CONCLUSION
The present thesis is a constant engagement with theatre as world in itself. It tries not to construe theatre just as a singular cultural trait (like eating with spoon). In the contrary, it tries to see theatre as a medium embedded with society itself – historical, contemporary and also possibility of a new futuristic society. It is made possible because of the very nature of theatre, where there is possibility of endless permutation and combination. All this is also explored through the genre of Shumang Lila. If it is theatrical then it is also ritualistic, if it is religious it is also secular, if it is rational it is also irrational, if it is traditional it is also modern, and if it is folk and popular then it is classical. What is being seen is that there is no specific single ideology working in a linear fashion. Shumang Lila cannot be put into just a single category. This is where the danger of binary opposites lies. Shumang Lila has been seen not just as a binary opposite of Stage Lila (proscenium theatre) in Manipur theatre world. It has been seen in conjunction with many theatrical genres including those present in Laiharaoba ritual festivals and Vaisnavite forms.

The pertinent sociological question which has been constantly raised is how performance, in general, can be seen as a cultural part of society. Do human beings only survive with just food and shelter? The hunch of the matter is that entertainment also has a profound space in a person’s life. Then, can an individual be content with his/her own secluded sphere? Probably not! Very much difficult! Impossible? As has been often pronounced, as a maxim, human being is a social animal (before he is political or economic!). With social comes cultural, political etc. Simply, we are social with social actions. Then performances like festivals, rituals, concerts, theatre etc. are also social spaces for cultural transaction and meaning making. Shumang Lila is an example of such interaction and transaction.

The present thesis is an endeavour to study Shumang Lila which bears the imprints of both the micro and macro elements of Manipur in general and Meitei society in particular. Its course of development is also a witness to both the structural and systemic changes in social, cultural, political, economic and gender spheres. The thesis also tries to study Shumang Lila as a theatre genre where various nuances of aesthetics are at work. But this does not discount the fact that aesthetics has been part of the sociological analysis since any cultural performance form has been created in the mould of social conventions, be it in similarity or in difference.
Though theatre has its own world, it is a world within a larger social world in which it has been located. This way, there are sometimes tussle between the two worlds in terms of whether or not a certain theatrical element, mostly innovative, could be sanctioned by the society, in general and the viewing public, in particular. This is more pronounced in a society where primordial elements still have their exemplary share in guiding it. This may happen even within a democratic country where the democratic elements remain only as ideals and the real lived world is directed by the ‘traditional’ belief systems. This does not, however, substantiate that the society does not change. There is, always, mutual diffusion between cultures and this is especially strong in today’s ‘globalizing’ world politics. The point to drive home, here, is how the culture receives and reacts to the changes, both endogenous and exogenous. Shumang Lila is also witness to the changes taking place in Manipur and outside. One major change which also affects Shumang Lila is in regards to how the Meitei society has been changing its outlook towards the sexuality which was not regarded as normal. This is carried forward in Shumang Lila in the form of Nupi Shabis whose sexuality also has been changing in tune with the changes in the society.

The present work has tried to see Shumang Lila analytically. The seemingly meaningless comic gestures and words in such genres as Phagi Lila have been discerned for its politically relevant messages. Such reading enables us to see what is not shown and to hear what is not spoken. This is a reiteration of the importance of interpretation, and not just description in sociology. Below the superficial world there lies a ‘deep structure’. In the present work, the propensity of Shumang Lila to politically engage through cultural and religious mediums has been evoked. Its reflective politics has been a force to reckon with, for a society to also follow it in its own reflective politics, be it to question cultural changes or religious revivalism or incursion of civil space by military laws.

Apart from this political side, the present work has tried to delve into Shumang Lila’s reflection on family and kinship structure of Manipuri society, in particular. The possibility of blurring the real social world and the character of plays has been discerned. This phenomenon arouses the question of whether imagination is unreal at all. Imagination/fiction is social also, when it is directed towards the real person or event. That is why literature, both oral and written, is also important for a society.
Do we need ritual, at all, when we consider ourselves being liberated and rational? Why people still need religions when every sphere of life is intruded by science and technology? Why people are turning towards spirituality? Must be, there is still much space for irrationality in the psychic and social world of a human being. The present work argues that rituals contained in Shumang Lila serve as a psychological means to retain calm and poise of the performers. They also serve as a social fact to regulate the transaction between the performers and the audience. The transaction can be meaningful when what is transacted is grasped by the audience. This enables the audience to respond through applauses, laughter, and also boos. All these are signs of whether the audience gels well with the performers or has critical differences. The present work tries to introduce semiotics to analyse this transaction. At the same time, it is reiterated that the audience does not consist of just receivers but an informed public.

Does this communication survive the time and space of performance? The actual performance time is limited, between two to three hours in case of Shumang Lila, but the 'play time' certainly is longer. The comic scene, for instance, lingers in the observer's mind long after the performance has actually finished. This is extended further when she/he decides to narrate the same to others who is new, and also when the observers share it again and again amongst them. On the other hand, the space of performance, most of the time, does not survive the sanctity created by performance. The present work argues that space has the potentiality to change from being sacred to profane or vice versa, depending on the act performed or object installed on it. This characteristic has been termed as 'camouflagization' of space.

Even the 'nature' is divided when it is turned into 'culture'. Or is nature itself hierarchical in itself? Is culture only an efficient cause to an end? (This reminds me of the Jaina concept of \textit{guna paryayavat dravyam} which says that substance already has [in latent form] the qualities of the effects, it is part of.) On the other hand, society has its own social divisions. It is only that some societies are less hierarchical than others. Manipuri society is not an exception. The present work argues that this social fact is reflected in the audience structure also. The people also respond to this social arrangement when they accommodate the artistes into certain social stratum.

This issue of social status is evoked in Shumang Lila when it comes to women artistes. It has been argued that the entry of women artistes in secular theatre ensemble is due to negotiation between two patriarchies – Manipuri and Bengali. The present work also argues that Manipuri society has its own concept of public and private space. Even in the public space
also, there are areas which are solely occupied by women and there are some where their presence is not welcome. It is argued that women professional artistes have entered this censored space and public, in general, see them as ‘unwomanly’ and ‘licentious’. But then, it is argued, women artistes in Shumang Lila are not rebels, to change the strict gender dichotomy. So, Nupi Shumang Lila does not qualify to be called a feminist theatre but a women's theatre. This is in keeping with the contextual understanding of Manipuri society, in general and this theatre genre, in particular.

What about female impersonators? Are they stigmatised or admired? The present work studies the phenomenon of cross-dressing in Shumang Lila in conjunction with the male Maibis who cross-dress like female Maibis in Laiharaoba ritual festivals. This way, Nupi Shabis have cultural sanction. The present work also studies the current trend of visibility of people who practice alternate sexuality. The present work argues that the sexuality present during performance is a unique sexuality, independent of the personal sexuality of the Nupi Shabis. This has been termed as ‘performance sexuality’. It is argued that through this sexuality, Nupi Shabis have been partly responsible for crafting images of womanhood in Manipuri society. It has been asked if creating imagery of women by male artistes is a patriarchal motive to keep its women within the sanctioned space. However, this very concept of femininity has been questioned, recently, by informed people in Manipuri society with the influence of various feminist movements. Though women, in general, do not really come out to protest against patriarchy, there are rising number of female writers who declare themselves as ‘feminists’. This shows the changeability of social norms, and structures itself.

In this vein, culture can be seen as existing in a flux. Shumang Lila has adopted this very reality. In its endeavour to maintain its own niche, Shumang Lila is also constantly charting out its tactics, time to time. This survival tactic has brought in commercialization, in terms of both its form and content. In broader perspective, commercialization and westernization are on the rise in Manipuri society. Also with this, there is rise of fundamentalism among people who stick to the past and the traditional belief and value systems. So, Manipuri society is at crossroads today, caught between the pulls of two countervailing forces. One force works for purism which tries ‘to conserve’ the ‘true Meitei cultural and religious essences’ with fair amount of indulgence in cultural policing. This is carried out by some idiosyncratic groups which do not think twice about the means as long as the end is profitable to them. There are numerous examples. One of them is the incident when
the Manipur Central Library in Imphal was burnt down by a self-styled saviour of Meitei society called Meitei Erol Eyek Loinasillon Apunha Lup (MEELAL), in demand of the reintroduction of Meitei Mayek (Manipuri Script) in schools and colleges instead of the Bengali script. With the burning of the invaluable books written in the Bengali script, Manipur has lost some of the knowledge stores and much of tolerance and respect for knowledge. Such diktats are visible confronting Shumang Lila also when an organization called Manipur Forward Youth Front (MFYF), time to time come up with its edicts limiting the performances only till 9 pm at night. Censorship is a lingering issue in a collective bound society like Manipuri society. Self-styled cultural police constantly engage to keep the individuals within the norms of collectivity, giving negligible space for individualism.

On the other hand, there is a counter force that loves anything new and fashionable. This involves fetishism, a fetishism that blinds the conscious ‘self’. Shumang Lila is also not immune to such forces. Today, it is exposed to the influence of various media of entertainment e.g. cinema, television, etc. But to attribute wholesale imitation to popular demands is unconvincing and self-destructive. Entertainment and knowledge dissemination also demands caution, (self censorship) a caution that also should not serve as an impediment to the creative enterprise. For example, Devdas need not look like Shah Rukh Khan or any Bengali Bhadralok in the play Devdas but a Manipuri Devdas. But it is also not advisable to regress Shumang Lila to the form, prevalent some decades back. What is needed is the consciousness both of the local and ‘global’ elements.

Both the above cultural forces seem unviable and should not stand as binary opposites to each other. The first force cannot stand firm, given the kind of cultural and knowledge diffusion Manipuri society is exposed to. The second force is insensitive. Any alien cultural trait, be it music or clothing or food, need to be closely scrutinized before it is merged into the way of living. Also borrowing any form of art in toto in the name of creativity is irresponsible. A middle path has to be chalked out. It should be born in mind that ‘desire’ creates ‘culture’ and then this ‘desire’ becomes ‘need’. But one can balance the ‘desire’ before it turns into a nagging ‘need’. It is essential for Manipuri society, in general, to come out of the clutch of this dialectics of unmonitored regression and progression. This means Shumang Lila, a cultural performance, which reflects and guides the public, must tread cautiously with all its balancing acts so that it can remain with time and at the same time ahead of time. Space for critical engagement needs to be created, most preferably through Shumang Lila.

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