bohag Bihu reverberated around the Balijan tea estate Kushal Konwar was so busy with his work that he forgot that it was Rongali Bihu time of merrymaking. That day, in the afternoon, 5/10 cows of the manager of Jamuguri tea garden, of Borhat Tea Company entered the Balijan tea garden. Kushal Konwar kept the cows in the tea house of his garden by persuading the gatekeeper. Kushal sent a message to the labourers who came to take the cows back to their garden, Kushal Konwar told them- "Tell your European boss that if he comes himself, then only the cows will be released. After getting the message of Kushal Konwar, the manager of Jamuguri tea garden, Mr. Wilson arrived at Balijan office at 4 pm. At first Kushal talked gently with Mr. Wilson, though he

disliked the behaviour of the foreigner. Kushal told Mr. Wilson that if Mr. Wilson did not pay the fine not, a single cow would be freed. There were altercation in Hindi and English between Kushal Konwar and Mr. Wilson. Enraged, Mr. Wilson took out his whip, and in retaliation Kushal also took one sandal from his foot and told the Sahib bluntly that there would be no peace before you foreigners are not kicked out. Mr. Wilson shouted 'We will see you' to Kushal Konwar and went out. After that, Konwar freed the cows to the local government pounds through the gatekeeper. This is the burning example of Kushal Konwar's mentality towards the British.

It was the second level of freedom movement of India. On 26th January of 1930, Congress accepted the proposal of full freedom. This increased the national awareness among the common people and the frenzy of movements also got more brisk. Salt Act was defied, the Defiance of British Law Movement started with fast unto death agitation by Gandhiji in 1939. The Salt Act prohibited the people to produce and sell salt except the government. Therefore, the common people protested against this act and under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, people started to produce salt in Dandi. Mahatma Gandhi started this journey with his 79 trustworthy volunteers. This rally marched 240 miles (384 km) on foot from Sabarmati Ashrama to Dandi, for 24 days (10 miles every day). During the journey, hundreds of people joined the rally enroute. Keshab Sonowal, Kanak Das of Burhagohai Khat, Golaghat subdivision, also went to Dandi. But Kanak Das was arrested by police while he was producing salt and he was sent to jail for one and half month. At that time Shankar Barua stayed in Golaghat to make anti British Law movement successful. In this movement, Bhadrakanta Phukan, Bhola Borua, Bharat Tati and Golapi Gogoi were sent to jail for seven and half months, 1 year, six months and six months respectively.

In 1930, Lord Arwin came to Jorhat. The volunteers of Sivasagar district decided to show him black flag. A team of workers of Golaghat subdivision also went there. A youth named Purnachandra Goshwami led the team by taking a black flag in the meeting held in Chinamora, Jorhat. The other workers of the team were- Shankar Baruah,

Nandeshwar Gogoi, Bogai Saikia, Dhiren Dutta, Thogiram Kakati, Dharmeshwar Thakur etc. They protested against the government policies by showing the black flag. At that time the education department of the British Raj issued a circular banning students from joining the movement. There was a huge protest against this circular in the whole Assam. In Golaghat, Bhadrakanta Phukan boycotted the government school. In this movement, with him, the others who took part were- Rajen Baruah, Shankar Baruah, Dhiren Dutta, Mohan Chandra Mahanta and Bhola Barua. The British rulers punished Dhiren Dutta and Som Baruah in a dark cell like room in jail for participating in the movement. In the movement of 1932, two volunteers of Golaghat became martyrs inside the jail for participating in the movement. One of them was the wife of Anandiram Das, Dwariki Das. She picketed in Drugs Prevention movement and was sent to jail for 5 months and passed away in Sivasagar jail. The another was Biju Baishnab. He took his last breath in Jorhat jail.

Inspiration of Shankar Barua in Kushal Konwar's life:

On 19th June, 1936 Kushal Konwar focused on freedom movements as a freedom fighter after leaving his job in the tea garden. During this period, he came more close to the revolutionary Shankar Baruah. Kushal Konwar became a devoted worker of Congress after getting encouragement from Shankar Baruah. From then, his life took a new turn. He started to wear Khadi clothes boycotting the foreign clothes. He had some new habits like Geeta reading regularly, taking vegetarian foods etc. The revolutionary Shankar Baruah formed a service team and through the members of this team, he took some new steps like- prevention of drugs, picketing in shop, boycotting the foreign good, refusing to pay taxes, removing the untouchability etc. Kushal Konwar participated actively in all these programmes. At that time volunteer team sang patriotic songs among the common people through rallies.

Harijan Movement and Gandhiji's visit to Golaghat :

Mahatma Gandhi came to Assam after travelling whole over India due to activities of Harijan club. New plans and programmes were formed in Golaghat in the second visit of Gandhi to Assam. Gandhiji

arrived in Golaghat on the day of 15th April, 1934. He lived in Jorhat for three days and collected money for the Horijons. There are no Horizons in Assam, the country of Sri Manta Sankar-Madhab. But there is a class of people, who come to cities for cleaning from outside, they are called as Horijons. On the day of Rongali Bihu, the visit of Gandhiji purified the minds of the local people of Golaghat. Almost 700 men-women volunteers received Gandhiji in Farkating station. The Editor of Akhil Bharatiya Horijon Sewak Sangha, Amritlal Thakkarji, also came with Gandhiji. In Assam, the president of Harijan Sewak Sangha was the Satradhikar of Garhmur Satra, Sri Sri Pitambar Deva Goshwami. At that time, he established 12 schools in Jorhat and managed it systematically.

It was the evening of 15th April of 1934. Gandhiji gave lecture from Pramodabhiram Park, located in General Field, Golaghat. In this meeting almost 30 thousand people were gathered. Gandhiji told in his lecture- "It was extremely expensive felicitation for me. It is undesirable. Service to Harizan is service to God and nothing else. It seems to be sin for preparing such an expensive felicitation for a servant of Harizan. I need promises of help from you in the activities of servicing Harizan. At the end of the meeting, the Congress volunteers collected money from the crowd in the command of Gandhiji. Swarnalata Baruah, wife of Rajendra Nath Baruah, paid her service to Gandhiji by giving a golden ring and some cash to him in Farkating, when Gandhiji was returning.

The Quit India Movement of 1942 and Golaghat :

It was the September month of 1939. The Second World War has started. The freedom movement was in full swing. The proposal of Quit India was accepted in the meeting of Congress Working Committee which was held in Wardha from 7th to 14th July, 1942. This proposal was presented by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Sardar Ballav Vai Patel supported this proposal and Mahatma Gandhi explained this proposal in details. This proposal was sent to British Viceroy. As a reaction to the proposal, the British rulers started to increase oppressive measures on common people. At that time Mahatma Gandhi was arrested and he was taken to an unknown

place. With Mahatma Gandhi, the other leaders who were arrested, were- Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, Raja Gopalachari, Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel, Abdul Gafur Khan. The two leaders of Assam Pradesh Congress, Gopinath Bordoloi and Siddhinath Sharma were arrested by the British, when both of them were returning from Bombay after participating in a meeting of Congress Working Committee. The other Assamese leaders, who were arrested by the British from various places, were- Mahammad Taybullah, Debeshwar Sharma, Fakharuddin Ali Ahmed, Bishnuram Medhi, Mahendra Mohan Choudhury, Sri Sri Pitambar Deva Goshwami, Bimala Prasad Chaliha etc. The British government announced the programmes of Congress as illegal. The dominant policies of the British government were also increased. The revolutionary people changed the way of movements by forming Death Squad.

In this movement, the contributions of people of Golaghat were boundless. During the Satyagraha movement, many workers with Rajen Baruah, Shankar Baruah, Ram Baruah were sent to jail. After accepting the proposal of Quit India, Rajendra Nath Barua was arrested by the British while the leaders and workers were arrested by the British in all over India. Shankar Baruah took the responsibility of the movements of East Assam by hiding himself. Shankar Baruah secretly managed the movements by secretly communicating with the national leaders like- Jayprakash Narayan, Achyut Bardhan, Ashok Mehta, Aruna Asaf Ali etc. This movement spread all around Golaghat Subdivision. The leaders like Gandharam Gogoi, Thogi Borah, Bhadra Phukan, Kushal Konwar, Nagen Chutia etc focused more on the organisation to make the movement successful. The members of the Death Squad took various steps to compel the British to quit India anyhow by supporting the slogan of 'Do or Die'. They burned the garages, club houses, post offices, bungalows of the managers of tea gardens in various places of Subdivision.

The incident of train derailment in Sarupathar :

The members of the Death Squad made new plan to derail the train near Changpuli in Sarupathar in the topmost level of the movement. The workers

like Suren Phukan, Dharmeshwar Baruah, Tilak Borah, Indreshwar Phukan etc went to Golaghat to discuss with the underground leaders Baikuntha Singh, Dharma Ranjan Deka, Nagen Chutia, Ghanashyam Saikia, Kanakeshwar Konwar about the train derailment. They decided to execute this plan and the team leader was Baikuntha Singh. But Kushal Konwar was in dark about this plan.

10th September, 1942. That day the accident was caused by dismembering the railway track. The news of coming of a special train on that day with armed English forces was collected by Baikuntha Singh. The important materials to open the railway track was collected through Mohan Prasad Rai, who was one of the employee of Deopani Garden. The planned execution started at night 11 O'clock. The leaders of the team Baikuntha Singh, under the subleader Suren Phukan, Indreshwar Phukan, Suryakanta Saikia, Kanakeshwar Konwar, Dharmakanta Deka, Maju Pitou Konwar, Ghanashyam Saikia, Nagen Saikia, Phukou Saikia, Dharmeshwar Barua etc successfully removed the fish plate of railway track. Pulin Bihari Baruah, Soneshwar Konwar, Gangadhar Ahom, Madan Phukan etc were waiting as a guard far away from the place. The train arrived at the Sarupathar station and after it started its onward journey and picked up speed the accident occurred. According to unofficial estimate several hundred army men died in this accident.

This train accident attracted lots of attention nation-wide. The British army combed the whole area and launched a mission to capture the perpetrators. The innocent people of the area were tortured and harassed. The Gandhian Kushal Konwar was the secretary of Sarupathar Congress Committee at that point of time. He was therefore arrested and booked as the main culprit. The real heroes of the incident Suren Phukan, Baikuntha Singh, Someshwar Bora could not be found out by the British army despite their best efforts. Total 43 persons were identified as the culprit related with the accident of Sarupathar by the British army. The army issued a directive to shoot Suren Phukan wherever he would be found or seen. The British announced an award of Rs. 10,000/- to anyone who can lead them to the hiding Shankar Baruah.

The Judgement of death by hanging of four persons :

The case against the accused was registered under P-76 Case no 2 dt. 10.10.42 of Lumding S.P. P.S cr No 304 of 1942 of Golaghat Court Emp. vs Kushal Konwar and others. U/S 126 Rly Act, 735 D.L. Rules read with ordinance III of 1942.

The presentation of evidence of this case took 6 days in Golaghat local board office. The judge was the Administrator of Sivasagar, C.A. Humphrey. Humphrey was a very notorious anti Indian from the beginning. The lawyers of accused were- Gopikaballabh Goswami, Gangadhar Barthakur, Taraprasad Baruah, Radhanath Goshwami and Bipin Phukan. The Government lawyer was Debeshwar Sarma from Jorhat. The 7 persons of the 43 accused were considered as guilty and the others were freed because of not having enough evidence against them. The four accused Kushal Konwar, Dharmakanta Deka, Ghanashyam Saikia, and Kanakeshwar Konwar were death penalty by hanging. Indreshwar Phukan and Nagen Chutia were awarded 10 years of rigorous imprisonment and Dhaneshwar Gogoi was punished for three years of jail.

Application to Governor against hanging of Kushal Konwar:

The four accused submitted mercy petition to the Governor after getting the order of hanging. In this application, many famous persons and lawyers signed. Among them, the lawyers of Golaghat were- Bipin Phukan, Radhanath Goshwami, Douleshwar Dutta, Priyaranjan Dey and freedom fighter Khageshwar Tamuli. The Governor General of India of that time Lord Linlithgoe rejected the application. The Governor of Assam reduced the order of hanging of the three accused Kanakeshwar Konwar, Dharmakanta Deka, and Ghanashyam Saikia and they were punished for 10 years of rigorous imprisonment. However Kushal Konwar, the main Congress organiser, Gandhian leader was shown no leniency. He was hanged at dawn on 15th June, 1943 in Jorhat jail for loving his motherland. The witnesses of this hanging were Mr. A.C. Humphrey, Deputy Commissioner of Sivasagar, E.A.C. Pachugopal Mukherji, Jailer Tarak Chandra Dey, Assistant Jailer

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Manipur : The Land of Dance, Music and Drama

Meghachandra Kongbam

Love of art and beauty is nature of the people of Manipur and it is hard to find a Manipuri who cannot sing or dance. It is the result of the royal patronage from the earliest time to develop a civilization of its own in different stages of human development. Manipur has a long and glorious history from the beginning of the Christian era. The recorded history of kingship started from 33 A.D., which marked the coronation of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. The Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Royal Chronicle of Manipur written in Meitei script recorded the events from the founding of the ruling dynasty in 33 CE until the abolition of the monarchy and subsequent merger of the state with India in 1949. It is considered as the oldest chronicle of the region, written on handmade paper made from bark of trees, in locally made ink, with a quill or a bamboo pen. After Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, 75 kings successively ruled over the kingdom of Manipur. The independence and sovereignty of Manipur remained uninterrupted until the Burmese invaded and occupied it for seven years in the first quarter of the 19th century (1819-25). Then came British Paramountcy in 1891, and later on Manipur was merged in the Indian Union on 15 October, 1949. King Bodhchandra (1941-1955) was the last King.

Manipur is situated on the eastern frontier of India with Myanmar. It has an area of 22,327 square kilometres comprising of the hills and the valley. The valley is at the centre surrounded by hills on all sides. The valley covers about 1/10th of the total area of the State. Meitei is the major community living in the valley and there are 33 recognised scheduled tribe groups settled in the hills. The recognized tribes who have made their home in Manipur since ages are Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Inpui, Hmar, Kharam, Khoibu, Koirao, Kom, Lamkang, Liangmai, Mao, Maram, Maring, Mate, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Poumai, Purum, Ralte, Rongmei (Kabui), Simte, Suhte, Tangkhul, Tarao, Thadou, Thangal, Vaiphei,

Zeme and Zou having their own distinct culture and tradition. Their costumes are colourful and their way of life cheerful. The folk dances of tribal people have great vigour and energy and they captivate the beholders with their exotic costumes and simple but graceful rhythm.

Fighting for honour and justice is in the blood of every Manipuris. Frequent battles among the native chieftains and against enemies like Burmese and Chinese have brought the rich heritage of martial arts which constitutes a significant area of culture of the people of Manipur.

The Meiteis have their own religion with its own myths and legends, gods and goddesses, priests and priestesses, rituals and festivals. They believe in a Supreme being- Taibang Mapu Sidaba and His two progenies- Sanamahi and Pakhangba. The Meiteis however embraced Hinduism extensively since the beginning of King Kyamba (1467-1508 AD). Groups of religious preachers from North India came to Manipur and this continuous influx of Brahmin families accelerated the process of proselytisation. Hinduism could not destroy the timeless Meitei religion and culture. The tribal people have had their own indigenous religion though some of them adopted Christianity

Rich in Traditional Media

Before the arrival of newspapers, television, radio and film in Manipur; the Kingdom of Manipur had its different forms of rich traditional media to inform, educate and entertain the people. Various performances of traditional media in Manipur were created with aesthetic elements to carry the messages while entertaining to the masses. The advent of Vaisnavism into the lives of Meitei community with the King's order in the 15th Century also attempted to revolutionise the whole of Manipuri society and it also enriched the performing arts of Manipur derived from the new religion.

Lai Haraoba

The celebration of annual Lai Haraoba (Festival of the Gods) in different localities in the valley of Manipur since time immemorial is not only a social, cultural and religious expression of Meitei worldview in ritualistic mode, but also a living example of powerful traditional medium of mass communication practice in Manipur. It is observed in the months between February and May-June at neighbourhood shrines dedicated to the local Umanglai (Sylvan God) deities and it can be as short as three days or can even exceed a month. It is a festival in which the creation of the cosmos, the settlement of the Meitei people and its civilization are performed through songs, dance and rituals. Langdren (traditional drum) and Pena (traditional stringed instrument) are the main musical instruments associated with Lai Haraoba. The dances and songs are predominantly performed by the Maibi, who is also priestess who tends to the Gods and Goddesses and who conducts the ritual in the temple of the deities. Maibis use 364 hand gestures during the dance sequence. It starts with the re-enactment of the creation of the cosmos by nine male deities and seven female deities. This is followed by dance representing, through fine gestures, the development of the human body in the womb, the birth of the child, the growing up stages, the building of houses, civilisation through cultivation of land and various stages of weaving. There are also various dance sequences depicting the continuity of life. Thus, the Lai Haraoba Festival is an institution imparting education with entertainment to the masses through dance, music and drama depicting the prosperity of human being and its civilization.

episode of Tangkhul and Nurabi in Lai Haraoba is an action packed drama for the audience. It describes the meeting of Tangkhul representing Nongpok Ningthou, a Meitei God and Nurabi representing Goddess Panthoibi. They are clad in the costumes of Tangkhul Tribe (one of the ethnic tribes of Manipur). In this episode, they quarrel over a piece of land and then reach at their final reconciliation. Exchanges of romantic words and riddles having sexual motifs are a significant part of Lai Haraoba. The episode indicates the good and pure

relationship between the hill and valley people. In his book- Manipur and the Mainstream (1975), N. Tombi Singh describes the importance of Lai Haraoba in the development of Manipuri dances, "The well-known festival of Lai Haraoba mostly performed between the spring and the rainy season is the most comprehensive feast for dances. The kings and members of the royal family, the leading members of the King's court and the regional chiefs took part in these festivals, along with the common people, not only as spectators and remote promoters but as actual participants in the dance and other ritual performances. One can realise the importance of these festivals as the breeding grounds for the Manipuri dances."

Beyond food and shelter, the urge to communicate each other is another fundamental need of human being and this urge is a primal one since the growth of human civilization. The urge to express, communicate, and share something beautiful among the human beings gives birth to performing arts. These performing arts were the medium of mass communication known as folk or traditional media before the birth of modern means of mass communication like press, film, radio and television. These performing arts have changed its structure continuously over centuries, modifying to the needs of changing situations, yet continuing to be functionally relevant to society.

Theatrical forms of Folk Media

We have seen that folk performance is a composite art in India. It is a fusion of elements from song, dance, pantomimes, versification, epic and ballad recitation, graphic and plastic arts, and religious and festival pageantry. It encompasses ceremonial rituals, beliefs and social value systems. Yakshagana of Karnataka, Jatra of Bengal and Orissa, Nautanki of Uttar Pradesh and Ankit Nata of Assam are some good examples of theatrical traditional media in India; Manipur has rich theatrical forms like Ras Leela, Goura Leela, Udukhul, Gostha Leela and the popular Shumang Leela.

The Ras Leela had its origin in the vision of King Chingthangkomba (1759-1762 AD), popularly known as Rajarshi Bhagyachandra. It is said that the King was blessed with divine powers. Lord Krishna

appeared in his dreams and asked him to install his idol made from a jackfruit tree growing at Kaina hill to worship it. After the installation of the idol of Shri Govindaji, the Rajarshi hurried with his plan to perform a Ras Leela. As the image of Srimati Radha had yet to be installed, the role of Radha had to be played by a young girl, while the image of Govindaji was placed in the middle of Rasmandal during the performance. Bimbabati, the young daughter of Rajarshi played the role of Radha. She was later known as Shija Lajoibi which means a princess who became goddess or a princess who looked after God. She refused to marry and spent her whole life as a devotee of Lord Krishna. She died in Nabadwip, the birth place of Lord Chaitanya. The first Ras Leela was performed at a specially constructed Rasmandal at the foot hills of Langthabal, the palace of Rajarshi. The Ras Leela depicts the story of Shri Krishna's divine love sports with the Gopis of Brindaban. There are five kinds of Manipuri Ras Leelas namely Vasanta Ras - performed during the full moon in March-Arpil; Maha Ras - performed during the full moon in November- December throughout the night at the large Mandap (Congregation Hall) of Shri Govindaji Temple in Imphal; Nitya Ras, Kunja Ras and Diba Ras - to be performed only during the day. The Manipuri Ras Leela is unique in terms of character, costume and ornament. It spreads the message of divine love to the masses.

Goura Leela which is said to have started during the reign of King Chandrakirti (1850-1886) is a traditional ritual oriented theatre of Manipur which depicts the life and activities of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and his Bhakti movement. The performance which originally lasts for three days is full of songs, dances and acting. The sequences of the Goura Leela performance on the first day are of six episodes namely Brahma Mohan, Prabhu Janma, Ganga Snan, Sukriti Brahman Udhar, Bal Leela and Bol Bikram. Five episodes namely Nityananda Bal Leela, Qazi Udhar, Digvijaya Pandit, Jagai Madhai Udhar and Kali Daman are played on the second day. Six episodes namely Hi Lanba, Prabhu Samkokpa (shaving of Prabhu head), Sachi Bilap, Abdaita Bhojan, Sarbabhouma Sangga and Samudra Poton are performed on the last day of the Goura Leela

performance. The artistes in the Goura Leela are versatile in singing, acting and dancing. It spreads the message of devotional movement to counter the caste system and religious and social superstitions of the Hindu society of the time.

Udukhol Leela is one of the Bal Leela of Shri Krishna which was introduced during the reign of King Churachand (1891- 1941 AD). It is believed that at the end of the Dwapur era, to destroy all evils, Shri Hari incarnated into the universe. The two sons of Kuber namely Nal Kuber and Manigriba were growing as a tree for about 100 years in the bank of the Yamuna River during the Dwapur era due to a curse of Narada Muni. The two brothers were returned to their human form by Shri Krishna. The theme and presentational style of the Leela showcase the rich cultural aspects of Manipur in the field of performing arts.

Goshta Leela, also known as the Sanshenba in Manipuri is generally performed by young boys in the age group of four to five years. It depicts the story of Shri Krishna with his Gopa friends enjoying their life tending the cow-herds and playfully during the period of his boyhood. Every year on the day of Gosthastami, Goshta Leela is presented at the temples of Shri Govindajee and Shri Bijoy Govindajee in Imphal and Gopinath in Ningthoukhong maintained with royal patronage. The rendering of these stories combines divine inspiration with a lively spirit of fun. It is celebrated on the eighth lunar day of Hiyangei (Kartik) month, seven days after the Goverdhan Puja.

Shumang Leela (courtyard play),

It is enacted in the open courtyard, watched by an audience surrounded from all sides, is one of the most popular forms of Manipuri theatre. An area of 18'x18' space is sufficient for a performance. Two chairs and a table are sufficient props for a play. In the middle of the open space a lighting device is placed. A troupe of 10 to 12 professional artistes performs in a play. Female roles are played by men performing in a falsetto voice. The actors speak their dialogues in stylised high pitched tones to make themselves heard by the audience and it has since then become a convention. Shumang Leela is a travelling theatre group and their plays are booked

in advance. A play usually covers some two hours. A play usually can stretch upto two hours. Shumang Leela season starts from Yaosang festival in February – March and it continues throughout the year with some break during rainy season. Shumang Leela traces its origin from the comic skits of court jesters of King Chandrakirti (1850-1886 AD). With the introduction of better acoustic system with digital and sound effects and music, it has become more effective and very popular medium among all sections of people. It plays a great role for educating social values to the general masses with entertainment. h of these traditional theatre forms has its unique styles and presentation to carry the messages effectively to reach the masses.

Ballad forms of Folk Media

Like *Alha* of Uttar Pradesh, *Laavani* of Maharashtra, *GeeGee* of Karnataka, *Villupattu* of Tamil Nadu and *Kabigan* of Bengal; Manipur has various ballad forms which narrates the stories of Mahabharata, Ramayana, Moirang Epic and historic events of mighty kings of Manipur. *Wari Leeba* (Narrative Art Form), *Lairik Thiba-Haiba* (Chanting Slokas and intoning the version in Manipuri), *Pena Phamshak* (Singing with Pena) and *Khongjom Parva* (Narrating Khongjom war episode with Dholak) are popular ballad forms of Manipur. The performer of *Wari Leeba* narrates the whole events of Mahabharata, Ramayana or *Moirang Kangleirol* (Moirang epic), stories of Meitei mythology episode wise in the Mandaps (large hall attached to Hindu or Meitei temple) and *Shangois* (an open large hall at the courtyard of Meitei's living house). Performances of Mahabharata and Ramayana are usually performed during *Kang Chingba* (Rathajatra) festival which lasts for 10 days and Durga Puja festival which last for five days. Stories of Meitei mythology are narrated at *Panthoibi Iratpa* festival which lasts for 15 days. (*Panthoibi Iratpa* or Panthoibi Puja is a religious festival of the Manipuri people dedicated to goddess Panthoibi, the goddess of courage, war, bravery and wisdom of Sanamahism. The festival falls on the same day of Hindu festival of Durga Puja). The performer usually male wears a white *pheijom* (dhoti) with bare torso sits on a *Kouna* (water reed) mat covered with a white cloth. He enacts all characters of the story employing variable

tones, enabling the audience to visualize the events. He uses a pillow as a prop to express any dramatic sequence. He communicates with audience with his narrative skills during the performance. The tradition of *Lairik Thiba-Haiba* is one of the important media and an art form in which the Sanskrit Slokas of Lakshman Digvijaya and, or the Gitgovinda of Jaydeva is chanted by the *Lairik Thiba* performer with proper rhythm after which the meaning in Manipuri is intoned by the *Lairik Haiba*. In this process, the meaning of text goes deep into the minds of the audience. This traditional narrative art form is said to have been started during the reign of King Pamheiba (1709-1747 AD).

The artiste of *Pena Phamsak* narrates the episodes of *Moirang Kangleirol* (Moirang Mythology). The performer wears white *Pheijom* (dhoti) with bare torso, ornaments and white turban in the performance. He uses the traditional stringed instrument *Pena* as prop while narrating the stories in the tune of Manipuri Folk songs. In *Lai Haraoba* Festival, the Pena singer wears *Khamen Chatpa Pheijom* (chocolate colour printed dhoti), *Resham Phurit* (green colour made of velvet) and white turban.

Khongjom Parva is a musical narration of the Battle of Khongjom fought between the Manipuris and the British in April 1891. It is ballad form of traditional performing arts using *Dholak*. The performer narrates the heroic deed of Paona Brajabashi who sacrificed his life for the cause of Manipur in Khongjom war in 1891. Paona Brajabashi was a Manipuri military officer, born in 1833, reaching the rank of Major by 1891. The Manipuri armies fought gallantly at the Battle of Khongjom under Major Brajabashi where Manipur lost its sovereignty to the British. Dhobi Leinou introduced singing of *Khongjom Parva* by thumping of hands on the knees and sometimes using an empty tin to thump upon. Today, the theme of singing *Khongjom Parva* includes the stories of Khamba Thoibi epic, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the exploits of the kings of Manipur. With the rhythmic beats of *Dholak*, the balladeer narrates the story mesmerising the audience. The male performer of *Khongjom Parva* wears white *Pheijom* and *Pumyat* or *Ngaksham Kabi Phurit* (collar or collarless white full shirt). The female

artiste wears *Phanek Mayek Naiba* (striped loin cloth), shirt and white *Innaphi Chaddar*. When the performer sings Moirang mythology, it is known as *Moirang Parva* which is a folk song based communication.

There are numerous folk dance forms of Meitei Community and the thirty three different tribes in Manipur. These dance forms performed in the festivals carry relevant messages of love, unity, traditional identity and moral value systems. Traditional media is always strong in a land with rich culture.

Visual communication as Folk Media

As a part of Manipuri culture, there are many folk games in Manipur which carry different messages. Apart from the performing arts in traditional media, there are visual forms of traditional media in Manipur. Andro is an old scheduled caste village in the eastern part of Imphal valley in Manipur wherein a sacred fire that is still preserved lies. It is believed that this is a place where fire was first discovered. When someone visits Andro, we can find a three-four feet high stick with a piece of white paper erected at someone's gate. It is traditional visual medium which communicates to the villagers that pork or any meat is available at the particular house. Anyone can visit the house to buy pork or meat. Folk arts and traditional media are the aesthetic components of the concepts of belonging and affinity in a cultural context. In traditional societies, art is an integral part of the process of living in a community.

Traditional Paintings of Manipur

Illustrations like humans, animals and birds accompanied with manuscripts are found in Subika Laisaba, which deals with astrology and Khutlou with the contents to find clues of lost articles, was supposedly written in 18th and 19th centuries. These illustrations were not for public exhibition. Did the people of Manipur ever think of using images to tell a story before the advent of cinema? Have they ever thought of narrating a story through pictures or paintings like Pattachitra- narrating a story through scroll painting on traditional cloth as practiced in West Bengal and Odisha, or in any forms of images exposing through light like shadow puppetry which is practiced in some regions of the country? When

we trace back the history of Manipur and its people on how they told stories to the masses, it was found that the practice was only through face to face communication.

Mutua Bahadur, a renowned cultural archivist of Manipuri culture stated that the movement of paintings in Manipur was a late phenomenon, which started with the work of Ningthoujam Bhadra Singh (1861-1927) who was appointed as a royal painter in 1881 AD. He learnt the art form from Mangsatabam Angangmacha, the Karigor of the Royal Court, during the reign of King Chandrakirti. These paintings are found depicting various themes such as Gods and Goddesses of Hindu religion, Boat races, Expedition of King Chandrakirti and epic story of Khamba and Thoibi of Moirang Kangleirol. These paintings were used to be exhibited on the wall of frontal shed of the different houses and outdoor houses of well to do families, courtrooms and temples. The Hindu temples and mandaps are well decorated with the paintings based on the themes of Hindu mythology. Most of the paintings are sketched in cloths, papers and wooden planks etc. and in the medium of water colour. The art works of Bhadra & R.K. Yumjaosana are the two notable schools of traditional paintings in Manipur. Through this visual medium, it however, conveys a message of the stories of the Hindu mythology or epic story of Moirang Kangleirol and others.

Living with Music

Music is a part and parcel of the lives of Meitei community and other tribes in Manipur. Music stimulates the energy of life; and is a source of relaxation in the journey of one's life. In Meitei community, a child grows up with rhythms of music. *'Tha tha thabungton, Nacha morambi pobige, Pobi sanam nambige, Heibong charong amatang, Thadabiraku thabungton'*. (Moon, moon, young moon, let me carry piggyback your morambi child. Please throw down a bunch of figs, young moon). A mother carries her child piggyback by wrapping with a *nahong*, a cloth specially made for carrying a child on the back and singing the *Naoshum Ishei* (Lullaby) in the *Shumang* (Courtyard) gazing at the shining moon. The lullaby-*Tha Tha Thabungton* has a definite form in music and in text. The mother does not follow a grammar of

music but she sings along the way of social tradition with the beauty of music which makes the child goes to sleep.

When the child grows up, he or she comes across the *Lai Haraoba* Festival in the village and lives on the sounds of music, the dance movements and the texts of the folklore associated with the festival.

There is a rich tradition of folk songs known as *Kbulang Ishei* (pastoral folk song; rural love songs) in Meitei community. It is usually delivered in duet, exchanging romantic emotions between a lad and a lady through meaningful literary verses in natural tunes without any musical accompaniment. The verses are intelligently and intellectually created. High literary proverbs describing emotions, romance, things, places and situations are the components of *Kbulang Ishei*. When they go for work in the fields or go for fishing, it is sung to break the monotony of physical work. It is also a mode for self expression of one's feelings. When someone hears the song, he or she responds to it in the same tune. There are instances of folk songs during paddy cultivation which are *Loutaa Isei* (Song during tilling of field), *Nonglao Ishei* (Song to please the Rain-god), *Loungaak Ishei* (Song to drive out birds when the paddy is ripened), *Lourok Ishei* (Harvesting song), *Loukaa Ishei* (Song during the trip carrying loaded paddy from field to home), *Phousu Ishei* (Song during paddy pounding using *suk* (pestle) and *sumbal* (mortar). *Kbulang Ishei* is also known as *Khunung Ishei* (rural folk songs).

The *HINDU* reported on what the music maestro A. R. Rahman had said, "I have heard the *Rudraveena* and *Mizhavu* earlier, but the two folk forms from the Northeast were new to me. I realised how ignorant we are about that part of our country. I went to Manipur and discovered so much beauty there- the State has a beautiful soul. What stuck on was the simple lifestyle of the people, their philosophies,"

Manipur has three kinds of folk songs- Ritual or devotional songs, Ballad songs and Work songs. Ritual or devotional songs are abundantly found in *Lai Haraoba* Festival and *Nat Sankirtana*; Ballad songs are associated with *Pena Phamsak* and *Khongjom Parva*. Work songs appear during paddy cultivation and fishing in Manipur.

Traditional musical instruments like- *Haraopung* (Drum), *Pena* (Stringed instrument), *Tondri* (Wind instrument), *Pere* (Wind instrument) and *Shenga* (cymbals) are age-old. In the ancient book of *Cheitharol Kumbaba*- the Royal Chronicles of Manipur, it records, "*Sakabda 76 ta Khuiyoi Tompokna ningthou oiye. Mahakthakta saji maunna pung tingduna yeibada sajjigum khongnge. Madudagi kei maunna amuk tingbada keigum khongnge. Adu matungda san maunna tingbadagi pung makbol thokkhiye.*" (In 154 AD, Khuiyoi Tompok became the King. During his time, when the drum was made up of deer skin, it sounded like bellowing deer. And when it was made up of tiger skin, it sounded like roaring tiger. Thereafter, when it was made up of cow skin, it sounded like the sound of drum). Another ancient book *Ningthourol Lambuba*, a detailed history of the Kings in Manipur reproduced by Oinam Bhogeshwar Singh published in 1967 also recorded the making of the drum during the reign of King Khuiyoi Tompok. In his book-*The Background of Assamese Culture* (1948), Raj Mohon Nath wrote in the chapter- *The Manipuris*, "Khuiyoi Tompok in 154 AD is credited to have introduced drums, cymbals and other musical instruments and greatly patronised the art of music." King Khuiyoi Tompok ruled the Kingdom in 153 - 264 AD. An interesting account in the book was the mission of a cultural troupe from Assam, Manipur and Burma to China. It writes, "The powerful Tai king concluded an alliance with Tibet, wrested a part of China and in 707 AD invaded Manipur. The Manipur King Naothingkhong was defeated and the country passed into the complete control of the Tais for full ten years. This king sent an embassy to China accompanied by dancers, singers and musicians of different nationalities of Assam, Manipur and Burma. They played on eighteen kinds of musical instruments of which the big cymbals of gun metal and one-stringed instrument were specialities." The two musical instruments referred to in the book might be *Shenga* and *Pena*. King Naothingkhong ruled the kingdom in 663-763 AD.

With the entry of Vaisnavite religion into Manipur in the 15th Century, the seeds of the Vaisnavite songs and music were sown in Manipur. Vaisnavite religion set its foot in Manipur when the King of Pong in

Burma had presented an idol of Lord Vishnu to King Kyamba (1467-1508 AD) in the year 1470 and the idol was worshipped at Lamangdong in Bishnupur District, Manipur. The *Cheitharol Kumbaba* authored by Saroj N. Arambam Parratt mentions a joint expedition to Burma and the exchange of gifts between the two kings. It says, "They also exchanged their servants. Lowan the trumpeter, servant of Choupha Khekhomba, the King of Pong, was exchanged with Sekta the pung (hand-beaten drum of the Meiteis) drummer, servant of Meetingu Kiyamba". When King Bhagyachandra alias Chingthangkomba installed the statue of Shri Govinda at Langthabal, the *Ras Leela* was first performed on the 11th Day of Lunar Calendar of the Month of Hiyangei Month in 1779, Friday. It continued for five days. As the *Kirtan* was mandatory to be performed ahead of the *Ras Leela*, King Bhagyachandra created a new kind of *Kirtan* known as *Nat Sankirtan*. The King himself played the *Meitei Pung* (Manipuri drum). During the reign of King Chandrakirti (1850-1886 AD), the *Nat Sankirtan* was perfected. With the wave of *Nat Sankirtan* music; musical instruments like *Kbol*, *Kortal*, *Mandila*, *Jhal*, *Manggang*, and *Moibung* were introduced in Manipuri music. Other musical instruments like *Dholak*, *Dafat*, *Khanjuri*, *Pakhawaj* and *Tabla* became a part of *Nat Sankirtan* music.

In India, there are two classical music traditions- Hindustani Music in North India and Carnatic Music in South India. Arrival of the Hindustani Music in Manipur during the reign of King Churachand (1891-1941 AD) added a new chapter in Manipur music. Gopimohon Sharma from Cachar in Assam settled at Thangmeiband Hijam Dewan Leikai in Imphal taught the Hindustani classical music to Hidangmayum Dwijamani Dev Sharma, Maisnam Thambou, Kala and others. Maisnam Thambou became a pioneer Guru of Hindustani music in Manipur. When Dwijamani Dev Sharma became Education Advisor in Manipur Administration, Hajarimayum Madhu Sharma for vocal music and Loitongbam Menjor for *Tabla* and *Pakhawaj* were deputed to Bhatkhande Sangeet Vidyapeeth, Lucknow for five years on government stipend. Other notable figures who studied at the Vidyapeeth

on government stipend were S.N. Chand, Kshetrimayum Ibetombi, Nongmaithem Pahari, Sanasam Ibopisak, Mithailal, Nongthon, Asem Bimala, and Laishram Mema.

The Government Music College Imphal formerly Manipur Sangeet Vidyalyaya was established on May 6, 1962 and the Government of Manipur took over the college on July 1, 1976. Renamed as Shri Shri Balmukunda Dev Music College on May 6, 2000, it was the only government music institution in Manipur affiliated to Bhatkhande Sangeet Vidyapeeth, Lucknow since 1962. The college runs five courses on vocal, flute, sitar, violin and *tabla* for five years.

Manipuri modern music derived from the Hindustani Music and now an amalgamation with Manipuri folk and modern beats from different parts of the world has become a popular music in Manipur. The song- *Ningba Pumba Loina Kaire, Leiduna Keidouni Meitei Leimasu Khonglengbikbre* performed in the first Manipuri proscenium play- *Nara Singh* staged at the Mandap of Shri Shri Govindaji Temple on September 30, 1925 under patronage of King Churachand, became a popular modern song and later 30th September was observed as *Matam Ishei Numit* (Modern Music Day). Considering the Manipuri modern music as a popular art form, the Manipur State Kala Akademi organised a two- day seminar on Manipuri Modern Music on August 14 and 15, 1977 at the auditorium of Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy in Imphal. Following the seminar, the Apunba Manipur Matam Ishei Kanglup (AMMIK)- Pan Manipur Modern Music Association was formed on September 10, 1977 for development of Manipuri modern music. The year between 1970 and 1990 is regarded as the glorious period of Manipuri modern music.

Manipur has had a rich musical heritage from the beginning. In India, music is generally classified into three categories, namely folk music, Classical Music- Hindustani or Carnatic and Modern Song. However, Manipur has four. Renowned writer, lyricist and Sahitya Akademi awardee Dr. Jodhachandra Sanasam broadly classified the evolution of Manipuri music into four namely a) Manipuri native songs and music, b) Manipuri songs and music under the influence of

Vashnavite Culture, c) Manipuri Songs and music under the influence of Hindustani music and d) The current modern songs and music. Each of these musical forms has its own identity, tune and beats, and has its own school.

Music in Manipuri Cinema

Manipuri music plays an important role in Manipuri cinema. Aribam Syam Sharma first introduced lullaby in his maiden film music in *Matamgi Manipur* (1972), the first Manipuri film produced by Karam Monomohan. The song- *Tha Tha Thabungton*, Ngalli Chikna Nongmadon rendered by Ayekpam Kamala is still a captivating film song. Nongmaithem Pahari also composed a lullaby- *Pari Chingnunggi Hari Khonglakle Tao* penned by B. Jayantakumar in S.N. Chand's *Ngak-E-Ko Nangse* (1974), sung by Arambam Jamuna. S.N. Chand employs all four kinds of Manipuri music-

- i) a folk musical performance *Pena Phamsak*,
- ii) a Nata Sankirtana performance-*Basak*,
- iii) a Hindustani classical song- *Nil-khonglaba nonggi mapei mapei* rendered by Aarti Mukherjee and
- iv) a modern song *Ningthirabi Ahingse* rendered by S.N. Chand in his maiden Manipuri film- *Brojendragi Luhongba* (1972).

Bollywood singers have also made their presence in Manipuri cinema. Manipuri filmmakers wanted to have the experience with the Bollywood singers introducing them the rich Manipuri language and literature. On the other hand, the Bollywood singers also loved to sing the songs in Manipuri, a Tibeto – Burman language.

After Aarti Mukherjee, the Queen of Melody Lata Mangeshkar sang two songs –*Nungsiba Magi Ithak Ireida* with Laishram Mema and Pammuba Nungsiba with Aheibam Shyam Singh in *Meichak* directed by L. Banka Sharma. The songs composed by Aheibam Shyam Singh were recorded at Mumbai in 1982. L. Banka Sharma recounts that, “There was a strong mass movement in Manipur demanding the inclusion of Manipuri language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Then I took the decision to request Lata Mangeshkar, the most respected playback singer in India to sing Manipuri songs in

my film- *Meichak* to popularise Manipuri language. Many people criticized me for spending lots of money to request Lata Didi.” There was a delay in the production of the film. However, the film was released in 2000. Filmmaker Banka Sharma made another effort to arrange Bollywood singers in his Film- *Madhabee*. Udit Narayan, Sadhana Sargam, Jayshree Shivram, Anuradha Paudwal and Usha Mangeshkar sang the songs composed by S. Tijendra Singh in *Madhabee*. In the film- *Chatledo Eidi* directed by Makhonmani Mongsaba; three Bollywood singers namely Alka Yagnik, Udit Narayan and Poornima Shrestha sang the songs composed by S. Tijendra Singh. Udit Narayan, Sadhana Sargam and Anuradha Paudwal sang songs composed by S. Tijendra Singh in R.K. Kripa's *Lei-eeAma*. Kumar Sanu and Kavita Krishnamurthy sang in *Mandir* composed by Chandam Shyamacharan and Moirangthem Tikendra. Khun Joykumar composed three songs for Sonu Ningam, Kumar Sanu and Kavita Krishnamurthy in *Nongju Ahing*. Oken Amakcham composed two songs for Kumar Sanu and Priya Bhattacharya in *Laibak* directed by W. Ibohal.

Arrival of Proscenium Theatre

Sahitya Akademi awardee playwright Arambam Somorendra, in his article- *Manipuri Drama*, was of the view: “Western drama was a bye-product of the acculturation which Manipur had after its contact with the British Indian Empire in the 19th century. Western education was introduced in Manipur in the last quarter of the 19th century along with Bengali script and language which was in vague in the state for a considerable period of time. And as such we find a Bengali play- *Pravas Milan* as the first proscenium drama held in the year 1902”.

Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh (1895-1966) who was the first Manipuri playwright, in his book- *Introduction to Manipur* (1960) narrated that the modern drama-*Pravas Milan* was first staged in the Raja Dumbra Singh's compound where there was the palace in the beginning of the King Sir Churachand Singh's reign under the direction of Gulap Singh Selungba and one Sarat Babu. The actors were Lal Gopal Sharma, Lalji Sharma, Maibam Yaimabi Singh and others. Actresses were Chingakham Gopal,

Nanowbi Sana, Laishram Kulabidhu, Oja Bihari Singh, Nongmaithem Thanin Singh and others. From his account, we know that in the beginning of Manipuri drama, the female roles were enacted by male actors.

Arambam Somorendra discovered that the pioneers of proscenium drama in Manipur were teachers who hailed from Cachar and Sylhet districts in Assam who were thoroughly acquainted with Bengali drama of that period especially of the Girish School. Some Bengali employees of the State also contributed in the development of Manipuri drama with the establishment of the Bamacharan Bandhav Natyasala in 1903 where many Manipuri drama aspirants took part. The Bengalis presented drama during the Durga Puja every year. A few years after, Bengali dramas were presented in the Johnstone High School compound by the students during the Saraswati Puja. Main actors and actresses amongst the seniors were- Khwairakpam Nabakishore Singh, Chingakhom Mayurdhaja Singh, M. K. Birachandrajit Singh, Nongmaithem Thanin Singh, Masun Tomba Sharma, Thokchom Mangoljao Singh and others; amongst the juniors- Laishram Kirti Singh, Leisangthem Chaoyaima Singh, Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh, Maibam Rajani Singh, Khondram Dhanachandra Singh, Oinam Niladhawja Singh, Haobam Kanhai Singh, Ahanthem Tombi Singh, Takhellambam Damoo Singh, Nongmaithem Radhakanta and others. Then in 1914, the first drama in Manipuri- Arjungi Maithiba (a translation of Bengali drama Partha Parajay) was presented by the students class VII of the Johnstone High School in the school compound during Saraswati Puja. Khaidem Nongyai Singh and R.K. Thambalsana Singh gave a splendid performance. (Ibungohal 1960).

The first original Manipuri drama –Nara Singh, a historical play was written by Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh in 1902, while he was studying law in Dacca. The drama was staged at Palace Mandob on September 30, 1925. In the same year, another drama-Babhrubahan Pokpa by the same author was also staged in the portico of the Palace main building.

In 1931, Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh's Sati Khongnang and Areppa Marup and in 1933

Asangbam Minaketan's Bhagyachandra were staged at Yaiskul. Some prominent actors and actresses of the time were Khondram Dhanachandra Singh, Mayanglangbam Jatra Singh, Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh, Chingakhom Angoubi Singh, Hijam Irabot Singh and Smt Shaikhom Keinya Devi. (Ibungohal 1960).

Manipur Dramatic Union was founded in 1942 just before the WWII and the Dramatic Hall was constructed at Yaiskul in Imphal from active patronage of the State administration and public donation. After the WWII, Rupmahal Theatre and Aryan Theatre constructed their respective halls in Imphal. With regular shows on Saturday and Sunday at these theatre halls, Manipuri audience got into the habit to visit theatres. Manipuri drama got national recognition when Manipur Dramatic Union's folk drama- Haorang Leishang Saphabi was adjudged the best play in the folk category of the National Drama Festival in New Delhi 1954.

Theatre legends like Ratan Thiyam, Heisnam Kanhailal and Lokendra Arambam from Manipur brought the Manipuri theatre into global stage. Ratan Thiyam's 1984 play Chakravyuha (The Wheel of War), which catapulted him onto the world stage in 1984, was awarded the Fringe Firsts Award of the Edinburgh International Theatre Festival 1987 and the Diploma of Cervantino International Theatre Festival 1990, Mexico, and has since been performed more than 100 times around the globe. Heisnam Kanhailal staged his plays- Pebet and Memoirs of Africa at Tokyo, Toga and Niigata in Japan in 1987. His Migi Sharang was adjudged as one of the six best plays in the third Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre in 1991. Lokendra Arambam's mesmeric production – Macbeth: Stage of Blood made an unforgettable spectacle when it was performed on a floating stage on the River Thames in West London for five days from August 20 to 24 in 1997 as the sun sets on the river, with the audience watching from Watermans riverside location. Manipuri theatre took a good stride because of the fertility of Manipuri culture.

The rich Manipuri theatre contributed a lot in the evolution of Manipuri cinema. The pioneer film makers namely S.N. Chand, Aribam Syam Sharma,

G. Narayan Sharma, G.C. Tongbra, Moirangthem Nilamani were renowned theatre personalities. Main artistes in the first Manipuri film-Debkumar Bose's *Matangi Manipur* (1972) like G. Ravindra Sharma, Birbabu, and Amujao were from Manipur Dramatic Union, Ksh. Rashi, Lokendra Arambam and Aribam Syam Sharma from Aryan Theatre, Roma from Roop Raag, and Kangabam Tomba from Society Theatre. Main artistes of S.N. Chand's *Brojendragi Luhongba* (1972) like S.N. Chand was from Leimayol Arts Centre; Oinam Biramangol, Laishram Netrajit and Binodkumari from Rupmahal theatre. Almost all the artistes in the beginning of Manipuri Cinema belonged to the theatre. Similar was the case with make-up artistes and costume designers. The strong theatrical movement and literature in Manipur had impacted towards the growth of good film culture in Manipur.

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Mask Art: The Matchless Creation of Sankardeva

Dhiren Saikia

Mask is the ancient work of human beings. It is one of the achievement of the evolution of human civilization. Later it turned to be an art. Though mask was used in our Assam from the ancient time, Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva came forward with the mask art in a practised form. The mask art has a special role in the cultural movement, which took place during the campaigning and extension of Neo-Vaishnavite religion by taking Borgeet, drama, instruments, bhaona etc as the main medium. In Assam, it is known that there is a mask or mask like thing used in paddy field or in traditional dramas from the ancient time. In the paddy fields, there is a shape like human standing in the mid of the fields, made of straws and a pot as face. The pot, which is usually hanged in the trees of coconut, betel nut or other fruits, is painted with charcoal like human face. This shape of straws is used in the paddy field to remove the birds and animals from the paddy field. And in the villages, mask was used in Jatraparty, Dhepadhulia for the roles of demon, monster, animals from the ancient times.

Today the practice of mask art is extensively seen in various places of Assam and different Satras of Majuli. Almost all the organisations related with acting are using masks directly. These masks are prepared from locally available materials like bamboo, cane, clothes, dungs, clay, wood, kuhila, paper, glue, vermilion, Plaster clothes and yellow arsenic, colours available in market. The researchers remind the steps taken by Srimanta Sankardeva in popularising the use of mask in Assam with respect.

The use of Masks in outside Assam : There is no proper information about the invention of masks in India. Still, it is said that there was a continuance of masks before 1300 BC in India. Many people says that the masks of Bakasur, Jatayu, Putana, Ravana, Hiranyakashipu, Nrisingha form of Lord Bishnu described in Bhagabat Puran were the creations of

Pre-Sankardeva era, but the Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva campaigned Harikatha by using the mask art in his Ankiya drama. According to the scholars, the mask was used in Greek dramas. These masks were also prepared from the skins-furs-skulls of animals, skins of trees, feathers of birds etc. It is known that in Old Testament and New Testament also there were some pictures like demon, dragon, raptiles etc with the presentation of masks. The apply of masks is also seen in folk dramas of Orissa, Bihar, Kerala. Mukha is also used in Ramlila of North India. We can also see the application of masks made of woods and bamboos in ancient folk art cultures of China, Java, Balidweep, Japan etc. Dr. Tribenirekha Saikia mentions clearly in the article named 'Bhaonar Mukhasilpa' of the book 'Bhaona Darpan' edited by Dr. Raktim Ranjan Saikia and Manoranjan Bordoloi that there is no mention of using masks before that of 'Chihnayatra', one of the best creation of Srimanta Sankardeva. According to Gurucharita, Sankardeva used some elements of bhaona like music and instruments, mask etc in the drama of 'Chihnayatra'.

It is known that, masks played an important role in drama and bhaonas of Satras established by Sankardeva and other Neo-Vaishnavist gurus. Most of those masks are male centered. The masks used for woman are also type of manly. According to the writings of some mask artists, the colours used in masks were prepared from minerals like vermilion, yellow arsenic or trees.

How the mask is prepared : The mask artist Rebakanta Mahanta has written clearly that- the thing that we fix temporarily in our face to cover our face is the mask. The mask is wore with carefully in the greenroom. Generally, jati bamboo is used in making masks. At first the skeleton is prepared, later the potter soil and clay are mixed there. After keeping it in the sun to dry, the natural colour is used.

The mask artist Rebakanta Mahanta has written

clearly in his article 'Ankia bhaonar anyatam aharya paramparagata mukhasilpa' that- Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva is the first artist, who applied masks in bhaona by making masks made of bamboo sticks. The masks made by Mahapurush Sankardeva were- Ananta Sajya, mask of Lord Brahma and 'Raj Hansa', vehicle of Lord Brahma, mask of Lord Shiva and His vehicle 'Brishav', 'Garurh', the vehicle of Lord Bishnu, etc.

Types of Masks : There are various types of masks. According to drama scriptures, there are two types of masks- Pushta Mask and Sanjiva Mask. The masks of Lord Brahma, Hiranakkhya, Chakrabat demon, Putana etc are included in Pushta Masks and the masks of animals, raptiles, herons, birds etc are included in Sanjiva masks. There are also two types of masks according to size. Those are- Head mask and face mask. Head masks only cover the heads. And face mask covers the other parts of the body.

There are four types of masks in Assam- wooden mask, mask of bamboo sticks, clothing mask, Sanch mask.

Wooden mask : These masks are made by cutting a piece of wood with all the materials of mason.

Mask of Bamboo sticks : This mask is prepared by making sticks of bamboo by six 'mor's (keeping this under water for some time) and after letting it dry in the sunshine, a special class of soil is rubbed on the mask and colouring on it.

Clothing mask : This mask is prepared by using cloths, cotton, needles, pencils etc. Generally, beard, hairs, eyebrows are made in this way.

Sanch mask : This mask is made from paper, jute, fibre of banana tree, flour, maida, Tendu seeds etc. The colours of this mask are prepared from vermilion, yellow arsenic, charcoal, smoke of the lamps of kerosin oil, indigo, charcoal of the woods of java plum tree, minerals, white soil etc. Nowadays many people use the colours available in the market. Some of the famous masks are- Taraka demon, Maris and Subahu, mask of Ravana, Ravana, Suparnakha, Hanuman, Bali, Sugreve, Jambabanta in Rambijay bhaona and Hiranyakkha, Hiranyakashipu, Barah, Narasingha, Garudpakshi in Nri-singha jatra bhaona.

In Ras bhaona also, popular masks are- Ananta sajya, the mask of the snake who crossed Jamuna

river with little Sri Krishna, Bakasur, Aghasur, Putana, the mask of the lion in kidnapping Syamantak, Jambabanta, the horse of Prasen, tiger, deer etc and in Gajendra mythology the masks of grah, gajendra, garud etc. The Nri-singha mask is considered as the most ancient mask of Assam. The Bakasur, who comes to kill the young Lord Krishna, wears the mask made of wood, rod of bamboo, rope, kuhila, paper etc.

Reservation of the mask : The responsibility of the museum is boundless in reserving the masks. Though the fine art colleges, Kalakshetra, Rabindra Bhawan are continuously trying for the appropriate reservation of the masks, but it is not sufficient. According to our information, Lalit Kala Academy of Government of India with Kalakshetra society has organised workshops amongst the artists of North-East and other states and has also organised many small workshops in different satras under the traditional artists. Still the campaigning and extention of the masks has more recess. The mask artists does not want any publicity. Therefore, the government and volunteer organisations should find them and encourage them so that they can contribute more to the society.

The practice of this beautiful craft is not only in Chamguri Satra of Majuli, but also in Alengi Narasingha, Bihimpur, Natun Kamalabari satras. Dr. Debajit Saikia writes in article named 'Majulir Arthonoitik Drishyapat' in 'Majuli' that the mask artists of Majuli are so expert and excellent that the idols like Nrisingha, Ravana, Putana, Demon, Saraswati etc made by them are left to be alive. The masks made by the artists of Chamguri satra have sufficient demands in various places of Assam. Moreover, almost all Vaishnavists of various satras are profited by preparing different dresses of bhaonas. These artists earn incomes either by giving the dresses to rent or selling the masks.

The Sri Sri Alengi Narasingha Satra of Majuli is famous for the mask art. The name of the two late Satradhikars Sri Sri Lilakanta Mahanta and Sri Sri Priyakanta Mahanta are related with the making and practices of masks like So mask, Lotokai mask and Face mask in this satra. In 2006, one bhaona of masks made by Lalit Chandra Mahanta and Gopal Chandra Mahanta was organised in the month of

January in Sankardeva Kalakshetra invited from Cultural Affairs of Assam.

The mask artists keep the pieces of bamboo under the water for some days, after that different types of curds are made from them, they are kept for dry in the sun, and after that different types of 'mor's are added to them and masks are made. The potter soil is mixed on the shape through a special process. Nowadays, many people use the combination of cement and sand and use series paper on the combination for smoothening. Bamboo pieces are kept under water to protect from the ants and small insects.

The sizes of masks and arts are different according to different places of Assam. Today also, local thinkings affects the mask art. For example- masks are also prepared by living far away from the reality.

It is assumed that masks of raptiles, Narasingha, Brahma were made either for extra drammatrical gestures or for creating worries in the minds of the people. Though the masks are mainly bhaona centered, nowadays masks are made also for public exhibition or for educational fields.

The masks were made for creating extra drammatrical gestures, terrible and fascinating environments. The main aims of masks is to provide different kinds of satires like bravery, laughter, ugly, extraordinary and terrible etc to audience. Locally produced things are mainly used for the masks of bhaonas.

(The original Assamese article published in Oitihya Barta has been translated into English by Deepsikha Das)

(Contd. from Page 13)

Kushal Konwar – The unsung Hero of the Freedom Struggle

Abdul Karim Gani, Civil Surgeon, Ghatak from Cachar and 12 armed Policemen.

The people of Assam will always remember the Martyr Kushal Konwar and cherish his memory with immense gratitude. Though Kushal Konwar received only general education in school, but his education of unbounded love for motherland surpassed highest level of college degrees.

When Kushal Konwar's wife Prabhavati had her last words with him Kushal Konwar said to her that he was fortunate that he was selected for sacrificing his life among the thousands of people. Kushal lived his last days by reading Geeta and praying to God in Jorhat Jail. He continued to smile even on the day before hanging. On the day of 15th June, at dawn the Government officers were shocked to find Kushal Konwar sleeping peacefully. When the sleeping Kushal Konwar was suddenly awakened by the Jailer he simply told him that he was ready. We, the Indian people have gained freedom because of the sacrifices of the martyrs like Kushal Konwar. We have to save this honour of freedom anyhow.

(Contd. from Page 5)

Tumyehang System in Limbu Community

organized, systematic, strong, and reinstated in every Limbu village. This will develop consciousness and unity among Limbus. It will help us to make our customs and rituals general and common despite geographical constraints which could be followed by all the Limbus worldwide. Let us preserve, promote and develop our Tumyehang system in Limbu community. Despite knowing the importance, we see very little effort to study the Tumyehang system which is very disappointing.

Source::

Amrita Thebe, Tumyang Judiciary System in Limbu Community (A Customary Law).

Bal Muringla, Limboo Marriage: The Primitive Way.

Arjun Mabuhang, Limbu JatikoMundhum Ra Itihas.

Chaitanya Subba, The culture and Religion of Limbus



The practice of mask art is extensively seen in various places of Assam and different Satras of Majuli. Almost all the organisations related with acting are using masks directly. These masks are prepared from locally available materials like bamboo, cane, clothes, dungs, clay, wood, kuhila, paper, glue, vermilion, Plaster clothes and yellow arsenic, colours available in market. The researchers remind the steps taken by Srimanta Sankardeva in popularising the use of mask in Assam with respect.

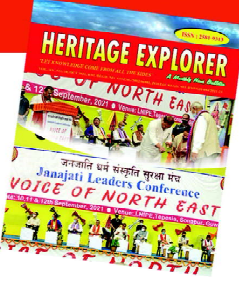
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