CHAPTER IV

ARTISTES AND AUDIENCE: BRAIDING OF THOSE LOOKED ON AND THOSE LOOKING
Theatre, mostly what we called traditional theatre, has a very close affinity with rituals both in structure and function. In this way theatre is a community event in itself or is made a part of the community occasions. Shumang Lila, in particular, being a development from the previously existent forms of rituals still preserves the rudimentary structure of the latter also in the interaction between the performers and the audience, both during the performance and outside the theatrical space. Some of these concerns have been touched upon in the previous chapter. In this chapter emphasis will be given on Shumang Lila's place in the community service; the audience study during performance; how people, who constitute the audience, see the actors in the mundane world; how the actors see themselves vis-à-vis the judgment of the community; the kinship relationship among the actors; and the organisational structure of Shumang Lila.

To start with, let us regard theatre as a 'social phenomenon' representing 'a social situation, a social gathering; it constitutes a certain social framework in its own right. within which the actors are integral parts.' There is a kinship bond between society and theatre. It is also a contention that people go to theatre as a place to 'escape' from the day-to-day activities. However, the kinship bond would not allow them to escape. According to Goodlad, 'when people watch drama, it is unlikely that they are indulging in the same sort of escape as they do when they sleep, take drugs, or drink alcohol. The likelihood is that they are not escaping from their social obligations, but escaping into an understanding of society, which is necessary to them for their participation in society.' This is because 'theatre is a sublimation of certain social situations, whether it idealizes them, parodies them, or calls for them to be transcended'. It is a surprise for theatre and also for the spectators themselves also why they burst into sobbing in a tragic scene even if they know that what is presented to them is not real but a fiction or impersonation. The probable explanation for this, according to Gurvitch, is that 'the theatre is society or group looking at itself in various mirrors, the images reflected therein'. The spectators see themselves in the characters in the drama and imagine the latter's ordeal as their own. Theatre provides a space for social interaction of a different type. It gives 'un-embarrassing company for the lonely. Theatre assuages loneliness without imposing the pest of company. Actors provide

company...without asking anything in return. Indeed we do not even need to show gratitude; we have paid.' There is both transcendence beyond and staying within the society. In some dramas one is able to disconnect from the bothersome social environment and lose in a surreal world. On the other hand, there is representation of almost everything he faces in the social world. This is also a case when 'drama invests the trivial with cosmic significance. Details of everyday life seem to matter when displayed in drama.'559

Functionally in modern literate societies, popular theatre is replacing the functions traditionally associated with rituals and myths. According to Fischer the myth, folk tale, and ritual provide both cognitive and affective functions. 'The cognitive function of myth is to inform individuals not about the universe or nature but primarily about social structure, and to help them to understand the workings of their own society. The affective functions of folk tale (and thereby of myth and ritual) are to express emotion at elements of social structure that might otherwise give rise to conflict in the mind of the individual and/or in society.'560 Levi-Strauss also 'suggests that modern popular literature is a degenerate form of myth – or, rather, occupies the same position in the cognitive world of industrial society as does myth for the savage mind'.561

1. Shumang Lila as Community Performance

Performance in theatre carries the implication that it is a social action of a peculiar kind. A person, even outside the theatrical space, performing a social action is seen, responded and judged by others. According to Weber, 'action' is 'insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior – be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is “social” insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course.'562 What is important in his concept is the presence and communication between two or more persons for an action to be called social. He affirms that 'overt action is non-social if it is oriented solely to the inanimate objects'. Again not all the human contacts are social actions but 'confined to cases where the actor’s

559 Ibid. pp. 43.
560 Ibid. pp. 17.
behavior is meaningfully oriented to that of others. So, there should be meaningful transaction of messages between the parties involved in the social action. This means the subjective involvement of the parties is necessary.

Talcott Parsons' understanding of social action is based on his critique of Classical thinkers like Alfred Marshal, Vilfredo Pareto, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. His theory of 'voluntaristic action' is the convergence of 'individualistically rational (utilitarian)' and 'normatively determined (idealistic)' understanding of action. For him 'voluntaristic action implies that people make choices in a way that balances normative and self-interested pressures.' He conceives an action to be constituted by 'unit acts'. So, an act involves: ' (1) It implies an agent, an “actor.” (2) For purpose of definition the act must have an “end,” a future state of affairs toward which the process of action is oriented. (3) It must be initiated in a “situation” of which the trends of development differ in one or more important respects from the state of affairs to which the action is oriented, the end...(4)...in the choice of alternative means to the end, insofar as the situation allows alternatives, there is “normative orientation” of action....' In his conception there is a connection between means and end in that the action done by the agent should be directed to attaining its purpose. This is, in Weberean sense, the ‘rational action’.

These concepts of both Weber and Parsons can be adapted to the space of theatre, albeit with qualification. As mentioned in the previous chapter, mere thinking of going and then actual going to theatre are a form of social action or ‘anticipatory social action’ where there is anticipation in the minds of the agents for the forthcoming interactions with other people. Then the performers’ desire and willingness for performance is also the social action of this kind. Otherwise there can no longer be theatre at all. If we take the Parsonean concept, the agent is voluntaristic in deciding to go to the play (or to perform) instead of going for shopping at that particular time. Apart from this theatre has got the kind of social action both the thinkers talk of i.e. in the interactions between the organizers and the spectators; between the spectators and the artistes in ‘extra-dramatic frame’; between the spectators; between the theatre personnel (actors, directors, playwrights, musicians, stage experts, lighting experts, ticket seller etc.); between the characters of the play etc. However the interaction between the characters and the spectators during performance is not always

563 Craig Calhoun et al. op. cit. pp. 184-5.
564 Ibid. p. 343.
exactly the one suggested by both the thinkers. There are cases when the performers try to involve the spectators in the performance through direct communication between the two. For instance, Richard Schechner’s attempt to do so in his avant garde productions. In this case there is a meaningful communication between the actors and the spectators. But in most of the cases, there is no direct address by the characters to the spectators. The characters are cloistered to the dramatic frame constructing their own world. This does not mean that there is not an attempt to reach out to the spectators through their actions. The theme of the play may be a means to convey a subtle message to the spectators. The spectators’ responses to the play, in the various forms, are an indication that there are interactions between them and characters. This interaction may not be physical, in most of the cases, but psychological. The play is not oriented towards the audience and yet it is oriented.566

Forms of transaction between people involved in the performance – spectators and performers, while being considered as form of social actions, take a different yet similar trajectory when they are taken as social behaviour within a community. Social action can happen anywhere if we consider the above descriptions of Weber and Parsons but the ones which take place among members of a community gives a different meaning to them given the commonalities shared by the members. It is here that the role of community is important in traditional performance also. But then the concept of community does not command unanimity amongst the social scientists, in general and sociologists, in particular.

At the outset it has to be kept in mind that the concept of community is not a static concept, but a process. This concept has been construed in two broad ways: Territorial and relational. In the territorial perspective it has been contextualized within the frames of ‘location’, ‘physical territory’, ‘geographical continuity’. Such approach is mainly used in studying phenomena like ‘community power structure’, ‘the urban community’ etc.567 It takes into account the town, the village, the neighbourhood, the city etc. The second approach i.e. relational, is concerned with ‘the quality or character of human relationships, without reference to location’. This approach sees how ‘group members, cooperate and conflict’ and is oriented towards ‘the existence or absence of bonds of similarity and

566 The communication between the characters and the audience has been studied in detail in the semiotic analysis dealt in the previous chapter.
sympathy, to what unites or differentiates a collectivity of people.' However the two 
approaches are not mutually exclusive but rather intertwine to each other.

The concept of community has been seen as dichotomous to society. So, there are 
dichotomies like community and society; community and association etc. In West 
European and American history the 1800s was a period of great change due to Industrial 
revolutions and such political revolutions as French Revolution. So, changes were felt in 
all public and private domains. So, the scholars saw this period and after with mixed 
feelings – ‘nostalgia’ and ‘disgust’. The traditionalists, led by Comte, were nostalgic about 
the past and they saw ‘the new world of economic logic, political interest groups, mass 
electorates and exchange-based market relationship could only mean the destruction of a 
stable environment and an authority essential to human well-being. They mourned the 
impending decline of the small and static local areas of neighbourhood, kinship and 
parish.’ On the other hand, the processual aspect of community was lauded by such diverse 
scholars as Marx and Spencer. For these modernists, ‘the new rational character of modern 
life meant the end of those constraints on human equality and economic affluence from 
which mankind had suffered for much of the human past.’ 568 This was a period when the 
process of dichotomization between community and society began. In sociological 
understanding ‘such human organizations as kinship, friendship, neighborhood and “folk” 
are communal; corporations, economic contracts, labor unions and political parties are 
societal’.

According to Joseph R. Gusfeld,

The community-society typology might also be seen as distinguishing relationship based 
on*sentiments*-emotional and intrinsic attachments–from those of *interests*-mutually held 
goals which prescribe cooperation in their pursuit.... The building blocks of community 
are thus familial, kin, territorial, ethnic, religious; the sense of being part of a common 
group where loyalties and obligations rest on affective, emotional elements. Society is 
made up of groups such as hospitals, schools, courts and organizations where expediency, 
exchange, mutual interest and rational calculation of gain are criteria of participation and 
success. 569

Durkheim was instrumental in seeing the change in the structure as positive rather 
than decaying of the previous structure. He however does not see structures in the typology

568 Ibid. pp. 5-6.
569 Ibid. p. 10.
of community and society, rather he considers them as ‘societies’ changing from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity is solidarity based on ‘similarities’ among the members of a society, in terms of skills, occupation etc. while organic solidarity is based on the ‘differences’ of the members. However, both can be existent in the same structure. Mechanical solidarity ‘is at its maximum when the collective conscience completely envelops our whole conscience and coincides in all points with it. But at that moment, our individuality is nil.’ Mechanical solidarity ‘is at its maximum when the collective conscience completely envelops our whole conscience and coincides in all points with it. But at that moment, our individuality is nil.’

The division of labour in modern societies brings the organic solidarity. Here individual personality is given more prominence than the collective conscience. Durkheim writes,

It is necessary then, that the collective conscience leaves open a part of the individual conscience in order that special functions may be established there, functions which it cannot regulate. The more this region is extended, the stronger is the cohesion which results from this solidarity. In fact, on the one hand, each one depends as much more strictly on society as labor is more divided; and, on the other, the activity of each is as much more personal as it is more specialized.... Even in the exercise of our occupation, we conform to usages, to practices which are common to our whole professional brotherhood.

This is evidence that kinship ties, if not real, and the sense of community are still prevalent in modern societies. Durkheim, thus writes, ‘These two societies really make up only one. They are two aspects of one and the same reality.’ So, when society based on various associations came up, Durkheim saw it as a process rather than decaying of previous system. This new system has its own mechanism of solidarity.

One scholar, other than Durkheim, who has been closely followed by later scholars is Ferdinand Tonnies who differentiated between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. The former are ‘naturally developed forms of organizations which have intrinsic and non-logical values to them’ and are generally called community. On the other hand, the latter are ‘deliberately formed associations for rational achievement of mutual goals’. In German there are different terms indicating community which make the concept little ambiguous. ‘Local community’ is general referred to as ‘Gemeinde’ and community in

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571 Ibid. p. 131.
572 Ibid. p. 129.
573 Joseph R. Gusfeld. op. cit. p. 10.
general as ‘Gemeinschaft’. According to Rene Konig, ‘It must be stressed that originally both the words community (Gemeinschaft) and local community (Gemeinde) had a direct relationship to the common land of the community, and only later came in a “transferred” sense to include all other forms of “common life and existence”.’ His understanding of community is

A community is first of all a global society of a local unit type embracing an indefinite multiplicity of functional spheres, social groups and other phenomena, and conditioning innumerable forms of social interaction, joint bonds, and value concepts. Further, apart form numerous forms of inner relationships which may exist in the previously mentioned parts, it will also, and as a matter of course, have its own tangible institutional and organizational external structure....The community is ... therefore a term of a superior order to family, neighbourhood, profession, etc., because it includes all these phenomena and groups within itself (together with many others, for instance, social classes).574

Weber captured the changes taking place in modern times in his typologies of traditional authority and legal rational authority.575 He also followed Tonnies' classifications and wrote,

A social relationship will be called “communal” (Vergemeinschaftung) if and so far as the orientation of social action—whether in the individual case, on the average, or in the pure type, is based on a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together. A social relationship will be called “associative” (Vergesellschaftung) if and in so far as the orientation of social action within it rests on a rationally motivated adjustment of interests or a similarly motivated agreement, whether the basis of rational judgment be absolute values or reasons of expediency.576

‘Folk’ and ‘urban’ societies have been elaborately dealt by Robert Redfield. In his study of four settlements in Yucatan, city, town, peasant village and tribal village, he found an increasing order of cultural disorganization, secularization, and individuation as he went

from tribe to city. In his categorization he puts ‘little community’ at one extreme pole. According to him little community has four characteristics. They are

First, the quality of distinctiveness: where the community begins and where it ends is apparent. The distinctiveness is apparent to the outside observer and is expressed in the group consciousness of the people of the community. Second, the community we are here concerned with is small so small that either it itself is the unit of personal observation or else, being somewhat larger and yet homogenous, it provides in some part of it a unit of personal observation fully representative of the whole. Third, (such) community is homogenous. Activities and states of mind are much alike for all persons in corresponding sex and age positions; and the career of one generation repeats that of the preceding. So, understood, homogenous is equivalent to “slow-changing”. Fourth..., it may be said that the community we have here in mind is self-sufficient and provides for all or most of the activities and needs of the people in it. The little community is a cradle-to-the-grave arrangement.

What Redfield presents is a particular case of Latin American Indian community. But his position has been contested by some scholars. According to Rene Konig, ‘This is true even of primitive cultural spheres, and it is true to an even greater extent of economically highly-developed societies, where the idea of an isolated self-sufficient community (Gemeinde) is quite unjustified and is never more than the sentimental delusion of some high-flown folklorist.’

Community has not lost its existence even in this modern world. It exists in different forms. According to Nisbet there has been a revolt against ‘individualistic rationalism’ created by enlightenment project. Reflecting on the indispensability of community he referred to what Edmund Burke once said that society is a partnership of the dead, the living, and the unborn. He writes, ‘The root ideas and values of early nineteenth-century conservatism have found their way straight to our own generation and have become the materials of a fresh and infinitely diversified veneration for community.... And at the present time it is, plainly, the aspiration toward moral certainty and social community that gives relevance to so much of the theoretical and imaginative work of the

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579 Rene Konig. op. cit. p. 25.
The concept of community is revived further by Benedict Anderson when he talks of nation as an 'imagined community'. This conception becomes important as it also coincided, historically, with the rise of capitalism due to industrial revolution which again is also a part of West European enlightenment project.

The concept of community has become so important that it has been equated with cosmos. According to Radhakamal Mukerjee, 'The philosophy of community means a profound study of the unforeseeable role of man in and with community and cosmos, of the values and potentialities of *Homo universalis*.' Human beings have the potentialities to transcend their selves. He further writes, 'Thus does the community become identified with the universal community of communities that can achieve the full and complete actualization and transcendence of self. For selfhood is so constituted that it must include and encompass all other selves for its fulfillment.'

I will limit myself to the study of Meitei community and its relationship with other communities wherever needed. From the above brief account it is discerned that sociological types of community and society have their variations in particular cases. The multiplicity of definitions makes the present venture more complicated as to which one is to be adopted for defining Meitei community. And it is also made discernable whether Meiteis should be called community or society. To avoid such traps, it is deemed important to devise one's own understanding to address the particular case. When I talk about Meiteis I will prefer to stick to the 'Meiteiness'. So, Meiteiness may be referred to as community or society. It is again difficult to define the constituents of Meiteiness because of the multiplicity and complexity. Generally, it may include language, religion, cultural practices, folklore, physical attributes, food habits (which include shared domains of tastes and smell), and even body language, among other minute details. In my work the category Meitei community will be confined to a particular locality, which again is within the larger whole of Meitei society. Here I am not using society as an associative body where only rational-legal systems are the main characteristics. Society in my case is a whole in which forms of social groups both communal and associative are present.

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\(^{583}\) Ibid. p. 20.
How do we connect community with performance? Here I will try to connect the concept of ‘collective conscience’ of Durkheim with the concept of ‘liminality’ of Victor Turner. How collective conscience of a society is reasserted in a state of liminality?

According to Durkheim,

The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the collective or common conscience.... It is, in effect, independent of the particular conditions in which individuals are placed; they pass on and it remains.... Moreover, it does not change with each generation, but, on the contrary, it connects successive generations with one another. It is, thus, an entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can be realized only through them. It is the psychical type of society, a type which has its properties, its conditions of existence, its mode of development, just as individual types, although in a different way.... As the terms collective and social, are often considered synonymous, one is inclined to believe that the collective conscience is the total social conscience. 584

Now let me bring in Turner’s understanding of liminality. This has been briefly dealt with in Chapter 1. Turner brings in the concept of ‘subjunctive’ and ‘indicative’ mood of language. For him cultural performances fall within culture’s subjunctive mood which, according to Webster is ‘that mood of a verb used to express supposition, desire, hypothesis, possibility, etc., rather than to state an actual fact, as the mood of were, in “if I were you”. ’ 585 Turner is of the view that ‘ritual, carnival, festival, theatre, film, and similar performative genres clearly possess many of these attributes.’ 586 On the other hand ‘the indicative mood of culture, viewed as cultural process rather than as abstract systems ingeniously derived from social life’s flow, controls the quotidian arenas of economic activity, much of law and politics, and a good deal of domestic life.’ 587 He relates cultural subjunctivity to ‘liminality’.

Originally, Arnold van Gennep used this concept of liminality to describe the stages in rites of passage, which has three main stages. ‘These were: separation from antecedent mundane life; liminality, a betwixt-and-between condition often involving

586 Ibid.
587 Ibid.
rites may involve either individual or group of individuals of a society. For Turner ‘public
liminality is governed by public subjunctivity’. According to him,

Liminality itself is a complex phase or condition. It is often the scene and time for the
emergence of a society’s deepest values in the form of sacred dramas and objects­
sometimes the re-enactment periodically of cosmogonic narratives or deeds of saintly,
godly, or heroic establishers of morality, basic institutions, or ways of approaching
transcendent beings or powers. But it may also the venue and occasion for the most radical
scepticism—always relative, of course, to the given culture’s repertoire of skeptical
concepts and images—about cherished values and rules. Ambiguity reigns; people and
public policies may be judged sceptically in relation to deep values; the vices, follies,
stupidities, and abuses of contemporary holders of high political, economic, or religious
status may be satirized, ridiculed, or contemned in terms of axiomatic values, or these
personages may be rebuked for gross failures in commonsense.589

If we consider cultural performances as being in liminal state, they are also
occasions to reassert the collective conscience of a society among the performers and
spectators. This conscience may not be deliberately assured in day-to-day life of the
members of that society, though it is always operational. This is because they are within
the ‘indicative’ mood. However, when the members congregate for watching a play the
subjunctive mood is activated and the collective conscience is also reassured by the very
fact of congregation. Moreover, organization of a play itself reassures the ‘liminality’ as
the occasion is a break from the day-to-day routine work of a community. It is a betwixt
state. This situation may either be functional or dysfunctional given the social environment
of the congregation. It may be dysfunctional when some wayward members try to interrupt
the occasion for some personal reasons. This, however, can be put under control with the
intervention of some elderly members of the community. Such disturbances do not belittle
the collective consciousness of the community since they are part of the consciousness
itself.

In case of Shumang Lila, the state of liminality is operationalized in both the texts
of the plays and the congregation of the spectators and performers. As mentioned by
Turner, the plays may be a critique of family system, community, economic and political

588 Ibid.
589 Ibid. p. 102.
mismanagements etc. There is space of satire, ridicule and outright rejection of particular socio-political systems as we have already seen in previous chapters. In terms of congregational aspect of spectators Shumang Lila serves as an extraordinary example of reassertion of collective conscience among the members of the community as most of the plays are attended by members from the same community, say Meitei community.

In many Shumang Lila plays the contents are deliberately made instrumental for certain ends i.e. political, cultural, social, ideological etc.\textsuperscript{590} Above this, the performance per-se, irrespective of the themes (for most of the time), are efficacious. For decades, Shumang Lila has been part of the community culture. Apart from the organization of the plays by local groups for the entertainment’s sake, plays have been part of the community occasions like \textit{Luhongba} (marriage), \textit{Nahutpa} (ear piercing ceremony of children), \textit{Soisti Puja} (birth ceremony), \textit{Chakehanaba} (feast), \textit{Sorat} (death ceremony), \textit{Phiroi} (death anniversary), \textit{Durga Puja}, \textit{Saraswati Puja}, \textit{Laiharaoba} or any other occasion where people feel that a play should be organized.\textsuperscript{591}

Some decades ago (still today though rarely) it was a ‘fashion’ among the people, mainly of Kakching, Moirang, Kumbi and Andro, to organize a Shumang Lila play on the eve of \textit{Heijingpot}, a ceremony confirming the marriage one or two days before Luhongba, the actual marriage ceremony.\textsuperscript{592} It was the responsibility of the groom’s side to book the play which was the choice of the bride’s side, to install the poles and half lamps on the performance space and other details. Sometimes it turns out to be a site of minor conflict between the two parties when the chosen play was not shown. Since this is part of the ceremony which marks the bonding (affinal) of two families there is a power tussle. Before marriage the bride’s family has an upper hand vis-à-vis that of groom’s.\textsuperscript{593} In such situations the groom’s party had to humbly clarify the reasons for not being able to arrange the desired play. The reasons could be that the particular play was already booked for the day by some other individual or group. However, it also happened that bride's party tried to confirm if the information was true or not by secretly enquiring the troupe members. If the information provided by groom's side turned out to be wrong after the enquiry, then the

\textsuperscript{590} The content analysis has been done in Chapter I and II.
\textsuperscript{591} For explanation of these terms see Chapter I.
\textsuperscript{592} Gathered from M. Binod.
\textsuperscript{593} It is not exactly the case that the groom’s family has an upper hand after marriage. It is the dynamics between the ‘giver’ and ‘receiver’ statuses. Bride’s family being the givers can take liberty in asking what is customary and, sometimes, extra-customary services and objects, from the groom’s side, the receivers.
groom's party might even take the extreme step of calling off the marriage. Such was the involvement of Shumang Lila in the dynamics of community relationship.

One ritual which may be put in the diametrically opposite Luhongba is that of Sorat. The former is the life changing ritual of a person which is marked by merriment and the latter the death of the person. However they are both bound by Shumang Lila in its participation in both. Themes of the plays in sorat and phiroi, unlike those in luhongba, have to be ones which suit the mourning ambience. So plays with religious and historical elements, not comic, are chosen. Performances in sorat were/are usual in Salungpham (near Wangjing), Yairipok Malom, Heingang, Wangoi, Maibam Lokpa Ching etc. This is done in place of the usual sankirtan singing after the Chira Katpa ritual. Like in the beginning of sankirtan singing, the performers are presented with white chadars (translucent cloth). The reasons behind these performances vary. In most of the cases it is because the deceased was a devoted follower of Shumang Lila, so his/her kinsmen dedicate it to him. In a case in Maibam Lokpa Ching, plays were performed consecutively for five years on the eve of his phiroi, arranged by his son-in-law. Some give value-loaded reasons i.e. they do not prefer the vaisnavite sankirtan singing and in its place the indigenous Shumang Lila is brought in.

Shumang Lila performances are also used as a vehicle for political purposes. The play Lidece-gi Gulap was organised at Thoubal Ningombam as part of the election campaign of Dr. Nara Singh, a CPI candidate for the Manipur Inner Parliamentary Constituency for the Parliamentary election of April, 2004. It was also mainly because the troupe, Sanaleipak Nachom Artistes, is under his patronage, he being a connoisseur of art and culture. It was a good way of gathering a crowd in the name of the play. The political motive was made known when there were speeches before the beginning of the play. As the candidate himself could reach the place on time, Hemanta Singh, the comedian of the troupe, started in his inimitable style, laced with comic interludes and at the same time making the audience think of the importance of electing Dr. Nara. Notwithstanding the political impact of his speech, the audience was amused. The next speaker R.B. Minthing, a Tangkhul by ethnicity and a Congressman, also campaigned but gave emphasis on the importance of harmonious relationship between the Meiteis, the

594 Gathered from M. Binod.
595 The play was performed on the 27th of March, 2004. Dr. Nara Singh was the Cabinet Minister of Art and Culture in the O. Ibobi Singh Government.

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Nagas and the Kukis of Manipur which is also a dear theme of Shumang Lila plays. The interesting part turned out to be when Dr. Nara himself became a character in the performance itself. As he came late, he was not able to speak to the crowd and instead he came up the stage as one of the persons laying wreath on the graves in the last scene of the play.\(^{596}\) He then bowed to the crowd and went off the stage.

2. Audience Structure

Theatre bears a very close similarity with social ceremony, though the performances and motives are different. Spectators’ congregation is an evidence of a social gathering. They form ‘the public, or rather “publics”, whose tastes, requirements and social origins are often quite different. These publics may or may not constitute groups in their own right; their membership may be formed essentially from the mass of people, from the neighbourhood or a community….When the public is structured in coherent groups, it can be the case the theatre ceases to require publicity, critical appreciation coming directly from the spectators (for example, in Greek drama, the Russian theatre, etc.).\(^{597}\) Theatrical audience, in general, provides a category which is difficult to be termed unqualifiedly either as a social group, where there are definite relations among the individuals who are conscious of the group itself and its symbols, or as a crowd. Crowd also has its own kinds depending on its allegiance to certain collective behaviour. Sociologically speaking ‘a crowd is a mass gathering engaged in collective behavior, especially when that behavior is disruptive or non-normative’.\(^{598}\) But there are also kinds of crowd different from the everyday crowd where there are ‘conventional behaviors’, ‘calendaring’, and ‘official sponsorship’. For instance, spectators at a sporting event. Even in a class and status specific theatre, say the classical as against the popular, the members of the same class or status do not share a close relationship though they may have the consciousness that they are of the same class or status. Though they may adhere to the same behaviour within the theatrical space they may not interact with each other despite the fact that they have the same motive of enjoying the drama. The situation may be different in case of traditional theatre which are similar to ritualistic performances. In such cases the social gathering has closeness because of the sharing of the communitarian feelings. It may be an extension of

\(^{596}\) For details of this play see Chapter II.
\(^{597}\) Georges Gurvitch. op. cit. p. 74.
the community itself, microcosm of the community structure. It has the categories of stratification of the community i.e. age, sex, status etc. But then the structure becomes complicated when the audience is constituted by members of different communities, villages, localities. Then it also takes certain characteristics of crowd.

Gurvitch is of the opinion that the audience study should take into account...the diversity of audiences, their different degrees of relative homogeneity and cohesion, and of the importance of their potential transformation into social groups proper, i.e. into collective units with structural properties, and perhaps into purposefully structured units, which can extend as far as the audience organization." This is an indication that there is a fluid identity of the audience, even for a traditional theatre form. This is also reflected in Shumang Lila.

Shumang Lila is not one community specific theatre genre, though the artistes are all Meiteis and the audience normally is constituted by Meiteis. It is open when it comes to audience structure, incorporating members of all forms of intra- and inter-community stratifications based on sex, age, status, locality, village and ethnicity. The audience structures are different depending on the place and occasion of the performance. There are roughly four types of performance situations. First is performance in an official occasion where the play is shown as part of the official function and where there are formal invitations, formal hierarchy of seating arrangement for president, chief guest, guest of honour of the function etc. Second is the performance in the annual Shumang Lila Festival. Third is the one in religious occasions like sorat (death ceremony), phiroy (death anniversary), Laiharaoba etc. Fourth and the most common is the non-official performance in localities and villages. In the first category there is demarcation in the audience. The important persons of the day, office bearers, people of higher status, elders of the locality, and organizers are given more priority and are seated in the front rows. In such cases the performance space is either one directional where the podium serves as the performance space and the audience is seated in front of it, or is surrounded by the audience. In both cases mostly chairs are used and the segregation of the audience into male and female side is relaxed.

In the second case also there is maintenance of status among the audience. The invitees and judges of the competition are seated in the front row in especial seats like sofa

599 Georges Gurvitch, op. cit. p. 76.
etc. However the status hierarchy is dismantled among the rest of the audience. For them it is the price of tickets which decides their seating places, which are steel chairs. The sex segregation is also not maintained. One probable explanation of the non-maintenance of sex segregation in these two kinds of performances would be because of their increasing adoption of the kind of theatrical environment present in the Stage Lila (proscenium theatre). Then why is there no sex segregation in Stage Lila when any traditional Meitei cultural performance has this? One probable answer could be its adoption in toto of the elements of the ‘modern’ theatre as it is an import from outside during the British influence.

The third kind of audience structure bears the same environment of the religious occasion where the play performed. For instance, in performance as part of sorat, the audience structure is hierarchized in such a manner that the male elders according to seniority in age are seated in the front rows and the remaining space is occupied by other invitees/spectators who are seated in male and female sides. But in case of performance in Laiharaoba, this age hierarchy is dismantled but the phamnaibas (male traditional office bearers of the Laiharaoba) and their spouses still are in the front row, if at all they decide to remain to watch the secular performances of the day. The male-female division is still maintained. The fourth kind of the audience structure is just the opposite of the first two kinds, in that there is no maintenance of status in the audience, but there is strict maintenance of sex segregation. This bears the authentic charm of Shumang Lila and is less influenced by alien elements. Neither the price of ticket\textsuperscript{600} nor status of an individual, or the ethnic identity is the condition for the spectators’ place in the seating arrangement of the audience. It is arranged on the ‘first come first served’ basis where there are no chairs for seats but the audience sits on the ground, sometimes carpeted with straws or stools and moras (small stool like seat mostly made of canes or bamboos with plastic strings) which are brought mainly by female spectators.\textsuperscript{601}

This fourth audience structure is a later development brought in by structural changes in the genre itself and in the wider Meitei society. During the period (loosely pre-1960s and even 1970s) when the Dialogue Lila was the dominant Shumang Lila genre, the seating arrangement was also on the line of that of any religious ceremony. As a tradition.

\textsuperscript{600} The prices of all tickets are the same and sometimes without tickets.
\textsuperscript{601} From here on audience study will be of the fourth kind of performance situation.
the elders, both male and female, of the village or locality, were seated in the first row. The leader of the village, locally known as Pradhan or Chowkidar was seated in an especially marked out place along with his followers. On the female side his spouse, Leima Siju occupied the similar place. Then the younger members managed themselves in the back rows. The age hierarchy was strict in that the elders were bestowed with power and respect. It was also a period when the microphones were not introduced in Shumang Lila. So, as a means to discipline the audience, one of the elders would remind the spectators to maintain good behaviour during the performance and also asked if anybody was not interested in the play he should leave the place without any disturbance. This announcement often served as a warning and spectators would follow it. That was an era when there was a close connectivity of the theatre with rituals. The insignificant amount of commercialization of the plays with dominant local themes and indigenous folk songs during this era allowed a wider audience at par with such secular performances like Khongjomparba singing. But today with more secularization of Shumang Lila coupled with the increasing acceptance of egalitarian values in the wider society; the audience structure also has changed. This does not mean that elders no longer go to the plays but instead they have accepted the new arrangement without any objection. They will be found sandwiched among the younger spectators, equally enjoying the play i.e. laughing, sobbing, teasing the Nupi Shabis and even booing. This is because the common purpose of enjoying the play has taken priority over the age hierarchy. It is a form of 'ethnomethodological' situation when the theatrical ambience consumes the audience.

The non-exclusivist character of the audience can be seen in such places where there are people of various ethnic identities, e.g. Imphal city. Moreover Shumang Lila has endeared itself to other communities of Manipur like Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) and hill communities. The play World Trade Centre was performed in many Pangal villages and localities, because of its theme. Again the play Ningol Chakouba, with a theme of Hills/Plain co-existence was very popular among the hill people and was performed at Ukhrul, a town dominated by Tangkhul tribe. So, its open character allows anybody, literally anybody, to enjoy the play. Due to its usual performance time i.e. night time, the

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602 Gathered from K. Achoubi Singh.
603 A style of singing with dholok, mainly of historical and mythological themes, mostly in the nighttime. attended by both young and old members of the community.
604 See Chapter II for this play.
dress code is also quite casual in that the spectators may not care much about the kind of
clothes they wear. There is no norm that one should be in certain dress. People do not heed
much. This is in contrast to the audience of Stage Lila, which comprises of people
belonging to certain class, mainly middle class. It has got some unwritten norms for dress,
dictions, behaviour etc. Once one is inside the theatre hall, he/she is expected to talk in a
low voice in order not to disturb others, has to be polite in behaviour using decent
language, and the applause should be within limits. On the other hand, Shumang Lila is not
just the play but the audience itself becomes a frame in itself for young boys and girls. So,
despite the absence of norms on dress, it is important for young boys and girls to be seen
only in their best clothes and make-up, whether it be night or day.

The interaction of the spectators and the characters of the play is always present
both in subtle and vocal forms. Apart from this, the audience also indulges in its own
world. There is free intermingling and gossiping among them. The sudden cry of a baby in
the midst of a scene and mothers enjoying the play and at the same time breastfeeding their
babies are not uncommon phenomena. The atmosphere is carnivalesque, everyone whether
defaf, blind, mute, critical minded or innocent enjoy the play in their own way. This is
where Shumang Lila becomes a social gathering, which creates a collective consciousness.
The gathering is, in one way, functional as it gives the members, time to sit together,
gossip, exchange their views on day-to-day affairs etc. This gives them a sense of
belongingness to the same community. It serves a latent function to bind them together.
Moreover, it serves as a respite to the people after a day’s busy and tiresome work in fields
or offices. It also works as a safety valve to the upwardly mobile Manipuri society. Its
slightly dysfunctional side can be witnessed when there is exchange of fist of fury
triggered by that youthful local syrup called ‘Yu’ (local white liquor). However it is not
viewed as pathological by Meitei audience since it only echoes the co-relation between life
and dramatic texts.

Theatre as a pastime and also as subsystem within the larger system of a society has
been clearly documented by Clifford Geertz. Though his study on Balinese culture did not
discern the forms of performance per se, his study of a sporting event i.e. cockfight reflects
how the event is very much connected to the life and culture of Balinese people. He says.
‘In the cockfight, man and beast, good and evil, ego and id, the creative power of aroused
masculinity and the destructive power of loosened animality fuse in a bloody drama of
hatred, cruelty, violence, and death.'\textsuperscript{605} What is of interest in this section is the response of the audience to the spectacle which is quite melodramatic though not entirely a theatrical performance. He writes,

Surrounding all this melodrama—which the crowd packed tight around the ring follows in near silence, moving their bodies in kinesthetic sympathy with the movement of the animals, cheering their champions on with wordless hand motions, shifting of the shoulders, turnings of the head, falling back en masse as the cock with the murderous spurs careens toward one side of the ring (it is said that spectators sometimes lose eyes and fingers from being too attentive), surging forward again as they glance off toward another—is a vast body of extraordinarily elaborate and precisely detailed rules.\textsuperscript{606}

Another example of audience structure which is also very similar to that of Shumang Lila is the one of Kathakali performance: In the traditional outdoor performance, 'the audience gathers on three sides in front of the stage, although the largest concentration of audience is in front of the rectangular stage space. Women usually sit to the left and men to the right. The patrons, guest of honour and connoisseurs sit closest to the stage area'. In performances in family compounds, sponsored by Kerala’s wealthier families, ‘patron family members most interested in Kathakali sit in front of the cleared stage area. Family members not so interested often remain on the verandah where they talk freely during performance.'\textsuperscript{607}

The audience in Ramlila of Ramnagar presents a complex image. Ramlila of Ramnagar, as described by Anuradha Kapur, not only is a theatrical performance or a spectacle but also a pilgrimage for the spectators. Since the performances take place in different venues according to the demand of the event in the text, the audience is also mobile. Because of the sacred nature of the performance there is enormity in attendance by spectators who are also devotees. The audience is assembled in front of the stage. As several thousand attend the performance it is not a privilege for every spectator to be nearby the stage and enjoy the performance. According to Kapur,

The Maharaja atop his elephant has three sorts of texts before him: he reads the \textit{Rāmcharitamānasā}, which he carries with him; he hears the Ramayanis who sit at the


\textsuperscript{606} Ibid. p 423. Also see, for literature review on theatre and spectacle, William O. Beeman – \textit{The Anthropology of Theater and Spectacle}. In \textit{Annual Review Anthropology}, 1993, 22: 369-93. (www.jstor.org)

foot of his elephant; and he sees the panorama of the performance from his lofty seat. The spectators, however, have to choose. For those who believe that hearing the Rāmcharitamānasā is in itself a form of worship, the places near the Ramayanis are the choicest. Since there may be several thousand people between them and the performers, they will hear Tulsidas and merely glimpse the svarūpas. The text here is hearing. For others the text is seeing, darshana. So they will take the seats near the acting areas in order to adore the gods the better.608

The ideas of seeing, believing, expecting and responding by the audience to the performance enable the audience to be ‘fictive in the original sense of being made’. According to Kapur, audience has an imaginative power to see what is visible and also to see what is not visible; to hear what is audible and also to hear what is inaudible; to taste murky water and to find it blessing. There is two way traffic between the performance and audience. She says, ‘If the scale of the spectacle is created by the audience, then it might equally be that the audience as we know it in Ramnagar is created by the spectacle—it gives them layers of actions to connect to their meanings, it materializes ideas for them, it gives them models for belief, and what is most important, it provides them with roles inspired by the performance enabling them to understand the performance the better.’609

In case of Chho dance performance of Purulia district of West Bengal, the dance area, Asor is surrounded by the audience who struggle to come closer to the performing area to have a better look of the dance. When the dance becomes more exciting the audience jump up and dance vigorously so that the machchas, which are string cots hoisted on long poles, forming a semi circular gallery behind the seating area on the ground, behind them are shaken and fall down. This indicates a clear case of theatre arousing emotions among the audience. But, sometimes, it happens that the supporters of the dance troupe release a harmless snake among the audience and the latter begins to jump in fear which leads to the fall of the machchas.610

Let me now bring in the audience structure of the Tibetan festival drama which is a community based theatrical performance.611 It has scripts with religious themes. These

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609 Ibid. p. 23.

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festival dramas are performed in August-September and the site of the performance is a vast plain in the Tibetan mountains. This festival is a five day long affair, which serves as a social event in which people from different villages come and enjoy the drama and social ambience. The performing arena is a circular one around whose circumference the spectators gather before the performance begins. The audience structure is hierarchized according to the economic status of the spectators. The rich people establish camps with their tents around the circumference and stock the article of comforts, as these will be their homes for the five days. They watch the drama from their tents unlike the poorer people who commute daily from their homes to the performing site and back.

3. The Looking and the Looked

The interactions between the spectators and the performers outside the performance need to be discerned here. For this, let me take up some performances in both the rural and urban areas of Manipur. In the performance of the play Lidece-gi Gulap at Thoubal Ningombam, a rural environment in the east of Imphal, despite the heat of the sun, spectators started gathering slowly around the performance space. The female side of the audience was a sight not to miss, with all hues of umbrella above their heads and stool as seats. But the male side was devoid of such arrangements. Some in the audience were curious to know something about the artistes and even befriended with the artistes and chatted with them in the ‘Dressing room’. Children were also curious to see how the make-up was done, especially by the Nupi Shabis and mobbed the gate of the dressing room which was not excluded from the public viewing unlike the conventional Green Room. As the play started, the interaction also took another shape and their responses were to the characters. Some of the children on the side of the entrance even teased Hemanta, the comedian of the play, with his pseudonym, Tolhan, famous after the play Eegi Mahao.612 The laughter, awe, sobbing etc. were parts of the interaction between the two parties as the play went on. The last scene of the play moved the audience so much that some forgot that it was a play and responded by waving their hands to the hand gestures of the female character.

The other performance of the same play at Uripok, a locality in Imphal saw a larger audience in a smaller space. The swelling audience served as an energy booster for the

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612 See Chapter VI for the play description.
performers. As the play was organized by the girls of the locality, they served the actors with possible comforts, like supplying refreshments, comfortable dressing room etc. and at the same time urged the actors not to shorten the play as the audience was anticipating the show with excitement. Enthused by the audience, Biramangol Mekola, the main musician of the orchestra, announced the eight awards won by the play in the annual Shumang Lila festival held in March 2004. There was not much difference in the audience behaviour between the performance there and at Thoubal Ningombam.

One performance of the same play which was of importance was that of Malom Mamang Leikai which is at the fringe of Imphal City. The audience was volatile with the presence of some who were drunk. There was intermittent shouting before and during the performance. Some came in front of the dressing room and passed comments on the Nupi Shabis like, ‘Nang fangabadi yarehe!’ (It is OK even if I get you!). Some youth feel free to mimic the actors’ cry in the sad scene, creating a kind of anti-climax. This reminded the audience that it was watching impersonations not the real ones. This is a sudden regression from theatre to the real life situations. Some would pass funny comments on the actors making them conscious and vulnerable. Apart from this, one person, satisfied with the performance, entered the performance space and offered money to the actors and the musicians. Such offering is common in both religious and secular events. The audience was clever in that it knew the course of the story of the play and started getting up when the end was nearing up. This was an indication of the predictability of most of the plays of Shumang Lila.

When the play was over, some youths lined up nearby the gate of the dressing room and glued themselves to the Nupi Shabis and passed some light but lewd comments, which also hurt the Nupi Shabis. They were curious to have a look at the physicality of the Nupi Shabis i.e. whether they really had long hair, smooth skin, bigger breasts etc. So their eyes were fixed on them when they were changing clothes under the phanek (a sarong type lady wear) like any Meitei woman would do. Nupi Shabis became bothered and even responded the onlookers with some feminine gestures which amused the latter. The confrontation between the performers and the audience also is part of the interaction. One, slightly drunk, from the audience approached the troupe members and enquired about the person who took

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613 Also see Chapter III.
photographs of the female audience.\textsuperscript{614} He was then convinced by some of the actors that it was harmless. That was the peril of being a stranger (person taking photographs being a stranger to the locals) in the time of a crisis situation when the Manipuri society lives in paranoia created by the militarization of the civil space and the mind.

4. The World of Theatre Persons

Apart from the audience theatre depends on the persons who are making the theatre possible i.e. the performers and the persons in the background like playwright and director. The dramatic texts when they remain, as literature does not require these experts. They may remain as private affair. But when these texts are brought to theatre then these persons are the vehicles and they no longer remain a private affair. But then if the performance is not witnessed by an audience there cannot be theatre but only rehearsals. So, audience and theatre persons have a concomitant relationship.

Of all, actors are the most important constituents of theatre in the conventional theatre, even though there may be new forms of theatre created without them but with only sounds and lights etc. This way actor is not only first in importance but also indispensable for theatre. Every play has the need for interpretative elements to bring its script to life and to present it to the audience for which it is intended. This responsibility is maintained by the actor. Whether the play is a dialogue in which the performers simply sit and talk, or a pantomime that depends entirely upon physical movement, it is the actor who is mainly responsible for conveying to the audience the dramatist’s meaning. The business of the actor is to perform what is written by the dramatist; but it is also the business of the dramatist to write what can be acted.\textsuperscript{615}

Success of a play is largely dependant upon the actors though there are many other elements, which help. A good play can be spoilt due to miscasting or lack of skill on the part of the actors. Also a bad play may be lifted aloft with the skillful handling of the craft of theatre by the actors. So, a dramatist is required to have the actors in mind when he writes a play. It includes how his play will look like when presented on the stage, how his expressions will be presented satisfactorily by the actors. This means a good dramatist is also required to be a good actor (or a director). It is not surprising that Shakespeare and Sophocles were actors themselves. One thing is certain: the actor can never be better than

\textsuperscript{614} Incidentally I was taking photographs of the audience both on the female side and the male side.
\textsuperscript{615} Elmer Rice, 1960 – \textit{The Living Theater}. London: William Heinemann Ltd. p. 245.
the part he plays, for his function is to interpret the character that the dramatist has created.
If he embroiders the part, or gives it deeper meanings than the dramatist had conceived it,
then he is creating something new and, in effect, becomes a dramatist himself.

A fair amount of liberty is also made available to the actors too. A play is not bound to a fixed mode of presentation irrespective of who are playing it. An actor can use his personal skill and charm to bring out the character to his best. Otherwise the play or the character will be stereotyped and theatre lovers will begin to lose interest in seeing it time and again. A great play or character has a greater variety of interpretations. For instance, Hamlet is presented in different ways according to the conception of the director and the actors. Hamlet, the character in this play by the same name, is so complicated that no one actor could possibly realize everything that is implicit in the script. Therefore, each actor is able to discover his own set of meanings and to give a more or less individualized characterization. Hamlet can be presented as a poet, a philosopher, a suicidal melancholic, a madman, a psychopath, a lover, a scheming politician, an incestuous-minded son, a modern swashbuckler, and even as a woman.616 In plays (great plays), while the essential qualities of the plays are preserved, the relative values and emphases are substantially and interestingly altered.

Theatre is a make-believe world in which ‘there’ is materialized ‘here’ and ‘then’ is represented ‘now’ with the help of acting (both vocal and pantomimic). So, the actor needs something more than his/her physical characteristics. One actor cannot play all the similar roles in diverse plays because he has a certain physical feature. For instance, an actor may not be fit to play the role of a dacoit in a new play though he may claim that he played one in so-and-so and in such-and-such. This is because the role of a dacoit portrayed by a certain dramatist is not necessarily similar to the one done by another dramatist. If it happens so, there is this phenomenon called ‘type casting’.

Ideally, every part, no matter how small, should be played for everything that is in it. This implicitly means that any actor, whoever his status as an actor is, must not have any hesitation to take the role, however small it is, if he suits it. Practically, it is not happening. Prominent actors usually feel that they suffer a loss of prestige by appearing in a minor part. Here the definition of who a great actor is becomes various. Someone may claim that a great actor does not see whether the role is small or big but gives her/his best

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616 Ibid. p. 247
to whatever role he is given. Others may stick to the idea that a great actor must be always in the lead role in a play befitting her/his status in the theatrical circuit.

Shakespeare might have said as matter of fact, that every man and woman is a player. But when he/she is taken to the stage and is asked to act what he/she has been doing in day-to-day life, he/she will be stuck and will become self conscious and nervous. Acting, thus, is a serious discipline, that includes many skills – diction, voice production, bodily grace, timing, teamwork, make-up, and characterization. The mastery of these skills is a long and costly process. This demands complete devotion from the actors. Learning of these skills may be through the regular performance or from formal training in schools in case of Kathakali, Noh etc. Training in schools is incomplete until and unless the actor is taken to the stage and made to face the audience. Like any art, the art of acting is encumbered with many traditions, many styles and many theories. But unlike the purely creative arts, its various manifestations directly affect the art of the drama. For instance, a play presented in a sing-song dialogue delivery technique will be quite different from the one, which is presented in a realistic dialogue delivery technique. Depending upon the different techniques of acting, there arises certain question. Should an actor completely submerge herself/himself in the part and seek only to project the dramatist's conception? Or should he/she attempt to enhance the vividness of the portrayal by injecting into it something of her/his own personality?617 Both the dramatist and the drama student would be inclined to take the first view. But it has been witnessed that many successful actors add their individual charm or magnetism. They adapt every part they play to their unique personalities. Again, a merely ‘technical’ performance may be rigid and lacking in emotional colour while a certain amount of spontaneity can produce a sense of freshness that communicates itself to an audience.

This reminds us of Stanislavski’s approach to acting which is generally known as ‘system’. His method tries to create realism as opposed to melodrama which was quite popular during his time (19th century) in Russia. This realism ‘required actors to experience the feeling of living the life of another person. The basis of this approach was that actors must believe everything that is happening on stage. He made this possible by teaching actors to recall their own personal feelings and emotions and use them on stage. Observation was also another key point of Stanislavski’s teachings. He believed that

617 Ibid. p. 251
studying people and their behaviour was very beneficial for an actor. The more time an actor spent observing, the better actor he or she would become. Following this approach Stanislavski held that "an actor’s main responsibility was to be believed (rather than recognized or understood).... (His idea of actor taking his or her own personality onto the stage when they began to play a character) was a clear break from previous modes of acting that held that the actor’s job was to become the character and leave their own emotions behind."

Opposed to this approach is Brecht’s ‘epic theatre’ which emphasizes ideas or didactic lessons. His argument is that ‘the theatre should not seek to make its audience believe in the presence of the characters on the stage – should not make it identify with them, but should rather follow the method of the epic poet’s art, which is to make the audience realize that what it sees on the stage is merely an account of past events that it should watch with critical detachment. Hence, the “epic” (narrative, non-dramatic) theatre is based on detachment, on the Verfremdungseffekt (alienation effect or A Effects). achieved through a number of devices that remind the spectator that he is being presented with a demonstration of human behaviour in scientific spirit rather than with an illusion of reality, in short, that the theatre is only a theatre and not the world itself.' About the actors he writes,

In order to produce A Effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learned of persuading the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays. Aiming not to put his audience into a trance, he must not go into a trance himself. His muscles must remain loose, for a turn of the head, e.g., with tautened neck muscles, will ‘magically’ lead the spectators’ eyes and even their heads to turn with it, and this can only detract from any speculation or reaction which the gestures may bring about. His way of speaking has to be free from ecclesiastical singsong and from all those cadences which lull the spectator so that the sense gets lost.

Production of a play also is very difficult without a director, especially in modern forms of plays. The director of a play, however, is an invisible man who makes the play presentable to the audience. Many people in the audience are unaware of him though they

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618 See http://www.dulwich.org.uk/Drama/resources/StanislavskiUnits3-5.htm
619 See http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/stanislavsky_c.html
620 See http://www.cs.brandeis.edu/~jamesf/goodwoman/brecht_bio.html
621 Bertolt Brecht, 1948 – A Short Organum for the Theatre. Quoted in Ibid.
are well aware of the actors. They, even, are not conscious of the fact that the play is directed at all. This may, at first sight, seems to be a very disappointing gesture but it is in fact a positive sign for the director. This is because, the director is able to create a play which is very realistic and natural that the audience feels that it is not directed at all. In a well directed play, the movement is so easy and graceful, the flow of words so smooth and natural, that it all seems to be something that is happening spontaneously, instead of the precise execution of a carefully conceived and minutely detailed pattern.622

The director is nearly indispensable as the actor for the production of a play. It is almost impossible to imagine a company of actors preparing a play for performance without the guidance of a director. They would not know what to do, where to go, how to speak their lines and productions would be a hopeless muddle, completely lacking in form and in cohesion. So a director studies the play, instructs and guides the actors to make the play visible and successful. He is the captain of the whole production under whom every actor performs his/her role. He is also like a coach of a football team who guides his player to capitalize on the right moves. He is the one who saves a production from chaos. The old Sanskrit theatre addresses him as acharya who is responsible for selecting the able actors and directing them for the plays.

There are two important preliminary works for the director before the actual direction starts. First one is the casting of the play. It is a meticulous work in which the director tries to relate the candidates’ personality and ability to the part he/she is required to play. Familiarity with the actors’ past performance is helpful but it is not an assurance for good performance in future. In casting of a play, the director must do more than select a suitable actor for each part, he must also consider the parts in relation to each other and assemble a company that plays in the same key and seems to belong in the same milieu. It is because all the best actors may not give good productions if they are engaged in outshining one another in their individual ways. Theatre is a group work.

The second preliminary work for the director is to familiarize himself/herself with the physical layout of the scenes in which the action is to take place. He/she needs to know whether setting is done properly, that sight lines are unobstructed, that means of access are advantageously placed, that furniture and properties can be arranged so that they can be most effectively used, and that a dozen other physical and technical details have been

622 Ibid. p. 255
properly organized. When the director has got all this knowledge he/she can use it as a basis for his/her pattern of the stage movement.

Following the various methods in staging a play, the director can be grouped into three categories—author’s directors, actor’s director, and director’s directors. The author’s director tends to use the actors as instruments to bring out the values of the play script. He is more concerned to stay within the bounds of the character the dramatist has created. This does not mean that actors are subordinated to the script but that they are used to make the characters played out to the utmost satisfaction. If the play is good, the actor has artistic integrity as well as skill and director knows his business, this type of production can be deeply convincing and aesthetically satisfying.

Actor’s director tends to treat the script as material to be used by the actors for the display of their talents. He studies each character from the point of histrionic opportunities it offers. The main emphasis is given on what the actors should be doing rather than upon the progression of the plot. This method works very well when the play is weak and actors are good, as the deficiencies of the script are concealed by the skillful performance of the actors. A prominent actor can be tested in such plays. The actor’s director also tends to span a great deal of time giving technical instruction to the actors. Such indulgence is avoided by the author’s director as he feels that it is not his duty to teach acting.

Director’s director employs both scripts and actors for the exhibition of his mastery of the tricks of stagecraft. He is largely regarded as ‘showman’ for his love for producing sensational effects by the use of any device that comes to hand or that he can invent. Here the attention is diverted from the play and the actors and the emphasis is on the maximum use of scenery, lights, costumes, eccentric staging, photographic literalism etc. This is an attempt to create an illusion to the audience. Here, the production is more popular than the play itself. So, one sees not somebody’s play but so-and-so’s production of somebody’s play.

It is a matter of fact that every director cannot be labeled as solely belonging exclusively to only one of the above categories. There is intermixing of them in a good director. Basically, the duty of a director is to translate the play script into terms of acting and stage mechanics. This means a light scene should be created so as to arouse laughter and serious scene to arouse tensions. Apart from mastering stage craftsmanship, a director

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623 Ibid. p. 257.
must also understand off stage relationships among the actors and between him and actors etc. He must be something of a psychologist. His relationship to the actors is a quasiparental one. He is responsible for maintaining the backstage morale also to bring out a well coherent production. The audience may not give such importance to this captain of the ship but he is the reigning king during the crucial production period.

Performance is the culmination of the works put in by the actors, though a play once performed is not complete in its form. It may get improved as the plays are performed again and again. To come up with this product the actors have to take into consideration other facets other than just acting. These include their extra-theatrical bonds which also are seen in the play. In Shumang Lila there is a close kinship bond not necessarily related by blood but by the fact of being in a close group. There are levels of subgroups among the artistes. One level is the 'we' feeling shared by all the Shumang Lila artistes as different from other groups outside it and society in general. The second level is the one shared among the members of a troupe which is more consolidated than the first one. The troupe members, being busy with the performances around the year, except some slack season, spend time in their office cum temporary residence in Imphal. They have a family like relationship in which the elders are superior in their authority and are respected by the younger artistes. Though they have a rigorous discipline which must be followed, they are open to each other in terms of their dialogue in the decision making process. Due to their busy schedule they hardly socialize outside the troupe members. Most of the members are full time professionals devoted only to Shumang Lila, though some have other parallel profession like government jobs and private small business. So, the office becomes a place of entertainment; gossiping; discussing day-to-day events, including political issues; practices; and rehearsals. The hierarchy among them is also on the basis of age. Those who are of the same age share their views openly. For instance the younger ones go out together for shopping or for merry-making outside their office.

4.1 Changing Mode of Status
Status of a person or a group in a society is the social position the individual or the group holds in that particular society. It is one of the categories deeply involved in social stratification. This area has been dealt with elaborately in the Prologue. What is of importance here in this section is to see the occupational status of a group as a stratum in a
hierarchy of differentiated occupations in a complex society where division of labour is very prominent. The position of an occupation in this hierarchy is directly proportionate to the prestige it holds. This means the higher the position of the occupation in the hierarchy, the higher its prestige is within that society. The question is how occupations are hierarchized in a particular society? Some prominent researches in this field have been carried out in different countries with different economic status. One such effort was that of the North-Hall Scale which was developed in the mid 1940s. This studied the general standing of each of the occupations. The occupations were judged on the basis of an evaluation scale which ranged from ‘Excellent,’ ‘Good,’ and ‘Average,’ to ‘Somewhat below average,’ and ‘Poor’. When judging a particular occupation as excellent the respondents gave such reasons as it – 1) paid well, 2) served humanity, 3) required a lot of previous training and investment and 4) had a lot of prestige associated with it.624

Another effort was that of Otis Dudley Duncan who carried out his study on occupation stratification in USA in 1950s. According to him occupational prestige was highly correlated with income and education. He was able to develop an equation to estimate the prestige scores of all occupations in the 1950 Census, since data on their required educational levels and income were available from the Census. From these a socioeconomic index (SEI) was developed for all occupations.625

Effort to compare occupational stratification in different countries was made by Inkeles and Rossi in latter half of 1950s.626 Their study comprised countries like Germany, Great Britain, Japan, New Zealand, the USSR and the USA. Though these were mainly industrialized countries, they found little evidence to favor the “culturalist” position that within each country or culture the distinctive local value system would result in substantial – and, indeed, sometimes extreme – differences in the evaluation of particular jobs in the standardized modern occupational system and much to support the “structuralist” contention that there is a relatively invariable hierarchy of prestige associated with the

industrial system, even when it is placed in the context of larger social systems which are otherwise differentiated in important respects. 627

It has been found that the occupational prestige hierarchy is almost the same in both industrialized and undeveloped countries. All the societies have 'specialized institutions to carry out political, religious, and economic functions, and to provide for the health, education, and welfare of the population'. 628 These institutions may be different in structure but the functions are almost the same in all societies. 'Considering the importance of these functions to the maintenance of complex social systems, it is not surprising that occupations at the top of these institutional structures should be highly regarded.' 629 According to this study the criteria for judging an occupation are 1) the importance the occupation has in a particular society and 2) the amount of training and skill involved.

These studies provide a perspective to study the occupational status of Shumang Lila artistes as one stratum in the ladder of occupations in Manipur, in particular and India, in general. Shumang Lila as an art form and its artistes has undergone stages of status changes. Shumang Lila being a cultural institution may not serve the people in a concrete term like providing health service but it has recreational and cognitive elements. It depends on how Manipuri society ranks cultural institutions and occupations associated with it. In terms of training and skill involved Shumang Lila artistes may not lag behind any other occupation which requires rigorous training, like doctors. But they are different sectors which need different parameters of training and skill. This training and skill notwithstanding, it is important how society ranks them in its prestige hierarchy.

To start with, the artistes are of various backgrounds brought in by their common love of theatre. Many of them, who are talented, directly come to Shumang Lila without much training though they have exposure to performing art forms. Later the training starts when they are part of their troupe where the senior members and the director give them rigorous training on how to deliver dialogues, and the nuances of acting like body language etc. Some of them are influenced by their kins who are already in performing art forms. For instance, Herojit of Kamkhya Sangeet Mandal has a grandfather who is a Lairik haiba, a form of story telling genre. Many of them also have graduated from the Stage Lila

628 Ibid.
629 Ibid.

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(proscenium theatre) as they want to experiment with Shumang Lila and also the fact that it is economically viable compared to the former. Again many also have taken formal theatre training under able theatre personalities. For instance, the troupe, Sanaleipak Nachom Artistes had undergone training under Sanakhya Ibotombi, a National School of Drama (NSD), Delhi graduate and renowned theatre person. This is the present trend in Shumang Lila.

Shumang Lila, today, gives the artistes some economic security also. But it depends on the name of the troupe and the members. Members of the well-known troups earn well, though there are troups which are groping for shows. A troupe normally charges around Rs.7500 as dakshina per show in and around Imphal City and Rs. 8000 for the places located more than 25 kms away from Imphal city. But there are troups which charge more according to the demand of the well popular play. For instance, Sanaleipak Nachom Artistes charged around Rs.15,000 for a show of the play Lidece-gi Gulap in 2004. If the troupe has three to four performances, not an unusual thing, then one day’s earning of the troupe would be around Rs. 24,000 (taking Rs. 8,000 as the average charge). This amount is then distributed among the members whose number ranges from 10 to 15. So for a popular play the members of a troupe can have a cozy life. Gokul, a young and well-educated artiste of Sanaleipak Nachom Artistes is not at all complaining when he can earn Rs.10,000 on an average per month in the busy seasons, in this land where there is rampant unemployment problem. At the same time he is also into films and Manipuri music videos which means his income is better than most of the people in the government services.

Money is good for popular plays but popularity of the plays also does not solely depend on the prizes they win in the annual Shumang Lila Festivals but also the reputation of the troupe and the actors. But this fee structure is a far cry from the 1950s till 1970s, when a show was booked only at a meager amount of Rs.60 irrespective of the places of performance. Moirang Parba performances during the 1940s were even performed at a charge of Rs.5. During those days the troupe members would travel in their bicycles to far-flung areas, stayed out there and performed for two to three days and come back. But then the money was good for them, which could at least contribute to running their homes.

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630 By 2002’s money value.
631 Gathered from N. Angouton.

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In addition to the money, the actors become public figures recognized easily wherever they go. Some of them have star status and even throw star tantrums. Seeing such success in Shumang Lila, many stage theatre personalities have joined Shumang Lila. Initially they face problems in adapting, as the two have different structure of performances. But today's Shumang Lila had to undergo a severe test in the face of society. In the beginning because of its secular and 'low-brow' character, as compared to the religious and 'high-brow' performing art forms of Manipur, it had to lie low in the hierarchy of status and its artistes bore the brunt, though the genre had always remained with the tastes of the people.

Why is the status of Shumang Lila artistes low? Why do people love the aesthetics of the performing arts but refrain from acknowledging the performers? Why do they admire and praise the characters in the play but suspect the medium of those characters? What a paradox, a paradox in human mind and civilization! Does the answer lie in the 'low-brow' status of this genre in the beginning? It is not as simple as that. A genre is not 'low' or 'high-brow' by itself but is guided by the ideology prevalent in the society whose faith is mostly decided by the people who are in power and prestige. Apart from the external influences there is also the internal culture, which decides the fate of the genre. The 'elites' of Manipur who were co-opted by the monarchy was consumed in the 'high' culture of Stage Lila as it carried the hallowed status since beginning because of its association with the British and the Bengali culture. So, Shumang Lila had to be pushed to the genre of the masses. But then why the masses did not have a good impression of the genre and the artistes? This means there were some internal factors, which drove the genre to its low position in the firmament of performing arts.

One explanation given is that most of the artistes were uneducated or less educated during 1950s and before. But this might not be a complete answer in a period when the percentage of literacy of the entire population of Manipur was as low as 5.06% in 1941 and 11.41% in 1951. The not so good impression was created by the artistes themselves in that some of them were involved into some habits, which were not sanctioned by the society like taking liquor, Ganja etc. According to M. Binod, some in his troupe even could not perform without their dose of liquor, which he despised. He was desirous of

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maintaining a good impression of his troupe and at the same time that of Shumang Lila. This also created an internal rift among the members. This along with the allegiance of Manipuri society to the conventional hierarchy of profession created a low status for the artistes. During that time artistes were not considered to be of high esteem despite their indispensability in the social, cultural and above all the religious events. These performing arts were considered not as any profession by the masses whose idea of work was something 'productive' either agricultural (manual) activities or government jobs. Shumang Lila, for them, was just a form of entertainment; 'unproductive'; and those who were part of it were the ones who did not want to take responsibility and want to have care-free lives.

Personal image matters a lot in Shumang Lila and for that matter in most of the performing art forms, as the artistes are public figures who are watched and judged for anything they do, even in private sphere. So, there was a serious attempt in 1960s and 1970s to come up with good 'impression management'. The Shumang Lila Ojhas (gurus) started reformulating the bad habits of the artistes with strict disciplinary actions. The latter were directed to obey and respect the Gurus, to behave well with their colleagues and to respect the sentiments of the people. The educational qualifications of the artistes also increased gradually.

Today the status of the artistes has improved considerably. Some of the reasons for this might be – 1) the increasing educational level of the artistes; almost all of them are literate; most of them are matriculate; some graduate and some even MA; 2) employment of some of them in the government jobs; 3) changing hierarchy of professions i.e. performing art is less considered as unproductive but as a means to earn a livelihood, due to the increase of the unemployment problems in the state when government jobs are not considered the only job; 4) changes brought in the presentation styles of Shumang Lila itself on the lines of Stage Lila and films with the use of sophisticated techniques and musical instruments; the marketing tactics like advertisements in the newspaper, posters on the walls and in the local Cable Television; 5) influx of well known artistes of Manipuri Films like Gokul, Kaiku etc. which increases the popularity of the genre; 6) Shumang Lila artistes taking roles in Manipuri films which are growing due to the absence of Hindi films in Cinema Halls of the state; 6) the changing mindset of the people towards habits which

633 Gathered from Sanakhya Ibotombi.
were counted as socially unacceptable; and 7) strict discipline within the troupe; e.g. Sanaleipak Nachom Artistes has a rule that if any member drinks liquor or is involved in consumption of other intoxicating substances he will be fined Rs.500 or if the matter worsens he will be exterminated from the troupe. This serves as a deterrent and all the members respect the rule though some of them are into it in their private sphere, not disturbing the smooth running of the organization.

Despite these changes, the impression of artistes as no good character is not completely eradicated yet. The past still lingers in the minds of the public. This is felt by the artistes themselves. A. K. Bengol, an accomplished artiste, draws a simile between Shumang Lila troupe and *shan-doctor* (veterinary doctor). Like the latter who is directed towards the *shngol* (cow shed), which is stinking with cow dung, the moment he comes to treat the ailing cow, a Shumang Lila troupe is also directed towards the ill-furnished dressing room. On the other hand, the Stage Lila is regarded as a simile of *Mee-doctor* (doctor). Like doctor who is treated well with tea and snacks and is led to a room of a house for the treatment of the sick, the Stage Lila group is given the comfort of a well-furnished and well-equipped green room. The reasons for this 'loose' treatment towards the Shumang Lila troups might be because of 1) the temporariness of the dressing room and the following of the conventions which have been in vogue for decades; 2) people's identification with the Shumang Lila artistes i.e. the local people are not in awe with the artistes as they do not have the aura of distant and untouchable stars of the virtual world of films and television. In case of the virtual world there is idealization of the artistes following the characters they play in certain films. The distance between them and the viewers serves as an advantage for the artistes and the viewers' curiosity also increases to witness the former in person though they are kept informed through print media and television. So there is a kind of hallow created for the film and television artistes. But Shumang Lila is a genre where the audience can 'feel' the artistes in person, so no 'fetishism'. But the audience is also curious to see those film actors who are part of Shumang Lila. However, when familiarity dawns in between the audience and the actors the curiosity is slackened and the hallow is reduced.

The comparatively low status of actors in the occupational hierarchy is not the sole phenomenon of Shumang Lila, it is also the case in other societies. One such case is that of actors of Special Drama (Speshal Nātakam) of Tamil Nadu. "Special Drama" is a genre of
popular Tamil theater that began in the 1890s and continues to the present day. The name refers to the practice of hiring each artist “specially” for every performance, making each performance a “special” event. These events last all night, from 10 P.M. until dawn. They are now primarily held in villages in conjunction with religious festivals, as dramas are considered entertainment simultaneously pleasing to mortal and immortal audiences. 

However, the artistes of Special Drama are a stigmatized group in Tamil society. They are addressed as ‘drama people’ (nātaka makkal) which is a stigmatized identity category. People in general feel that the actors lack murai, which is ‘a kind of property and sense of social order. Such pervasive, commonly held beliefs about drama people make theirs a community identity of a different order than most, more akin to a rogue state of disorder than to an order at all. To lack murai is the very definition of stigma in local Tamil social contexts. The artistes have been compared with Ganesh cake (kolukkattai), a sweet made of rice flour and coconut dough, shaped by hand, often squeezed in the fist. This sweet is headless, ‘irregular, knobby, and dumpling plump with a homemade childlike quality’. ‘The actors’ lack of murai is like the absence of a head on the kolukkattai cake, an analogy of marked absence: actors lack properly ordered relations, as the roly-poly Ganesh-cake lacks a head. 

4.2 A Genre of Sobriquets

It is not an unusual thing in the world of theatre when the artistes are identified with the characters they essay in the plays. When the play becomes popular and the performance of the artistes spellbinding, the artiste is permanently attached to the name of that character. This means there is also the possibility of losing his own name and identity. This may not necessarily mean that the artiste transforms himself into the character, living it in his own life. But there are also extreme cases when this actually happens. When performance is repeated time and again, there is a series of transportation, which leads to the transformation of the status of the performer. There are many examples of this permanent change. One of them is the case of the person who played Narad-muni in the Ramlila in Rannnagar. During his thirty-five years of continuous playing of the role of Narad-muni

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635 Ibid. p. 31.
636 Ibid. p. 33.
(during 1960s and 80s), people started identifying him with the legendary semi divine sage. He was addressed as ‘Narad’ and not by his real name. Audience numbering around twenty five thousand listened devotedly to him as if the real Narad-muni was speaking. They believed that he had powers linking him to the sage/character he played. In real life, he practised priest-craft since he was also a Brahmin. He became the mahant, owner and chief priest of two temples in Mirzapur, a city about forty miles from Ramnagar. Such similar examples are still present in Indian film world too. Another example is that of Quesalid, a Kwakiutl who wanted to expose the quackery of the Shamans. After some time, Shamans accepted him as a member of their group. He was thoroughly trained in acting, magic and singing and other arts related to Shamanism. He mastered the art so well that he exposed other Shamans as quacks and in the process became a good shaman himself. People started believing in his curing power and he himself also began to believe in his mystical power. Thus he became transformed into a good shaman. Levi-Strauss says, ‘Quesalid did not become a great Shaman because he cured his patients; he cured his patients; because he had become a great Shaman.’

These two examples involved the agency of the persons in their own transformation into the role, they take.

Other cases are the ones created by the audience. For instance, Arun Govil as Rama and Nitin Bhardwaj as Krishna are two personalities who are much revered by most of the Indians who watch the epic television serials of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata respectively. There is even idealization of their photographs as Ram and Krishna respectively. This is akin to the kind of idealization of the paintings of Saraswati by Ravi Verma as the image of Saraswati which till then existed only in the minds of the people. This phenomenon becomes cosmic due to the religious fervour of the issue. So, the public expect both Arun Govil and Nitin Bharadwaj to be like Rama in their day-to-day lives also which makes the latter’s lives difficult. Nevertheless the latter joined BJP, probably to respect the public feelings.

This phenomenon comes very near to the practice of kinship address system of teknonymy in certain societies where a mother or father is addressed after her/his sons and daughters instead of being directly addressed by their real names. Shumang Lila has been replete with such phenomenon since its initial days. M. Binod is still known as Jagat Singh Daku after his famous role as a dacoit in the play Ipagi Ibungo; Nabakumar as Hamlet after

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638 Ibid. p. 94.
his role as Hamlet in the play of the same name; Ibotombi as Bir Singh Shaba after the character Bir Singh in the play Abir Khan; Inakhunba as Devdas Shaba after the play Devdas; Jugeshor as Cheitei Shaba, a dacoit by the name of Cheitei in the play Meitei Chanu; Langonjam Baruni as Khaba Shaba after Khaba, the antagonist in the play Panthoibi Khongul and Dhanabir as Chaar Sou Bis (420) after his role of the same name in the play Chakthekpi. Among the Nupi Shabis, K. Achoubi is known as Kamisana Shabi after the wicked character in the play 50 Thousand; Tondon as Paro Shabi after the character Paro in Devdas; Ibobi as Chaibi Shabi in the historical play Charairongba.\footnote{See Chapter II and VI for the details of these plays.}

Apart from the identification of the actors with the characters, people still can identify the dialogues for which they became popular. For instance, Jagat Singh’s line, ‘nang karigumbada Jagat Singh haibadu takhrabara?’ (Have you ever heard of the name Jagat Singh?) is still imitated in many gags and day-to-day conversations. Also the personal styles are still remembered. These are from the early era. This trend has come down in the present era. From the present era one very famous artiste who is known by his character’s name is S. Hemanta Singh who is Tolhan after the character in the play Eegi Mahao. This decline in this phenomenon is probably due to the growth of media exposure of the artistes. During the earlier era, the interaction between the artistes and public was rather rare. The only way that the public could remember him was through his character. With the growth of media, both print and electronic, the names of the artistes are often found in them in the forms of reports on them or their interviews. Moreover the improvement in communication and transportation system allows spreading the news from places to places faster. So, there are no secrets about the artistes kept away from the public.

5. Organizational Structure

Broadly speaking organizations can be either formal or informal in structure. However there is also informal relationship within the formal structure of an organization. This is important for the management of the organization. According to Talcott Parsons ‘as a formal analytical point of reference, primacy of orientation to the attainment of a specific goal is used as the defining characteristic of an organization which distinguishes it from other types of social systems.’\footnote{Talcott Parsons, 1967 – Structure and Process in Modern Societies. New York: The Free Press. p. 17.} This criterion of an organization has its implication in its
external relations with other systems and also in its internal structure. Then how does an organization attain its goals? Parsons writes,

The attainment of a goal is defined as a *relation* between a system and the relevant parts of the external situation in which it acts or operates. This relation can be conceived as the maximization, relative to the external conditions such as costs and obstacles, of some categories of output of the system to objects or systems in the external situation. An organization is a system which, as the attainment of its goal, “produces” an identifiable something which can be utilized in some way by another system; that is, the output of the organization is, for some other system, an input.\(^{641}\)

Organization if we follow the ‘cultural-institutional’ point of view should be bounded by a value system of its own. Again it needs to have ‘institutional patterns which spell out these values in the more concrete functional context of goal attainment, adaptation to the situation, and integration of the system.’ However, this value system must by definition be a subvalue system of a higher order one, since the organization is always defined as a subsystem of a more comprehensive social system. Two conclusions follow: First, the value system of an organization must imply basic acceptance of the more generalized values of the superordinate system—unless it is a deviant organization not integrated in the superordinate system. Secondly, on the requisite level of generality, the most essential feature of the value system of an organization is the evaluative *legitimation* of its place or “role” in the superordinate system.\(^{642}\)

Shumang Lila troupes have undergone stages in organizational structure since their initial years. They fit well into the characteristic of organization i.e. attainment of goal. However, apart from this there are also characteristics of an organization, especially formal one. They may be the well defined structure with hierarchy of positions, registration to the government, interpersonal behaviour which are almost fixed according to the positions, rigid rules and regulations for running the organization etc. It is typical of a bureaucratic structure. Shumang Lila troupes started as organizations having their goal of performing plays and also for economic ends. This stage may not fit into the typical formal organizational mould but with characteristics of informal organization where the members were bound by certain kinship relationship, both real and fictional. But they had the hierarchy based on the age. Moreover, they were not registered as organizations to the government. In these initial years the troupes were mostly located in Imphal and its

\(^{641}\) Ibid.
\(^{642}\) Ibid. p. 20.
surrounding villages. In the 1950s theatre organization was not an easy task unlike today. The leader of the troupe had to search for the artistes for his troupe. There was high dropping rate of artistes due to lack of economic security. One instance was that of M. Binod's troupe. As he was the leader of the organization he had to anyhow manage to pay the artistes and had to take care of other paraphernalia of the organization. Sometimes he had to mortgage his watch and even his coat to run his organization. Such was his determination. Till then he had not given name to his organization. But after their first family play *Mani Mamou* of G. C. Tongbra his troupe began to be known as *Mani Mamou Party* or *Heingang Party* after the name of his village i.e. Heingang at the eastern flank of Imphal. In 1963 he registered his troupe as *North Imphal Jatra Mandal*.

Today the troupes are gradually formalizing their organizational structure. Each troupe, as norm of being registered as an organization, has a President, General Secretary and other posts like Treasury Secretary etc. depending upon the need of the troupe. For instance, S. Hemanta Singh is the President of *Sanaleipak Nachom Artistes*. By 2004 Shumang Lila had as much as twenty-five troupes participating in the annual festival out of which thirteen were male and twelve were female troupes. The goal of these troupes is made conspicuous when they compete with each other for the awards in the Annual Shumang Lila festivals. So, it is their utmost endeavour that they should come up with good production which will promise them a good earning from performances.

Apart from these inter-troupe competitions there is also intra-group competition when the artistes vie for the best role in a particular play. Such competition is more pronounced among the Nupi Shabis. For instance, when O. Arun was in Sanaleipak Nachom artistes as Nupi Shabi he had, always, to play second fiddle to R.K. Sanaton. So he decided to opt out and be part of the new troupe called *Peacemaker* as lead Nupi Shabi. Another facet of Shumang Lila is the generation gap between the new crop of artistes and the old ones. Some of the old ones are critical of the rampant commercialization at the cost of the traditional model of performances and the structure of Shumang Lila. The new ones are also critical of the conservative outlook of the old ones in the age of changing world.

Shumang Lila troupes operate as organizations within larger systems which encompass them as parts. First such organization was the Theatre Centre which organized 643 Gathered from M. Binod.
the All Manipur Jatra Festival in 1965 at B.T. Park (Bir Tikendrajit Park). Then since 1968 the Festivals were organized by the Publicity Department of the Government of Manipur which continued till 1972. During this time a need was felt to bring the troupes under a formal organizational umbrella and the All Manipur Jatra Association was established in 1971 by the lovers of Shumang Lila. In the succeeding year (1972), the Manipur State Kala Akademi was established to boost the growth of art and culture. It started organizing festivals, both for Stage Lila and Shumang Lila (dialogue one) in different times of year since 1973. This was a period when the name of this theatre form was changed Jatra to Shumang Lila. Around 1975 Eshei Lila, a new genre of Shumang Lila came into the picture. Initially it was looked down upon by the purists and traditionalists including State Kala Akademi. So, the latter refrained from including Eshei Lila as part of Shumang Lila festivals. Seeing their indifference towards this new crop of Shumang Lila, Manipur Jatra Association started organizing festival for only Eshei Lila since 1981. In 1984, Manipur State Shumang Lila Council (MSSLC) was formed as an apex body to cater to the growing demands of the Shumang Lila troupes as the all Manipur Jatra Association could not fulfill the needs of the artistes as it was run by non-performing people. This new organization then replaced the latter, though it was running as a parallel body with 3-4 troupes, and started organizing Eshei Lila festivals too. The Council started its own Eshei Lila Festivals since 1984. Due to growing popularity of Eshei Lila among the people, the Manipur State Kala Akademi also had to give in to the demand of Shumang Lila Council and in 1989, it included Eshei Lila as a separate category in its festival. In 1992, the dialogue Lila and Eshei Lila were merged together and known as Shumang Lila. Since then, the Akademi has been organizing festival in cooperation with the Council.

The above documentation shows how there are myriad of organizations whose interests are sometimes opposed to each other. This presents the complex dynamics of inter-organizational relationship. There are, sometimes, integrative problems in Shumang Lila when the members do not agree to one value or structure of the organization of which he is a part, or of higher level of organization. This is reflected in Parsons’ thesis on inter-

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644 Gathered from M. Binod.
645 Gathered from S. Hemanta Singh, the current Secretary of All Manipur State Shumang Lila Council.
646 See Chapter II.
647 See Chapter II.
organizational relationship, though he is not exactly talking of some cultural organization. According to him,

The central problem concerns the institutionalized norms which can effectively bind the actions of individuals in their commitments to organizations.... The focus of the integrative problem on a trans-organizational level, then, is the problem of the determination of the loyalties of participant persons. On the one hand, the level of loyalty he bears to a particular organization (in which, for example, he is employed) and the bases of this loyalty; on the other hand, the way in which this loyalty fits into the larger system of loyalties in which his obligations to a plurality of roles are balanced. Clearly this allocation of loyalties, not within the organization but within the society between collectivities, is intimately connected with values. It cannot be only the values of the organization which govern, it must also be a higher-level value system. 648

Loyalty is also a much respected word among Shumang Lila artistes as the organization works as a very close-knit group which serves sometimes as a family. But it is also not unusual to have dissenting voices from within. Critical assessment is also essential for the organization to prevent it from turning into a small fiefdom of one member or a small group within the group. It works on check and balance equation. If there is no congenial relationship among the members, the production will suffer as play production is a team work. One good actor will find it very hard to carry the whole play if the remaining performers and the story line are not at par with his performance. This is important more so because, today, Shumang Lila plays have their conspicuous economic motives.

At the same time it is important for the troupes to show loyalty towards the higher organizations like the State Kala Akademi and Shumang Lila Council. This has its own efficacious motives in that the plays which are shown in the Annual Festivals have the privilege to be judged by some well trained performers and scholars. The plays which are adjudged first, second and third have a chance to have bright economic output during that particular year. 649 And the Festivals, as we have come across, are organized by the Akademi and Council.

There is a division of labour between the Akademi and Council in organizing the Annual Festivals which are normally held during February and March. The task of financing and fixing the venue for the festival are given to the Akademi while the Council

649 It does not discount the fact that there are also plays which are popular even if they are not shown in the Festival. The popularity is spread through the ‘word of the mouth’ of the audience.
has the responsibility of collecting scripts, scrutinizing them, screening of troupes and other little things required in Shumang Lila production.

Festival season is a hectic time for the troupes. They have to choose the finest scripts, rehearse them under able directors, and see if the music is made accurate with the performance and so on. As troupes are professionals, the success in the festival is considered to be a ticket to the good show throughout the year. This may be a myth as there have been many cases where a play is loved by the people immensely though it does not fare well in the festival. It may be because of the difference in the way of judging. These festivals are judged by a panel of scholars and experts in the field of theatre. Their perspective towards the plays may be a class apart from that of the masses. But in case of Shumang Lila judging by the people is more important than that of experts. Despite such facts, some troupes are seriously engaged in lobbying and even bribing so that they may bag the first three places.

Today MSSLC is the only functioning higher Shumang Lila body catering to all the needs of the troupes. It has thirteen Executive members – President, Vice-President, Secretary, Joint Secretary, Treasurer, Internal Auditor, and seven others. Madhumangol (Itukhombi) was the first President and S. Jugeshor of Meitei Leima Jatra cum Drama Association the first Secretary. In 2004 M. Binod was the President, Narendra Ningomba, the Vice-President and S. Hemanta Singh the Secretary. The election to these posts of the Council is held every year in which all the members of general body take part.

The Council has various levels of groups which take care of different needs.

1) **Advisory Board:** It has five members and they are nominated by the General body after studying suitable people who are scholarly and also enthusiastic about art and culture including Shumang Lila. This body does not have any right to interfere with the working of the Council, but they are consulted when there is any controversy within the Council.

2) **Affiliated Members/Bodies:** These are newly joined Shumang Lila troupes. A troupe can join the Council by paying a registration fee of Rs.100. This does not mean that all the members of the new troupe have automatically become members of the Council. The members have to get themselves registered individually by paying a registration fee of Rs.20.

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650 Gathered from Narendra Ningomba.
3) **Artiste Members:** All the artistes of Shumang Lila who are registered with the Council are called Artistes members. Each of them has to pay an annual fee of Rs.20. If they do not do so they cease to be members.

4) **Ordinary Members:** Anybody, whether he/she is directly associated with Shumang Lila or not, can become an ordinary member by paying an annual fee of Rs.20.

5) **Life Members:** Anybody, whether he/she is directly associated with Shumang Lila or not, can become a life-time member by paying a registration fee of Rs.500. Previously the fee used to be Rs.200. They do not have to pay any annual fee like other members. No specific responsibilities are bestowed on them. They are there because of their love for this art form.

There is also provision for transfer of artistes from one troupe to another. But there are rules governing this provision. A new set of rules has been operative since 1994. If any artiste wishes to change the troupe he is allowed to do so during the season of June to 31st July. However this new rule created instability in the troupe as the members are free to change troupes as per their choices. So, it disturbs the play rehearsals, performances and their internal relationship. Seeing these discrepancies, since 2001, the rule has been modified and the minimum period of staying in a troupe, for an artiste, is three years. During the transfer the member should bring a ‘No Objection Certificate’ from his present troupe. And also he has to clear all the pending dues in the present troupe. If any member does not follow these rules he will be liable to be expelled from the Council. This rule was applied, in 2002, to a group of artistes when they deliberately came out of the Council and formed a new troupe called *Peacemaker*. This dissenting group has some of the most talented and popular artistes of Shumang Lila today. They, nevertheless, became very popular amongst the audience despite their parting from the Council.

These organizational rules and ways of functioning are also responsible for maintaining discipline in the otherwise ‘ill-organized’ world of Shumang Lila. This is important as the artistes are the public figures and have to maintain a good image before the public. Moreover these organizations are sub-systems within the larger system of society. They cannot be world in themselves because ultimately their existence itself depends on the audience’s response. The troupes try to establish an umbilical code with the community of which they are also members. Spectacle and theatre survive because there are spectators.