



Shumang Lila: Growth, Development and Reflection of the Society in its Present Form

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Abstract

Shumang Lila (Courtyard play) is a very popular mode of entertainment for all sections of the Manipuri society. It is a Manipuri theatrical art form considered to have developed in the 19th and 20th century. It is believed to have originated from the ancestral worship ritual known as Lai Haraoba or pleasing the gods. The performances in this ritual earned the benefaction of the royals. It was Chandrakirti Maharaja's time (1850-1886) that started as Phagi Lila (a form of farce) preceding the Shumang Lila. Then there was the Eshei Lila accompanied by singing and music in the background and Phampak Lila (a stage drama) which is somewhat similar to the western theatrical model. The first theatre house came into being in the early part of the twentieth century with the name Friends Dramatic Union. Many such groups came to be established and they trailed in new contemporary issues, and ideas, spreading awareness to the masses. The paper deals with the origin, growth, development and reflection of society with some of its core problems. The paper also discusses how this art form broke the domination of being accessible only to the upper caste, the elite of the society and began taking up the role of community development media taking the role of entertaining, enlightening, instructing, moralizing, critiquing and sensitizing the public on various issues relevant to the society within the cultural context and space of the Manipuris. It is a medium to spread social awareness to people through its meaningful theme and enactments which portray the socio-politico-economic issues of the people not only in Manipur but also globally. Another aspect of Shumang Lila in its present form is the popularity of its 'Nupi Shabis' who actually are male actors performing female roles. This art form provides a platform and community for them. Even with the influx of mass media, and social media platforms, Shumang Lila has proved its validity to sensitize people's thinking to promote change and propagate ideas.

Keywords: *Lai Haraoba, Manipuri, Nubi Shabis, Shumang Lila and Theatre.*

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Introduction

Shumang Lila can be translated literally as ‘courtyard play’ (*Shumang* means courtyard in Manipuri language and *Lila* means play). It is a very popular means of entertainment for the masses in Manipur. It is performed by a group of artistes when and wherever they are invited to showcase their play. It mostly takes place during the festive seasons when the common people are more relaxed and could afford to spare some time to enjoy. A number of Lila Party (the group performing a play together) have sprung up performing plays based on varied themes and issues. Sometimes the demand is so high that they have to enact the play even in broad daylight in some places to meet the demands of the day. But there are times when they are not engaged for weeks or months. It can be noted here that the term ‘Lila’, ‘play’ and ‘theatre’ is used interchangeably here in the paper.

The actors and actresses (males acting as females, also called Nupi Shabis in Manipuri) are so talented and skilled. There are no cuts and retakes unlike in a cinema. The play is performed live right in front of a live crowd provoking mirth and grief simultaneously. Hearty laughter and cries follow one after the other in a good play. Their capacity to draw large crowds enables them to act as a medium for educating and bringing awareness to the masses. Government machinery as well as Non-Profitable Organizations have made use of Shumang Lila to convey the message to the general public. In the above context, the paper attempts to study the history of growth and development of the Shumang Lila, how the main concerns of society are being reflected in the plays and how the government, as well as the non-government organizations use the Shumang Lila as a medium to communicate, educate and bring awareness to the common people. The paper is based on the observations and the experiences of the author and is largely based on secondary sources. The rationale of the study is to examine the unique features of Shumang Lila and its contribution to the ‘world of theatre’.

The Origin and Growth of the Modern Manipuri Theatre

Lai Haraoba (one of the most important festivals of Manipur, particularly for the Meitei) sometimes translated as merry-making of the gods is believed to be the origin of the present Shumang Lila. It is a festival to honour and pay reverence to the ancient gods and ancestors. Folk songs and dances are enacted to celebrate the festival. Every year the festival is celebrated without fail to appease the gods and pray for prosperity and fertility in the land and its people. *Phagee Lila* which is a kind of farce gradually followed *Lai Haraoba* (Seram, 13.8.2012). Its main intention was to amuse, to produce pure glee and merriment and in the process point out the irony of the situation in the society of the time. Later on, the theatre can be said to be divided into two: religious and secular. The religious ones are *Gouralila* which depicts the childhood of Gouranga Mahaprabhu, *Udukhol* which depicts the childhood of lord Krishna. These plays can be taken as products of Hindunisation of the Meiteis during the reign of their kings in 16th-19th century Manipur. The secular or what is the present-day form of the Shumang Lila is the consequence of accumulations of trials, investigations, transformations and amalgamations etc. Thus, the origin of the secular form of the Lila can be traced to its ritual beginning.

One can broadly divide the development of the Shumang Lila into three stages. First is the period before Chandrakirti Maharaja (1850-1886). The second stage is between Chandrakirti's time till the 1950s and the third period is from 1950 onwards to the present time. This sequential division is required to shed light on the ever-developing nature of Shumang Lila. Some kind of secular form of theatre with a suitable structure took place in Chandrakirti Maharaja's time. Similar to the old English, the king and the nobles were entertained by court jesters. They were humorous, amusing and talented pundits of ingenuity. The performance of these jesters, the genre of which came to be known as *Phagee Lila* or simply a farce. This *Phagee Lila* began to move away from the king's court to public places like *Shumang* (courtyards) of individuals or a clan and performed on the basis of payment. Not only has it moved away from the confines of the king's court but it started representing the lives of the people less fortunate or who are on the margins. Gradually the firmly tiered structure of the society practiced by the people and patronized by the king was dismantled by its folk humour. The popularity of the Shumang Lila spread far and wide across all ranks in the state and this is demonstrated by Ethel St. Clair Grimwood, wife of a political agent, Mr. Grimwood (1888-91), during her stay in Manipur. She writes narrating an event at Gymkhana:

“.....to wind up there was a play. The Maharaja had three jesters, exactly like the old English fashion of having court-jesters to amuse royalty. The Manipuri specimens were very funny indeed. Their heads were shaved like the back of a poodle, with little tufts of hair left here and there; and their faces were painted with streaks of different-coloured paints, and their eyebrows whitened..... and as soon as she appeared a scuffle ensued, in which the old woman's clothes fell off. We thought best to beat a retreat, as the play was beginning to be rowdy and the dialogue vulgar; but I believe that it went on for some hours afterwards, as we heard shouts of laughter proceeding from the direction of the polo-ground, where the sports were held, late at night; and the princes told us the next day that it had been a very good play, and the only pity was that we had witnessed so little of it.” (Grimwood 84-85).

The 1950s saw a big rise in Manipuri theatre with the introduction of scripts for plays like *Puran Meithaba* and *BA Mapa Lamboiba*. A major influence was seen in the 1970s with the introduction of *Eshei Lila* (A Shumang Lila which involves background music and playback singing). *Eshei Lila* survived till the present time. In the beginning, most of the plays were reworkings from Bengali plays. The original Manipuri play is believed to be *Nara Singh*. Then gradually globalization and commercialization started seeping into Manipuri theatre. Though there is a lack of financial assistance and other logistic issues, there is no shortage of talent and the zeal to excel in the field is strong. There are problems as well as prospects in plenty. It is the audience and their tastes and preferences that will decide the fate of the theatre. How much the artists and the scriptwriters will be able to keep in mind the importance of the general public is another major task in the future of the Shumang Lila. There is a phenomenal shift in a more secular and varied theme at present. Issues of contemporary relevance etc. mainly form the crux of the matter in Shumang Lila of the present times. Theatre never remains quietly watching the ever-changing trends and

upheavals of society. These become spontaneously manifested either in a feature or lineament of the theatre. The matter is on the revelation and concealment, phrases and proverbs, directly or meanderingly in its expression. Theatre never ceases to live (E-Pao, 14.4.2015).

Themes, Setting and Genre of Shumang Lila

The Shumang Lila is 'popular' across classes and masses. Richard Schelmer is of the opinion that when the performances have a higher phase of 'efficacy', it has got to be more ceremonial and, more theatrical when it has a high degree of entertainment. Theatrical and ritualistic elements, most of the time, co-exist in a performance. Ritual and theatre are both sources that act as the source of theatre while at other times theatre acts as the source of ritual. So, they are essentially interrelated. There is osmosis between the two (1983:137). The Lila is 'popular' in its own way. A history of struggle always ensues between what is called popular culture with the elite culture in their bid to surpass each other. As the name suggests, popular culture is something extensively shared among a populace. It is a collective dream world of a population and can be perceived to have originated from the people. Thus, a culture of the people and for the people.

Themes

Themes are the central ideas of plays. The themes of the Shumang Lilas are varied. Some common ones may be concerning love, idealism, power, career, outcaste, morality, politics, corruption, injustice etc. Themes can be culture specific and so the treatment and presence of these varied themes vary in different cultures. Love and outcaste are dealt with in the form of purity/impurity, the taboo of inter-caste marriage etc. A fine example can be a play called *Keisamthong Thoibi*. Themes such as love and morality occupy a dominant place in Shumang Lila as the social structure is such that communitarian values stand above one's individual involvement or wishes. Rampant practice of corruption in different spheres of life form one of the dominant themes too. An example may be cited in play like *Mantri Dolansana*. Social dramas also come into view based on socio-politico-economic problems in society. These issues range from day-to-day family affairs, state affairs, dominant corrupt practices, the problem of unemployed youth, insurgency etc. These are only a few, as they can range from heaven to hell since different genres cannot be bound by any limitation of time and space. An example can be cited from the play- *World Trade Centre* written by Ranjit Ningthouja showcases the futility, agony and damage to the rudimentary human relationship in the aftermath of the 11th September 2001 attack on the Twin Towers. Ratan Thiyam on the other hand uses red colour to show the futility of war and the exaltation of peace through his plays: *Chakravyuhu* (1984), *Hiroshima*(1996), *Uttarapriyadarshi* (1996).

Setting

The stage of the Shumang Lila is set with only a table, chairs and mikes hanging down so that the voice of the artistes are audible to the crowd. Most often Lila is set in the frame of a middle-class family. The act may take place in different environments and situations. It could take place in a war field, natural place, garden, a palacial setting (when it is a historical or a mythical one etc), court area, offices, market, busy streets etc. Shumang Lila's performance right in the middle of the audience is a fine example of its claim that it is

the 'theatre of the masses.' Only a small passage is left for the entrance and exit of the artistes to and from the stage and the green room where they change their costumes etc. The Lila is performed by a band consisting of 11-13 professional artistes when invited on a payment basis. Most often the people of a town or locality collect money from households to pay for the troupe and are invited on festive occasions or on holidays. The Lila has achieved great success and popularity because it appeals to the rustic audience in themes and styles. Performances are carried out almost all year round, though frequency increases during festival seasons like Durga Puja, Holi (*Yaoshang*), *Cheiraoba*, *Ningol Chakkouba*, etc. Earlier it was mainly performed during the night but nowadays, due to the growth and huge demand and also commercialization, it is performed even during the day.

The play's endeavour to duplicate real settings becomes probable with the help of voice, gesticulations, sound etc. The endings of the plays can be of different categories. They may be happy, tragic, ambiguous, etc. Most often we find a final solution to the disorder created earlier in the play. In this way, it does not leave any further engagement in the minds of the audience by creating suspense or doubts. It provides a complete package to be consumed there and then, not leaving any undigested materials for later. To add to it, there is also a lasting impression of the contents of the play on the minds of the audiences. Some artistes are even known by name of the character they play while their real names remain unknown to the masses. The general public would often quote the plays to associate them with their daily lives or similar events witnessed in the plays.

Genre

A play may belong to one or more genres. The possible genre of plays could be – tragedy, comedy, farce, thriller, tragi-comedy, documentary etc. These different genres are collectively inclusive and are entwined in a single play showing the mood variations present in a particular social setting. Aristotle in *Poetics* opines that comedy “deals in an amusing way with ordinary characters in rather everyday situations” (Cuddon, 1999; 148). Alighieri Dante (1319) in his book ‘The Epistle to Can Grande’, said “comedy is a form of poetical narrative which is different from any other kind.... Comedy begins with harshness but ends happily” (Para 10). Though there are different types of comedies, Shumang Lila can be said to be an admixture of romantic and domestic comedies. Farce, which is a sub-section of comedy also finds its way into the Shumang Lila provoking laughter, and mirth of the simplest kind rather than wit, along with exaggerated physical action.

The Nupi Shabis

Nupi Shabis are male artistes acting as female characters in plays. Initially female characters were played by female artistes. But shortly after *Harichandra* and *Meiraba Charan* male artistes began to play female characters. This may be due to the inconveniences faced during performances at far off places at odd hours or due to the interest shown by the transgender community which were on the rise in the state. This unique characteristic became the trade mark of Shumang Lila and also gives Shumang Lila its originality and different tastes. It must be borne in mind that those were days of socio-religiously conservative times. Restrictions from families and social stigma must have contributed to the scarcity of female

artistes. This unique tradition of male actors playing female roles is also visible in famous Chinese Operas. In these operas, female characters are usually played by male actors simply as a tradition and not because of any non-availability of female artistes. Thus, if female characters are not played by male artistes, that play does not look like a Shumang Lila at all (Ayekpam, 24.5.2013).

Nowadays the argument of whether male actors should play the female role or not is, not discussed at all but what has become a serious topic is that these *nupi shabis* are becoming an important factor in making a Shumang Lila hit. There have been incidents where people would not watch a Lila after seeing the *nupi shabi* in the green room because they were not beautiful. And while watching Shumang Lila they forget that these are not actually women, instead, they begin to choose. Another significant characteristic of Shumang Lila is the important and special place it gives to these *nupi shabis*. Unlike Shumang Lila, no other art form gives so much importance to this section of people. Many will agree with the fact that the ‘*nupi shabis*’ look more feminine than many women themselves. They wear dresses that set the trend. Their looks, body gestures, facial expressions, and gait are all feminine. Many Lila enthusiasts are crazy about the hypnotic beauty and demeanour of Sorokhaibam Robindro, Sanaton, Heramoti, Bishesh, and Pandum (famous *nupi shabis* of the present times). These male actresses are abundantly popular and they are the main lure of any Shumang Lila play in our present day (Imokanta, E-Pao).

Though these *nupi shabis* are able to carve out a niche for themselves on the stages of Shumang Lilas, their real lives are tales of woes and tragedies. They face a battle in every walk of their lives, starting from their own families to society. What little respect they get is among the Shumang Lila circle. The very moment, they come out off the stage; they are ridiculed as a second-class citizen, and treated as sex objects. The ability to emulate feminine character is a big art, mere training cannot perfect it. On the other hand, scientists opine that it is an inherent genetic disorder that makes a man behave like a woman. And a person cannot change it. But this disorder has turned into an advantageous gift of nature through the art form, Shumang Lila.

A very popular *Nupi Shabi* once told: “even my own family look at me differently. I am forbidden to cross paths while children are going to examination for they considered me inauspicious” (Ayekpam, 24.5.2013)). He has to face ridicule and teasing wherever he goes. But such ridicule lessened once he has become a popular artiste. Another *nupi shabi* of yesteryear said, in an interview that he was ridiculed by his own people saying that he can never marry, so much so that he married quite early just to show that he can do it. Another interesting fact is that some *nupi shabis* are actually courted by men believing them to be real women.

Every effeminate cannot become a *nupi shabi*. It needs a lot of training to be a successful artiste. One needs to undergo training under a teacher (Director) on how to deliver dialogue and how to master the feminine gait and it is only when these qualities are mastered, one can become a complete and successful *nupi shabi*. The notion that – anyone with a

feminine character can become an artiste is not correct. As everybody cannot become a good artiste, every beautiful man without artistic talent cannot become a *nupi shabi* in shape and fit. A successful *nupi shabi* needs to have all those qualities required by a talented artiste. They are not replaceable even in case of sickness. At the same time, their time is also limited as they are no more in demand once they age. Performing three to four shows every day at odd hours takes a toll on their body. So, the earning period is usually shorter for them. People's attitude towards them in the social circle and their crippling financial status sometimes result in psychological trauma.

Society needs to change its attitude towards these artistes. They deserve to be appreciated and given a higher pedestal. It is worth remembering that without these *nupi shabis*, Shumang Lila, cannot be a complete whole. A famous personality who had taken up so many famous and memorable female roles is A. Robindro in plays such as *21st Century Kunti*, *Keishamthong Thoibi*, etc. He states that there is no other career option for them. The Shumang Lila is the only platform and a means of livelihood for them. Other artistes can always have other opportunities but the *nupi shabis* have no other options. The government should introduce some policy or suitable employment so that their old age does not go in vain but at least manage to sustain themselves when they have given their all for the enjoyment of the people.

Representation of Society in the Shumang Lila and the Lila as a Medium of Communication

Art in the form of literature, music, songs, painting etc. most often speaks of its own time. The modern Manipuri theatre also has undergone many changes and development to come to its present-day form. It has undergone complex changes along with changing needs. It encompasses various issues both local and global. Socio-political, economic, and cultural issues in the Manipuri society are being dealt with in Lilas. It also plays the role of educator of the masses, not just an entertainer through its complex presentations. It is the hard work, perseverance, sweat and toil of many talented and creative artistes that have made Manipuri theatre world-renowned. Sorokhaibam Lalit's direction of *Haorang Leishang Saphabi* depicts folklore where a poor boy-rich girl encounter takes place. The play shows how poverty is considered taboo. Another writer, Maibam Ramcharan concentrated on the romantic, sentimental, human suffering etc. Then we have the master strokes of G.C. Tongbra, Arambam Somorendra, Athokpam Tomchou and Pukhrambam Shamu who led to the flourishing of critical social dramas. Some of these personalities wrote in a satirical style protesting the hideous and abhorrent society of the time. The fast-changing society: rapid industrialization, new economic setup, and the general decline in moral and community values have provided fodder for these dramatists to exercise their talent and include these themes and issues of relevance in their plays. New issues arose around the late 60s when discontentment counter to the Indian administration of India, marketable manipulation by sellers, mediators and traders led to the surge of youth power, quest for self and renewal of the native spirit can be seen in plays of artistes like M. Biramangol as well as in Pukhrambam Shamu (IndianNetZone, 20.6.2012).

The Shumang Lila became not only a mirror of society but also became a means to propagate ideas, bring awareness to the masses, and educate them on matters of relevance from time to time. Many instances could be cited from as long as 1965, after the infamous Hunger Marcher's Day of 27th August, the Manipur People's Party (MPP- one of the oldest regional political parties in Manipur) created a play by the name *Chak Tangba* exposing the wrongs of the Congress Party in relation to the incident. The play was an effective tool against the party in power. Various agencies, whether it be government or non-government, have judiciously employed the medium of Shumang Lila to carry forward messages to the people at large. Another Lila *Meekap Thokpa* written by Heisnam Dhana performed in 1974 was the first attempt at utilizing the art form in spreading family planning messages. *Chayam Pokpa* by the Family Planning Bureau and Chana Lukhloi's *Anouba Mangal* carry family planning messages. Plays like *Singareina Kenkhrabada* and *Kanagi Maralno* by Rupachandra Ghosh were based on Polio Immunization. These plays successfully generated awareness among the people. The government departments utilized this medium to spread awareness on sanitation too with plays like *Anouba Mangal*, *Amambada Meingal* and *Anouba Lambi* by Rupachandra Ghosh.

Numerous plays have been written and enacted to bring about knowledge and kind of campaigns for a cause. A play entitled *Anouba Yenning* is based on the environment by the Science and Technology Department while *Senphu Hangba* was to generate awareness on national savings insurance. *Makhong Taragi Cheingak* generating awareness of Animal Husbandry services. *Naiton Satpi* by Manaobi MM is based on leprosy disease. Drugs caused havoc in the 70s and 80s Manipuri society. *Opium War* and *Ugandagi Maraibak* are historical plays enacted to campaign against drug abuse and illicit trafficking. A number of plays based on AIDS were also produced like *Amamba Leichil* written by Chongtham Samarendra. Not only did Lila educate but communicated the evil existing in society to its masses. *Matamgi Helloi* was widely displayed in different public places by the AIDS Control Society of Manipur in the year 1999. *AIDS ta Nokphade* and *Lambi Manga* was also a popular play on AIDS awareness. Successful plays on AIDS awareness were *Khuntak Lanshindringeida*, *Ngashigi Nonglei* of Chana Lukhloi, *Swargagi Lambi* of Thangjam Birchand, *Monalisha* of Rupachandra Ghosh, *Matamgi Khoimu* of Chana Lukhloi, *Thengmankhre Thabalse* of Thokchom Prafullo, *Jhinjur* of Hiyang Manisana, *Djuko Lily* of Niladhawaja Khuman, *Minungshigi Mityeng Ama* of Niladhawaja Khuman, *Punshi Khongchat* of Gouradhaja Sharma, *Under Arrest* of Ranjit Ningthouja etc. Shumang Lilas were even produced in tribal dialects to spread AIDS awareness to a larger audience. Mention may be made of some of these: *Ajawui Tuishot* (Tangkhul dialect) performed by C.R. Film Industry, *Khangban Sham Doh Ei* (Paite dialect), *Heo Neingadamin*(Thadou dialect) performed by United Rural Youth Artistes Manipur, *Phaikan Kathan* (Kabui) performed by All Zeliangrong Art and Cultural Organization etc. were popular tribal dialect plays on AIDS awareness. Recently, when Covid-19 became a pandemic the world over, the Government of Manipur used a Shumang Lila entitled '*Keidouna Kidoino*' produced in 2021 by the Department of Information & Public Relations (DIPR), Government of Manipur as a means to create awareness of Covid-19 among the public. All the above show the importance and relevance of Shumang Lila in Manipuri society. The Shumang Lila, for many years now,

served as a reflection of society and as a useful indispensable means to spread knowledge to the people. It is the only indigenous means to counter the negative impacts of other networks of communication and entertainment.

People's anguish and frustration over the State Government's negligence and unheeded policies of the Indian Government against the citizens of Manipur led to the rise of a historical event called the Nupi-Lan (Women's War). A play by the same name *Nupi-Lan* was written by Kanhailal based on a real event in history. Kanhailal's *Dakghor* and *Draupati* are based on short stories by Rabindranath Tagore's *Dakghor* (post office) and by Mahasweta Devi's written in 1978. Heisnam Sabitri, the writer's wife appeared nude in the play in protest against those who raped her (Kanglaonline, 15.5.2015). This act clearly connects to the protest against the stringent AFSPA law. The effectiveness of this act was evident in 2004 when a group of twelve middle aged women protested right in front of the Western Kangla gate (in the heart of Imphal) in broad daylight. The 17th sector of the Assam Rifles was stationed there at the time of the protest. It was indeed a daring act of protesting against the brutal rape and murder of a Meitei woman, Thangjam Manorama Devi. She was one of the many suspected insurgents under the radar of the army. The protesting body becomes the very site of resistance here while the Lila is a medium to protest against injustice, cruelty, discrimination etc. experienced by the people in society. In this way, Kanhailal's plays are a testimony to the suffering people of his motherland (Kanglaonline, 13.5.2015).

Lokendra Arambam's *Macbeth-Stages of Blood* (1997) captured the hearts of Londoners at Waterman's Arts Centre. It was situated by the Thames River in West London. It was a new theatrical experiment emphasizing the theme of political clampdown and revenge. An altogether novel version is produced with the fusion of Shakespeare's text with the history of the troubled state of Manipur. The play's relevance is unique in the sense that years of conflict which have left a mark on the state draw parallels with the conflict within 'Macbeth' finding an innovative meaning of present-day significance. Ratan Thiyam, another contemporary playwright, in his plays depict his political ideologies as well as uses the medium for political protest. According to him, every play is a protest for a variety of reasons. His recent production, *Macbeth* is said to protest greed and thirst for power in human beings. Many of his plays are the manifestation of his love for peace and his utter disgust for war. Norwegian dramatist, Henrik Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* (2008) comes alive in the play-*Ashibagee Eshei* in Manipuri. Thematically, the play depicts an apprehension for life. He is disappointed at how the Manipuri people lead their lives confronting the atrocities they face. Some very important and significant recurrent themes these great artists indulge in are: the experience of the controversial merger agreement with Independent India, the rule by the British Raj, the upsurge of claiming freedom from the neo-colonial clutch of Indian rule, the issues concerning AFSPA, the insurgency movements in the state etc. (Biswas, 19.1.2019 & Nongmaithem, Longjam and Pukhrabam, n.d).

Conclusion

Shumang Lila is the most popular form of theatre (play) and also a mode of entertainment for the people of Manipur. It is a live entertainment programme (like live

music or concert) or a live performing theatre, play by different groups of Lila Party. It becomes more and more popular after Hindi (Bollywood) movies were banned by an insurgent outfit (People's Liberation of Army) in 1998. After the proscription of Bollywood movies in Manipur, there is practically no other form of entertainment for the public other than Shumang Lila. The absence of Bollywood movies in the cinema halls in Manipur has heightened the prospects of Shumang Lila like never before and the Lila Party, directors, and scriptwriters of Lila have been using the platform as much as they can to entertain the people of Manipur. The Shumang Lila is also played in other states, particularly in Barak Valley where many Meitei and Meitei Panggal (Manipuri Muslim) are settled. Shumang Lila not only entertains the audience, but it also educates and sends out important messages to the public that is necessary and important for the community as well as to the individuals (may be to the youth or unemployed youths or drug addicts, etc). It is a significant agent that carries the message from the people to the government and vice versa. In other words, it is being used as a medium of communication with the public to disseminate important messages that are crucial, relevant and good for all. This kind of play (a live performing theatre in the open ground or courtyard) is not performed and is not found in other parts of the world. This is unique in its own way in the sense that it is established and institutionalised in Manipur and not visible in other parts of the world. It is played by the same gender only (a Lila party may be for only males or only for females). In short, it can be concluded that Shumang Lila contributes a vital role in the growth and development of the cultures and traditions of the state particularly in the arena of theatre. Shumang Lila represents Manipur to the 'world of theatre' and occupies an important space in it. It showcases the rich culture and talents of the people of Manipur to the world.

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