

5/9/09

UC

**MOIRANG PARVA:
A TRANSLATION AND CRITICAL INTRODUCTION
TO THREE PLAYS**

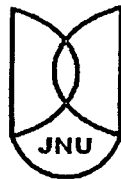


by

Satyam Pukhrem

A dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Philosophy



Centre for English Studies

School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies

Jawaharlal Nehru University

New Delhi-110067

2008



Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067, India

Date: 29.7.08

CERTIFICATE

This dissertation titled "*Moirang Parva: A Translation and Critical Introduction to Three Plays*" submitted by **Mr. Satyam Pukhrem**, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

MP

(MAKARAND PARANJAPE)
SUPERVISOR

Professor Makarand Paranjape
Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067

SKS


(SANTOSHK.SAREEN)
CHAIRPERSON

Prof. Santosh K. Sareen
Chairperson
Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067

29.7.08

DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This dissertation titled "*Moirang Parva: A Translation and Critical Introduction to Three Plays*" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.


(Satyam Pukhrem)
M. Phil Student
CES/SLL&CS
JNU

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincerest to all whose continued support has made this dream into a reality. I wish to thank my supervisor Prof. **Makarand Paranjape** for being so patient and supportive throughout this task and guiding me.

Thanks also to my parents, family members and friends who believed in me. I offer my thanks to Oja Dorendro Loitongbam and Oja Rajen Toijamba for introducing me to the world of *Shumang leela*.

Contents

Certificate

Declaration by the Student

Acknowledgement

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: A Prelude	31
Chapter 3: The Three plays	39
Chapter 4: Conclusion	113
Glossary	120
Bibliography	123

**Of Darkness that shrouds the abysmal depths
Of mine heart Illuminative lamp which art thee,
in this night bereft of light**

**Like a withered tree these wan thoughts are
indeed mine Thine Lordly grace' blessings breathes
life anew This unworthy self I offer you my very soul
As *Nongyai* did I prostrate myself before thee
Unto thee I bow once again teary eyed
Enlighten this heart of darkness, forgive me!**

Chapter 1.

Introduction.

Moirangparva is a form of Manipuri traditional theatre which is known as the **Shumangleela**, which in turn means Courtyard Theatre literally. Pertaining to its nomenclature, it is enacted in the open courtyard. Though it was born within the folds of shumangleela, it acquired a distinct identity of its own in terms of its artistic form, structure and uniquely enhanced performances. It has become an independent entity by its own standards.

Moirangparva depicts the epic story of *Khamba* and *Thoibi* two figures of immense importance in the folkloric tradition of Manipur and the village of Moirang in particular. The performing troupe consists of 10-15 artistes. Ideally each chapter of the story comprises one play which lasts approximately three hours. However variations in terms of duration and dramatization, including dialogic differences can be noted in many of the performances. Different chapters of the story are enacted separately and there are nine major plays which are titled according to the name of the chapters.

- 1. *PHI-WAIBA*(Borrowing of Clothes)
- 2. *LEI-LANGBA* (Offering of Flowers)
- 3. *PANA-LAMJEL*(Relay Team Race)
- 4. *KAO-PHABA* (Taming of the Bull)
- 5. *SHAMU-KHONGYETPA* (Bound to the legs of the Elephant)
- 6. *KANGLA-BICHAR* (Judgement at Kangla)

- 7. *LOIKUM-LOIKA* (The Exile and Return from it)
- 8. *KHAMBANA KABO¹ LEIKAI KOIBA* (Khamba's trip to Kabaw Valley)
- 9. *KEI-PHABA* (Catching the Tiger)

These are the popular Moirangparva plays that constitute the entire epic in dramatic form. The term Moirangparva literally means chapters on Moirang² and they are taken in synonymous synchronicity with the ballad of Khamba and Thoibi sung by the *Pena* Minstrels

Pena is an indigenous musical instrument of Manipur and has been in use since time immemorial...*Pena* is played somewhat like a violin. It has two parts namely, *Pena Cheijing* (equivalent of a bow) and *Pena Maru* (main body of the instrument and sound box). The *Meiteis* believe that the former represents the Universal Father and the latter, Universal Mother.

Pena. 5-day Festival of Manipuri Traditional Music,
MSKA. Sept. 2005.

It is a visual depiction of this popular ballad, composed in dramatic form. No other story of Moirang except the story of Khamba and Thoibi is called Moirangparva.

The term 'Moirangparva' is a combination of two words, 'Moirang' and 'Parva'. Moirang is a place by the side of the Loktak Lake in the south-western part of the

¹ A valley in Burma.

² The place, Moirang.

Manipur valley region. A place rich in heritage and cultural practices of yore which are traditionally revered throughout the North-eastern part of India. Much of these traditions and cultural practices are preserved and compressed in a bunch of annals known as *Moirang Kangleiron*.

Moirang Kangleiron literally means the stories of the land of the Moirangs. The Moirangs are a group of people settled on the side of the Loktak Lake since time immemorial and their presiding deity is the *Lord Thangjing*³. All stories of Moirang are spun around the Lord Thangjing, 'the earliest ancestor and creator of the Moirangs'⁴. The story of Khamba and Thoibi is one of them.

The Moirangs were assimilated to the *Meiteis*, the predominant group of people settled in the northern plains of Manipur in the 18th Century⁵. By the time of King Chandrakirti Singh (1850-1886) many art forms flourished in the land of Manipur. *Wariliba*⁶ became very popular, and the stories of Mahabharata were told by dividing it into many *parvas* in accordance with the chapters. Thus the term 'Parva' which is a Sanskrit word meaning chapter became a commonly known word. A play, 'Sabha-Parva' was also staged during this period too. Thus the words 'Moirang' and 'Parva' were joined together and the term, Moirangparva, as the play's name of the love saga of Khamba and Thoibi emerged and evolved.

³ Chief Deity of Moirang province.

⁴ *Moirang was created by the God Thangjing, who came down from heaven in the shape of a boar*
T.C.Hodson, *The History of Moirang*. The Meiteis, p.130.

⁵ The Gazetteer of Manipur, *History*, Ch.II,34.

⁶ Telling of stories, particularly those of Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

The last war of independence fought by the Manipuris against the British colonizers on the soil of Manipur in 1891 and the subsequent colonisation of Manipur had affected the socio-cultural life of the Manipuris. The new rulers needed a pawn in order to establish a firm grip and consolidate their own position in the administration of the land and therefore supported Churachand, the eight year old boy-king of Manipur. The Britishers dismantled *Shri Shri Govindaji Natyashala*, an institution where young artists were trained in the field of traditional melas and other performing arts. The institution was also known as *Jagoi Sabi Loishang*⁷. It used to receive royal patronage during the kings' rule and it played a vital role in the social make-up of Manipur as a centre for learning and entertaining the local populace. It was instrumental in the process of religious propaganda of the *Vaishnavites*. The ban imposed by the British on this institution was one of the steps in breaking the hold of the pre-existing powers that ruled before in Manipur. The devotional Leelas based on religious themes performed in various permanent *Mandap*⁸ or erected *Mandaps* in many localities of the valley of Manipur had suffered a setback due to the reformative attitude of the colonial rulers. Only a handful of traditional Vaishnavite religious leelas like *Ras Leelas*, *Gostha Leela* were occasionally performed at the Mandap of Shri Shri Govindaji Temple. *Goura Leela* (on the life of Gouranga) and *Parva Leelas*⁹ had no parts to undergo any sort of reformative actions. Open and direct protest to the ruling class was an impossible task for the subjugated class of the common people. Satire was thereby adopted and gained popularity in the form of amusing *phagi leela* (comic enactment) and *Thok leela* (pretentious plays having a loose plot) performances

⁷ Academy of dance.

⁸ Community halls.

⁹ Leelas covering chapters of epic Mahabharat viz. Sabha Parvas, Kijak Parva, Virat Parva etc

which were masquerades of protest carried out by indulging in an uncanny imitation of the British rulers and royal courtiers. These performances were very well received by the general populace living in harrowing conditions.

In these forms of amusement and other forms like those of songs, dances and ballad singing (*Khongjom Parva*) carried the undercurrent of protest, patriotism and longing for freedom. From the folds of these myriad forms, Moirang Parva as a complete Leela theatre form with its multilayered expressive dimensions emerged separately and yet intrinsically intertwined with the other forms of *leela* theatre.

The name Moirang Parva itself is also attributed to the fact that the performance of the *sabha parvas* in the Royal Palace Grounds¹⁰ were similar in form with that of *Moirang parva*. The Parva leelas on the chapters of Mahabharat emerged with less religious tone not so different from the model of the religious traditional *Vaishnavite mandap leelas*. These two musical forms are the possible models of Moirang Parva and more intimately the Parva leelas. Hence emerged the name '*Moirang Parva*', Chapters of Moirang.

A view of Moirang Parva in Time.

Moirangparva was first performed sometime around 1900 A.D. In the pre-British period¹¹ almost all the plays were more or less connected with religious matters with the exception of the comic skits¹². The royal court patronized these plays affluently, for

¹⁰ Royal Palace, Imphal, Manipur.

¹¹ Manipur was occupied by the British in the year 1891.

¹² Phagee-leela(in Manipuri), a variant of the Jatra.

example, plays like *Manipuri Ras*, *Sansenba*, *Gouraleela*, etc were some prominent and successful ones. The defeat of Manipur by the British Colonial army in 1891 heightened the patriotic fervor felt by the Meiteis and as a result of it, an intense search for the use of the mother-tongue, stories about the traditions and cultural roots was made by the younger generation. And Moirangparva was one of the most significant productions that emerged in this period.

Thus one of the plays '*Loikum-Loika*' (the exile and return from exile), was staged for the first time in an open ground at Wahengbam Leikai¹³. It was a sort of an environmental play where the natural environment was used as the entire backdrop and stage-space for the play. The Palanquin, horses and a number of other Royal paraphernalia were used in this play. Royal dresses and bales of traditional Moirang costumes were also much in use. Thoibi, the heroine of the play, on her return from exile rode a real horse in the play itself. She used to come riding in from Kangabam Leikai¹⁴ which metaphorically represented her land of exile, Kabaw.

The play was a real success and it carried on for quite sometime. The echo of its appreciation reverberated in the town of Imphal, much to the chagrin of the authorities in the royal court. Churachand Singh, the King of Manipur, was a minor at this time and the real administration of the State was in the hands of the British. The advisors of the minor King were much disturbed to find the birth of an independent play/theatrical troupe of artistes very much free from the confines of the Royal patronage. Picking up a Moirang

¹³ A locality at the heart of Imphal, on the western side of Nambul river

¹⁴ A neighboring locality.

story for a play and the use of royal paraphernalia were taken as an act of effrontery in the face the royal authority. One of the actors, Rajkumar Sanajaoba who played the role of Khamba in this play happened to be a great grandson of *Maharaj Madhuchandra*.¹⁵. The royal dresses, royal umbrellas and other items which were in his possessions were brought forth and used in the play. Therefore, the royal authority banned this play on the pretext that the performers of the play were responsible for the disruption of the 'Divine Sanctum' of the *Lord Thangjing*. After the implementation of this ban, this play was not seen for quite a long time.

(Bhadra Singh, one of the pioneering painters of Manipur has painted many scenes of Moirangparva in the first decade after 1900 A.D. Perhaps he was influenced by the play Moirangparva over and above his acquaintance with the entire story from the ballads sung by the *Pena minstrels*).

It was in the year 1902 that the first proscenium play was born in Manipur. The play "*Pravas Milan*" was staged at the *Purana Rajbari*¹⁶. From 1903 A.D. onwards the Bamancharan Bandhav Natyashala which later became Friends Union Theatre staged many Bengali plays. Bamancharan Bandhav Natyashala was the first theatre with a proper proscenium stage in Manipur. Later the Education Department. of Manipur took a keen interest in producing proscenium plays every year, especially during the Saraswati Pujahs and it had advanced considerably from 1902 A.D. onwards right upto

¹⁵ An ancient king of the Meiteis.

¹⁶ Royal palace grounds, Imphal

the 1930's.

It was during this period that shumangleela, the open Courtyard theatre came up with the first full length play –*Harishchandra* in the year 1918. Before this shumangleela, was only a comic-skit conducted by a group of professional jesters, which followed the footsteps of Kharibam Laishuba and Abujamba Shaiton, the popular comedians of Sir Chandrakirti Singh's Royal court.¹⁷ After *Harishchandra* came *Sabitri-Satyaban* and *Subhatta Shurihuranba* etc. and after this came the modern day version of *Moirangparva* as we know it today.

The play *Moirangparva* as we know it today became popular sometime after the year 1920. It was known at first as *Shamu-Khongyetpa*¹⁸ which enthralled the audience of that time. This play was put up by a troupe from Kongpal, a local area in the east of Imphal¹⁹ town.

Kshetri Kanhai was the chief organizer and he is remembered as Thonglen, who bears the mantle of the first warrior of the play. He was a friend and follower of Mayambung Macha, king Churachand's elder brother. Kshetri Kanhai continually pestered him with his unrelenting request for lifting the ban imposed upon the *Moirangparva*. At the insistence of Mayambung Macha, king Churachand had to give in and lifted the ban and a royal license was given to the troupes²⁰ to enact and production of the play once again. Kshetri Kanhai brought forth the play "*Shamu-Khongyetpa*".

¹⁷ . (1851-1888).

¹⁸ The 5th chapter/episode in the entire story.

¹⁹ Capital of Manipur.

²⁰ The troupe from Kongpal.

This went on to become a very popular and successful play and after about a year later from the date of its first production, another troupe of artistes enacted another play which depicted the “**Leilangba**²¹” episode of the Moirangparva. These two troupes, the first one is known as Kongpal’s Moirangparva or the old Moirangparva troupe and the latter known as Keisampat’s Moirangparva or the new Moirangparva troupe and both produced different successful plays in a mutually competitive way. The Kongpal troupe was taught by a famous *pena minstrel* – widely acclaimed and renowned Chungkham Manik and the other troupe by another equally famous troubadour-Huiningsumbam Ningthou. It was not a case of these minstrels being good playwrights and directors but the fact that the entire play being a vivid visual depiction of the ballads sung by them, the troupes of artistes had to learn the craft of singing, delivering dialogues and discoursing from these masters of the oral tradition, which happened to be the only form of narrative that was wholly intact and dependable.

Characteristics of Moirang Parva:

A sharp distinction can be made between the Moirang Parva leela and the aforementioned two traditional mandap theatre forms particularly in the light of the indigenous and secular treatment of the chapters of Moirang Parva and its usage of outdoor performing space for staging shows. Mandap Leelas followed rules of Shastriya Natya as propounded by Bharat Mani in his Natyashastra. Moirang parva also followed certain rules of the shastra in a shortened form. The concept of *Purvaranga*, *Nandi* and

²¹ The 2nd chapter –*offering of flowers*

Sabhabandana at the beginning and the *antaranga* at the end were followed in Moirang parva also as *Sheihou (kwaj)*, *Phamsak (Beitha)* and *Laothokpa (Subhabandana)*²² at the beginning and *Sheiroi* at the end of each play. An invocation song to Lord Thangjing²³(Chief deity of Moirang) with a *dholak* and *kartal (kwai)* followed by another rendered in a sitting position (Beitha) praising the motherland, and finally the leader of the group's or a senior actor's announcement about the play usually constitutes the prologue. Then the main body of the play proceeded. At the end of the play, the *sheiroi* or *Mikon thagon* is sung with *dholak* and *kartal* once again. The productions were laden with a vividly visible presence of many regional traits such as distinctive styles of dress, headgear, ornaments, make up, as well as songs, dances gestures and language(dialects) typical of the region. The performance of the Moirang Parva acts were marked and shaped by the extensive usage of music and dance, poetic verbal textures, prose dialogues which are often improvised over and above with emotionally charged lyrical dialogues. The use of sets and props are sparse and kept to the bare minimum to suit its roving activity. With all its ingredients from the simplest of folk elements, the religious and semi-religious *mandap leelas*, traditional performing art forms and the ritualistic elements of *Laiharaoba*, Moirang Parva has emerged with distinctive features of its own. It will be analyzed with greater detail in the following paragraphs.

²² Refer glossary

²³ The invocation at the beginning of the play.

Titles of Moirang Parva plays:

A moirang parva play's title is given in accordance with the particular chapter of Khamba-Thoibi story which the play dealt with. For example, *Lei-langba* (floral offering) is the chapter in which Khamba (protagonist) and Nongban (antagonist) collected flowers from the high mountains and difficult terrains. The flowers thus collected are offered to Lord Thangjing (Chief deity of the land of Moirang) in obeisance. Then, the flowers are distributed to the members of royal family and noblemen gathered there at the *Lai Haraoba* ceremonial place. So the play is given the title of '*Lei-langba*'. As many chapters were featured in the story of Khamba and Thoibi, there existed a corresponding number of Moirang parva plays. Some of the early Moirang Parva plays were:

1. *Lei-langba* (floral offering)
2. *Lamjel* (the foot race): The event enacted in this play is somewhat similar to the present day cross country marathon or race, Khamba and Nongban competed against each other. Surpassing the many obstacles inflicted upon Khamba by Nongban's men during the course of the race, Khamba emerged as the undisputed champion. Assurance was given by Chinghuba (prince and father of Thoibi) for the hand of Thoibi to winner of the race.
3. *Kao-phaba* (the taming of the Bull): By the Kings' order, Khamba overpowered the wild and notorious bull at IKOP. *Nganba Ningthi Pamheiba* is the name of the

bull. Its association with Khamba-Khamnu, the orphaned children of Puremba-Ngangkhaleima, as a domesticated animal is revealed in the play.

4. *Samu khongyetpa* (tied to the elephant's foot): Chinghuba Yuvraj and Nongban hatched a plan to kill Khamba and be rid of him for good. So with some hired hands they captured Khamba and beat him black and blue. Khamba vehemently refused to agree to the Yuvraj's order that he should not interfere and object when Thoibi's hand was offered to Nongban, who was strongly favoured by Chinghuba. In the dead of the night, Khamba was tied to the foot of King's elephant and left abandoned to be trampled to death beneath the huge legs. Thoibi's timely intervention saved the ill-fated hero's life. A durbar was summoned by the protest of Pheiroijamba, son of Chaoba and fiancé of Khamnu. The durbar sentenced three months of imprisonment for both Yuvraj and Nongban and further directed Thoibi to attend to the needs of the ailing Khamba during the period, till his convalescence.
5. *Loikum-loika* (deportation and return from exile): After the conviction period, Chinghuba made plans to hand over Thoibi to Nongban yet again which the Princess disagreed to comply with. Thoibi was exiled to Tamu (in the land of present Myanmar). On the request of Senu and his wives, Chinghuba sent Tampakyum Hanjaba to bring Thoibi back to Moirang. He entrusted Nongban to receive Thoibi on her return journey. Nongban with Shoura, his attendant awaited Thoibi at Khuga Tera Kha. Thoibi escaped from Nongban riding on Karuba, the horse of Nongban and she galloped all the way to Khamba's house.

6. *Kei-phaba* (hunting the Tiger): Nongban appealed to the court that Khamba lured Thoibi away from him. The court decided for a *chainaba* (a duel to the death with spears) in order to settle the dispute finally. At the moment news came that a girl named Kunjamala was killed by a tiger at Khoirentak. The decision of the court changed from the duel fight to hunting the tiger. In the fight, Nongban was killed by the tiger. Truth triumphed in the long run. Finally there was a union of the hero and the heroine of groups and with the introduction of written text during 1970s, new titles came up namely Kabaw loi (exile at Myanmar). Thoibi's exile at Kabaw (Myanmar) in which she encountered with Sandrik Chaningkhombi, daughter of Tamu King. Chaningkhomba ill treated Thoibi like a servant. Seeing Thoibi's supernatural ability she surrendered. This parva is an extension of Loikaba parva.

Kangla wayel (royal court), the presence of Chaoba (the Minister), Thonglen (the General) and Phiroijamba (Chaoba's son and friend of Khamnu) on Khamba's side, and Yuvraj, Angom Ningthou (Nongbans' father) and Thangarakpa (another Minister) on Nongbans' side constitute this durbar scene. A durbar scene originally succeeds Samu Khongyetpa and precede Kei-phaba chapter.

Possibilities are opened to new generation groups who do Moirang Parva by mounting plays from the unexplored areas of the epic scale story.

Moirang Parva text (oral and written)

The authorship of Moirang Parva may rightfully be attributed to the master pena singers who sang episodes of the story for several nights together. It was under the patronage of King Chandrakirti that Chanamba, Babuhanjaba, Pangamba and Ngangba began performing the ritual based *Pena* (a kind of fiddle) music and were instrumental in its success as a widespread tradition bearing the form of a narrative performing art. With their creative talent, these poets', singers' added new episodes in many chapters of the story with improvised skill and ingenuity. The continuity of this tradition of pena singing of *Phamsak* (seated singing) is still maintained in the oral form, performed and taught.

Acting style

The real mode of expression in acting is the main contributing factor in the shaping of Moirang Parva as a stylized theatre form. The speech pattern in the folk vernacular language has musical quality. The beautiful emotionally charged singing dialogues are the rarest and most treasured possession of the Moirang Parva actors. Moirang Parva actors are unique as they don the mantle(s) of a singing actor, a dancing actor and at the same time an improvising actor. The makers of Moirang Parva were capable performers of various performing art forms of their time. Their expressions were always multidimensional using various elements from both folk as well as classical forms. Moirang Parva is a total theatre because of its songs, dances, movements, martial arts, narratives being told through monologues of characters, singing dialogues, elaborate costumes, symbolic use of props and sets which merge and reproduce an epic scale story. There is a strong demand for every actor to be a total actor with a high degree of

imaginative faculty. From these considerations, it is obvious that Moirang Parva is the actors' theatre, neither the playwright's nor the director's. The non availability of such total actors has been the major factor for its decline. Indigenous sources become the base of Moirang Parva acting style. It can be sharply distinguished from the *parsi* theatre influenced proscenium acting style which also exists parallel to it for more than four decades. Also the style differs slightly from that of Shumang Lila though the performing spaces are similar.

Sources of Moirang Parva

The sources of Moirang Parva are manifold which can be traced from the simplest folk forms to the most sophisticated stylized acts. Classical forms are its composite elements. A major portion of its compositional whole constitutes of materials of indigenous origin. The story is from the regional tale, *Moirang Saiyon* (Moirang Incarnation), the language is vernacular, using both simple and rustic rural language and ornamented sophisticated language spoken by the royalty. Pena Phamsak (singing with pena in sitting posture) had contributed a lot in terms of its oral magnificence. For the dance movements and other visual aspects *Lai Haraoba* (Pleasing the Gods) served a major source. Moirang Parva also takes elements from religious leela theatre's like Ras Leela, Gour Leela and other narrative performing art forms of Vaishnavite devotional themes like Natya Sangkritana, *Basak*, *Khubak Eshei* etc. But these art forms had already their identity as traditional art form of the region through the process of synthesis. So Moirang Parva's composition is multidimensional. It can be located as folk, traditional, popular, pre-modern theatre with certain touch of contemporariness.

Characters of Moirang Parva

A Moirang Parva character consists of royal members, ministers, general, nobleman of the court, attendants, servants, messengers, tribal chief, priest, priestess etc.

Major and minor characters of Moirang Parva are:

1. Puritlai - the meek and righteous King.
2. Chingkhuba - the Yuvraj, younger brother of the King, father of Thoibi.
3. Thoibi - the princess, heroine of the play.
4. Mamaton - youngest wife of Chingkhuba
5. Khamba - the poor, handsome, courageous young man, protagonist of the play.
6. Nongban - rich, nobleman, wicked, symbol of shamelessness, antagonist of the play.
7. Chaoba - the wise minister, Khamba's well wisher.
8. Thonglen - the reckless, straight forward general friend of Chaoba.
9. Shoura - servant of Nongban, comic character.
10. Muba & Muktram - servants of Chaoba and Thonglen.
11. Pheiroijam - son of Chaoba, Khamnu's fiancé.
12. Tampakyum Hanjaba - messenger.
13. Samu Hanjaba - rural elephant's care taker.

14. Salang Maiba - tribal chief.
15. Huiroi - hunting guides, muslims by caste.

Characters are limited according to the demand of the particular chapter. Sometimes one actor does more than one role.

The performing space

A shumang (court yard), a mandap, a community hall, an empty field or playground which can accommodate enough area for performing space and audience space is proper for a Moirang Parva performance. Unlike mandap leela, it has no mandali, which divides the audience and the performers. The first row of audience on all four sides is the demarcating line. There exists an intimate environment between the audience and performers. A square space having the length of one side 18 to 20 ft. is enough for the performing space. A small passage passing through the audience connects the performing space with *leela phi setpham* (dressing enclosure or green room). Entry and exits of actors are done in this passage. Sometimes it is used as performing area when actors acted while taking entry or exit. Traditionally the phi setpham is situated either at the North-West or South-West corner. At the North West corner of the performing space, a mat is set for the sutra i.e. the musicians. On this mat the dholok and kartal are placed. Some actors during their non performing sequence play the music. A few chairs are set at one side of the performing space.

Costume and dress of Moirang Parva

Costumes of Lai Haraoba (particularly Kanglei and Moirang) were models for the Moirang Parva character to a larger extent. Royal dresses of Kings, Queens, Yuvraj, ministers, guards and attendants of the time did influence Moirang Parva dress. There are also certain similarities between the costumes of gaur Leela and Moirang Parva. *Ajmer Koyet* (turban of Ajmer style) is used both in Gour Lila as well as Moirang Parva. Costumes of some of the traditional performing art forms of the region also became sources for Moirang Parva costume. In spite of all these influences, Moirang Parva costumes have their own distinctive features. Thonglen's costume is of a peculiar creation bringing visual dimension of a brave general. Elaborate costumes of the characters maintained through colour scheme, texture quality etc also enhances the stylized acting patterns. *Pheijom* (dhotis), *innaphi* (shawls), *rejam phurit saijonba* (shirt with long sleeves), *phurit saikakpa* (short sleeve) all of which were made of silk fabrics are the costumes of high status characters like the King, Yuvraj, Nongban, Chaoba, Thonglen, Thangarakpa, Angom Ningthou. Turbans (*koyet*) of various designs and colour are worn by these characters. For the commons, cotton fabrics are used. Most colourful and enterprising dresses are observable in the Thangjing Haraoba sequence of Lei-langba chapter. *Ningkham Samjen* (a kind of loin-cloth), which was indigenously developed for male dancers of Lai Haraoba ritual, is worn by Khamba, Nongban and Pheiroijamba. *Kajenglei* (ornamented head gear), *resam phurit* (velvet blouse), *phige phanek* (horizontally checked wrap around) are the dresses for Thoibi, Senu and Khamnu. Ornaments (mostly golden) such as ear rings, finger rings, bracelet, necklaces are part and parcel of the costume scheme. Cotton malas of different colours are common for both

male and female characters. In the early Moirang Parvas, costumes for female characters were provided by the sponsoring houses or the general public.

Masks and animal characters

Though stylized, the acting is not sufficient to portray the animal characters hence masks are worn by the actors. Certain animal characters appear in some of the chapters. The bull, the tiger, the elephant, the horse appear in *Kao phaba*, *Kei phaba*, *Samu Khongyetpa* and *Loi Kaba* plays. In the Khamba-Thoibi story, these animals had human qualities in which they talked and acted. Holding a head mask of a bull and covered with clothes to symbolize the animal's body, two actors enacted the bull's role. In this way the elephant is portrayed too. However a single actor wearing a tiger's head mask and tiger skin patterned cloth suiting enacts the tiger. A horse is represented by a three dimensional figure made of straw or a painted thin plank of wood. Early Moirang Parva plays and Moirang Parva performed in the 1940s and 1950s sometimes used live horses. These animal scenes are of much interest to the audience especially appealing to the children.

Music

Though Moirang Parva possesses the high quality of a musical theatre, the musical instruments used are simple and few in number. A dholak, two pairs of Kartal, a pena instrument is enough. *Kwaj*, the invocational song of Lord Thangjing and *Beitha*, the devotional song praising motherland forms the prologue of a play. At the end of the play there is a closing song of *Mikon Thagon*. As the play progresses, music as a background score is given in the sequence that involves songs and dances, entries of the

characters of Nongban, Thonglen, scenes that involve entries and actions of animals, particular stylized movements of war and fights. Music is not a compulsory accompaniment for the whole proceeding of the play. So musicians are not separately engaged in a Moirang Parva. Actors among themselves act as musicians as and when required. Sometimes a pena singer ²⁴ appears in such sequences of *Lai haraoba* but as a character. The constant musical flow of the play through a recitative mode of rendering speech carries Moirang Parva to the status of a musical play.

Set and props

Set for a Moirang Parva is very simple, three/four chairs are sufficient. The chairs are set at one side of the rectangular performing space. In a durbar scene, these chairs are used as seats for the King, Yuvraj, Chaoba, Thonglen, Angom Ningthou etc. Sometimes a chair is symbolized as a tree on which Shoura, the servant of Nongban, stands on looking around to see Thoibi returning from exile. A mat is set at the North West corner where the Beitha is sung and also musical instruments are placed. The sets are also provided by the sponsor of the show. Properties are also as simple as the sets. Swords, spears, round shields, canopy (umbrella) walking sticks and few animal masks form the props. Mukhtram's wavy stick suits his comic character. A walking stick with carving of an animal head improvises as the horse of Nongban in the Nongban Shoura-Thoibi sequence of Loi Kaba chapter. These simple sets and props are appropriate for the gipsy like nature of Moirang Parva performing group as they are continuously on the move in the course of

²⁴ Folk singer/minstrel

their play being staged for an entire season . A handkerchief is the compulsory hand prop of characters that holds swords such as generals and ministers.

Lighting

Oil/kerosene lamps such as half lamps and petromax were used for illuminating for both performing and audience spaces during the early plays. Wick lamps such as a lantern and *podons*²⁵ were used for green rooms. Availability of electricity and generating sets have replaced the lamps in the later plays. However modern day light systems are still nowhere in the picture of the Moirang Parva performances, even spotlights are not used. The troupe relies on the availability of sufficient number of light bulbs/tubelights.

Mode of conveyance

Performers covered distances on foot to put up the shows during 1920s and 1930s. Even the journey took 2/3 days carrying their package of costumes, props and musical instruments. With the introduction of bicycle in Manipur during 1940s, some performers started using bicycles and mode of conveyance. Even two artistes shared one bicycle loading their packages on the carrier at the back of the bicycle. One rode the bicycle while the other seated on the frame. Sometimes bullock carts were used for conveyance. If the performance was given at a very far off village, the artistes stayed the night at the place of performance. Modern mode of transportation by vehicles/buses was unknown to the first and second generation of Moirang Parva artistes.

²⁵ (simple wick lamps without glass chimneys)

TH-16028



Make up

Face powder, zinc oxide, hair oils and sindur were the common items for makeup. Black shoots of lamps fixed with oil were applied for eye brow and eye lash make up. The hair for female characters was done by fixing one or two *samandongs*²⁶. Fibres of jute dyed with black colour were also used for both male and female characters. All the characters do not follow stylized make up, but make up of comic characters and particularly Thonglen was exaggerated. Moustaches were either painted or applied. Cosmetic items had replaced the conventional ones in the later plays.

Aesthetics of Moirang Parva

Aesthetic values are abundantly distributed in all aspects of a Moirang Parva performance. It has incorporated almost all elements from the religious pre-Hindu ritualistic performances, Vaishnavite Hindu leela theatres, performing art forms of indigenous origin and synthesized nature, martial arts etc. These elements when expressed in the performative circumstances of Moirang Parva started acquiring a new life through the art of Moirang Parva. Even when Thonglen is shouting a war cry with the loud music of dhulok and kartal, yet his sword movement is delicate and beautiful. The shouting is rhythmical, yet the spirit of fierceness is still there. Nongban's entry with extended rhythmic body movement has a sense of beauty and at the same time carries the abstract quality of pride, creation of beauty and communicating aesthetic pleasure to the audience is the primary concern of a Moirang Parva performance. Thoibi is regarded as a

²⁶ (arranged turf of women hair)

symbol of beauty and ideal love. This finds expression in the beautifully arranged costume and acting style.

There is a beauty in poor Khamnu's sadness, a profound beauty of the transcendental world, mournful beauty. Richness of aesthetics is the primary quality of Moirang Parva.

The play must be the story of Khamba and Thoibi. There are numerous stories of the land of Moirang but none of them is known as Moirangparva as it denotes only the story of Khamba and Thoibi.

The language of the play is a combination of the archaic and modern Manipuri²⁷ which is literary as well as rhythmic in its expression. The dialogues are rendered in a highly stylized manner. Recitation is a main element in the delivering of speech, dialogues are said with appropriate rhythmic intonations. Especially in the case of emotionally charged aspects of the dialogues, they are rendered in the form of a song which is sung in a particular style. There are three formats of song narratives- **Singkuplong, Haisak and Chumsak .**

- Singkuplong: a note for sentimental expression
- Haisak: a note for expression of love and happiness
- Chumsak: a note for expressing a general mood

²⁷ Its called *Meiteilon* too.

No other style of singing is utilized in Moirangparva apart from these three formats.

There is an extensive usage of metaphors and imageries in the entire play. Each and every sentence uttered is richly diverse with its allegorical allusions and symbolic speech patterns. The overall effect that is produced is one filled with mysticism and a sense of wonderment.

Songs, dances, mime, martial arts, poses and clowning are essential elements of the play. These elements are highly stylized with artistic perfection. In fact, it may be assumed that stylization becomes the very matrix of the Moirangparva performance. Even the movements of the body are extremely delicate and precise, movements of the hand, feet and body are synchronized in tandem with the rhythm of speech.

The clown is an important element of the play. Shoura²⁸, the servant of Nongban²⁹, the antagonist is the main clown of Moirangparva. He uses Nongban's brazenness as the perfect foil for his ridicules and frivolous comments from time to time. His antics and gestures are laden with mockery and stupidity at the same time and thereby draw more laughter from the crowd. Torro, the sister of Nongban is another clownish character. There are a few more secondary clown characters in the play, Muba, Muktram and Murari, who are the servants of Thonglen, the fierce warrior and lastly, Chaoba, the artful minister.

Mimes are artistically used in the actions of the play. Martial Arts which is an important element in the life of the Meiteis are used with aesthetic elegance to heighten

²⁸ A character in the play.

²⁹ Another character.

the performance of the play as a whole. The songs, dances, mimes and recitations are all balanced to enhance the actions involved. Most of the characters sing and as a result of this particular trend, Moirangparva can be classified as a musical play too. The roles of women are played by the male artistes themselves who speak and sing in a falsetto voice.

The story.

The tale of Moirang Parva:

The immortal love of Khamba and Thoibi as found in the legends of Moirang is the story of Moirang Parva. The two are believed to be the incarnation of God Nongpok Ningthou and Goddess Panthoibi. These Saiyons (incarnation) existed in nine orders and Khamba-Thoibi Saiyon stood at the seventh order. The nine Moirang Saiyons in their order of historical location are:

1. Henjunaha-Lairoulembi
2. Samba Langanba- Khamnung Yaidingkonu
3. Pungdinghanba-Phisaheibi
4. Nganba-Sangloulembi
5. Khoyon Haoba-Yaithingkonu
6. Akongjamba-Phouwoibi

7. Khamba-Thoibi
8. Kadeng Thangjahanba-Tonu Laijinglembi
9. Khongjomba-Pidongnu

During King Chandrakirti's reign (1850-1886) the singing of Khamba-Thoibi story by Pena singers as a narrative performing art was introduced. A master pena singer should singlehandedly sing, narrate, even exchange dialogues among characters through his story telling medium with imaginative input and improvisational skill. Playing the pena instrument he can describe a single chapter of the story for several nights together. There are several episodes or chapters in the Khamba-Thoibi story. A Moirang Parva performance centers on a particular chapter.

The story is a love story between Khamba, a poor orphan and Thoibi, a princess of Moirang. The protagonist of the play, Khamba, a poor orphan, though of noble descent is brought up to manhood by his elder sister, Khamnu who is only a few years older to him, by her own labour. Thoibi fell in love with Khamba the moment she set her eyes on him when he was going out from home in search of work to help his sister and lighten her burden. Nongban, the antagonist is a Nobleman in the court and an adherent of Chinghuba, Thoibi's father, the younger brother of the King. Nongban, who is already a married man with seven wives covets Thoibi to be his wife.

Nongban and Chinghuba plot and plan to destroy Khamba. However two powerful nobles of the court, Thongleng a fierce warrior, and Chaoba, a crafty minister support Khamba. Thus the conflict develops between Khamba on the one hand and Nongban on

the other, revolving around Thoibi. Many a time Nongban tries to destroy Khamba and eliminate him from his path by adopting a number of stratagems and Khamba suffers to the extreme.

Chinghuba asks his daughter Thoibi to be Nongban's wife but she flatly refuses the offer owing to which an enraged Chinghuba banishes Thoibi to Kabaw Valley. After the passage of some time he feels remorse and repents his rash decision and asks Naijahanba, the head of the royal attendants to bring her back. In the meanwhile, he asks Nongban to wait for her in Kumbi³⁰ on the way of her return from exile and take her back to his place. There Nongban eagerly waited for Thoibi by the side of a big *tera* tree. On seeing Nongban, Thoibi feigned illness, a disease that she had suffered in the land of Kabaw and asks Nongban for a horse to ride on her own as that would help her recuperate. Nongban gave her his own black coloured horse and Thoibi, while pretending to take a brisk trot rode away hurriedly and reaches Khamba's place. Khamba stopped the horse at his gate and welcomes Thoibi and took her home.

Nongban complained to the king's court that Khamba had kidnapped Thoibi on her return from exile. When he was summoned and asked to explain the matter clearly in the court, Khamba stated that Thoibi had come to his place of her own accord, without being accosted or influenced by him on any account. In order to determine the truth of the matter in accordance with the divine laws, they ³¹were asked to have a dwell with the spear. When these proceedings were at hand in the court, an old man from Phubala³²

³⁰ A place near Moirang

³¹ Khamba and Nongban.

³² Village on the banks of Loktak lake, a province of Moirang

brought grave news about the killing of a village girl by a tiger. In order to settle the dispute, Khamba and Nongban have been asked to kill the tiger instead of dueling each other. In the attempt to kill or capture the tiger, Nongban was killed by the Tiger and at last Khamba captures the tiger. Eventually he proves victorious and thus married his sweetheart, Thoibi.

And the chapters of the story of Khamba and Thoibi, such as Leilangba(offering of flowers to the lord Thangjing); Shamu-Khongyetpa(binding of Khamba on the legs of the elephant by Nongban and Chingkhuba in their attempt to kill him); Kao Phaba(catching of the bull by Khamba as a result of yet another conniving plot of Nongban), etc, become completely independent episodes which have been represented in various forms and narratives, canvassing different genres and stylistics, as Dramatic production, Poetic verses written in epic proportions, Novels and Novellas and other modes of oral narratives including Taped audio performances and Pena performances too.

Beginning of the play.

A play begins with an invocation song sung by the group after a complete dressing and necessary make-up, when the party is ready to begin the performance, the leader of the troupe shouts in the dressing room “Let us sing the praises of our Lord”. Then the group answers “ Let us sing”. The sound of the *dhollak*³³ goes “...ta ta tai dhan—khitai tai dhan...” accompanying the invocation song. The song is *Jaya Radhe Jaya Krishna, Shri Gopala, Shri Govinda...* after the song the party bows to the audience and goes into the dressing room except for two/three singers who remain seated at the

³³ Manipuri percussion instrument

northern side of the stage. They sing another song which is known as the *Saraswati Vandana*. The lines run as follows:-

Lengsinbirak-u Saraswati Ima Ibema

Napari eikhoi Tarana

Khut-lonnaduna khurumjari

Leiyang-thakta tongbiyu

Heirang katchari, leirang katchari

Kanbiyu Ima

Hanna-hanna khurumjari.

The English rendition is as follows:-

Welcome O! Mother Saraswati

Ten of your sons

Bow to thee with folded palms

Please be seated on our vocal chords

We offer thee fruits and flowers,

Save us Mother

We bow to thee time and again.

After this song the play starts. The action of the play starts as an actor comes out from the dressing room to the stage or the performance place.

In the later stages of *Moirangparva*, an attempt was made to make all the dialogues and songs to be truly Manipuri in its purest form. Therefore all the sanskritised words such as “ *Charan, Bhakti* “ etc., as well as other Brajaboli and Bengali songs were deleted. Pure Manipuri words and songs were used instead. Thus

the announcement of the beginning of the play also changed considerably, it went like this...

Moirang ichin-inaosa Thangjing gi Mingkhei shallasi.

(O! Brethren of Moirang, let us sing praises of Lord Thangjing)

Then the chorus shouts “let us sing”, and then the play begins.

In the early days, there were originally five plays of the Moirangparva, namely-

- 1. Shamu-Khongyetpa
- 2. Lei-Langba
- 3. Kao-Phaba
- 4. Loikum-Loika
- 5. Kei-Phaba

The rest of the episodes based on the other chapters of the story were added on afterwards, quite recently.

Arriving at the banks of the lake, he manages to find a boat suitable for his intentions and jumps into the boat and starts rowing it towards the direction of the girls gathered.

At this point of time, with a mysterious turn of events that can only be interpreted as an act of divine intervention, Khamba's boat is suddenly caught in a gale which directs his route to the spot where Thoibi is located. With this unexpected turn of events, the plot thickens and Thoibi makes her move. She pretends to be extremely upset and orders Senu, her aide to arrest Khamba. Then she summons Khamnu in order to get the truth out of her regarding his identity. Khamnu denies any knowledge about the young lad and suggests that they leave him alone and ignore his folly. Thoibi refuses to do so and says that she wants justice and punishment for the wrong doer. Khamnu is left with no choice but to confess the truth and plead for her brother's case. Thus Thoibi succeeds in her plan and manages to win Khamba's heart in the end.

A discussion on the description of *Kaoren The Bull*:

In order to draw a clearer picture of the entire episode of Kao-Phaba, (the catching of the Bull), I have included these two Excerpts from the work of Shri Hijam Anganghal Singh, which has been written in Manipuri verse form. These particular excerpts are depictions of the instances when Nongban dons the garb of the oracle in order to implement his sinister plans of getting rid of Khamba.

'KAOREN' is the incarnation of God (Lord THANGJING), created for a role to perform in Ibudhou Thangjing Lila. The Kaoren was owned by Khamba's parents, and it was set free after the demise of Puremba, Khamba's father. The holy Bull (Kaoren) is described as follows:

“ Red in colour; spine runs like a copper plated chain; lotus sign on forehead, birds can't fly over him; right horn is fitted with golden hook and left horn with silver hook, all the eight nails (hooves) are gold plated, name of the Kaorenis “Ngangba Ningthi Pamheiba” (beautiful red bull extraordi-nare)

As Nongban heard about the Kaoren running amok at Ikop Pat (Lake) of Khuman Kingdom, Nongban decided to hatch a plot to get Khamba eliminated so he (Nongban) can get the hand of princess Thobi. Nongban therefore, pretended to become an oracle/soothsayer (MAIBA) for a short spell to trap Khamba through God's prophecy. As Nongban saw approaching his residence – prayer hall – he began prophesying:

*Hai Hai Taibang apangba
Kumsi Kumdi Kumjadi,
Lamja oiba nangna,
Kaoren Sanbu Faraga,
Khoyum Eingonda Sharen Challab,
Napham Phamthon kahange,
Nungai Marang Kaihange,
Nattrabadi Taibang Punshi,
Nauna Khamhangani Hai,*

*Tadaba tajou hai.
Khoyum Eigi-Pao taraga,
Tana tana thouoi ushittana,
Taibang ithou toudrabadi,
Leipak ningthou awaba tagani,
Om hum haya he”*

Gist in English

(Hi gullible man, orphan Khamba,
If you catch Kaoren bull this year
And offer it to Me,(GOD),
You will prosper,
Lest you should die young
Listen, if you ignore My desire,
The Kingdom will suffer)

To fulfill his sinister design, Nongban, in white dress, twig put in ear, dancing like someone spell bound, went to Royal court, and tried to impress the King with prophecy:

*“ Eningthou, Kege ingna – chikna leinaba,
Nabudhou Thangjingna,
Kege Nongban Eingonda,
Kumsi Kumjadi,
Lamlen Torbung lamjaodagi,
Phaba Yarousha amadi,
Loktak tage phaba- lamlei nga amatta katlaganu;*

*Epok soida chak tariba,
Mareng popu thongdaba,
Manaam cheibul thadaba,
Machu ngangba mayanglen,
Makhong mari panba,
Maraibak thambal saba,
Kaorendu pharaga,
Thangjing cingonda katlabadi,
Moirang ngahong chak hongna,
Nungai yaiphana pan-hange,
Awat-apa leihalloi,
Nabungo Ningthouda pao-damjou
Chingu mapao pirakle,
Handak phaga- douriba Kao ashi,
Miyam changduna
Masada thang to thaduna,
Cheipham naiba yade;
Aduga, amatta pokpa nupana phagadaban
Masadagi ee marik amatta,
Leimaithakta tahanphade,"*

Gist in English

(O King, it is lord Thamgjing's prophecy/desire that to maintain peace and tranquility, this year any animal hunted from Torbung Lamjao(forest) or fish from Loktak should not be offered to Me; if the Kaoren grazing at Ikop Soi(Lake) – untamed, red in colour, spine runs like copper plated thread, with lotus sign on forehead – is offered alive to Me,

Moirang will prosper, The Kaoren is not to be caught by the crowd but only by a person born alone, without causing any injury or bloodshed”

A brief note on the plays.

The three plays which constitute the next chapter are *Een-chingba*(Casting the Fish-net), *Kao-Phaba*(The Taming of the Bull) and *Thoibi Loi-kaba*(Thoibi’s return from exile). These plays are three different chapters in the story of Khamba and Thoibi. Each one is different from the other in many elements. The variance in tone and humour is significantly portrayed by the mood of each play. The first play, *Een-chingba* is a playful and romantic rendition of the beginning of the love affair between the two main characters, Khamba and Thoibi. The mood in the play is light with the idyllic set-up of a holiday like event as background. The play entitled *Kao-Phaba* offers a contrasting nature altogether. Deeply spiritual and a serious plot sets it apart from the others. In this play, filial bonds which are extremely significant in the Manipuri society till date can be glimpsed. Beliefs and spiritual allusions are integrated into the narrative as the beginning of the play sets the story in motion with the appearance of the Lord Thangjing and the goddess Panthoibi. There is an allegorical element operating within the structure of the play and the character of the Kaoren(bull) symbolizes it.

Thoibi Loi-Kaba is the third and final play, with a short act entitled Waiting for Thoibi at Southern Tera-Khuga³⁴ included as a prelude to the main play. This play is a comic and satiric enactment of the part of the Khamba-Thoibi story where Thoibi returns

³⁴ A village near Moirang.

from Kabaw where she was exiled for a period of three months. Witty dialogues and slapstick histrionics make this play humorous and enjoyable. Here the comic element of shumang leela is reflected in the role of *Shoura*, the servant of *Angom Nongban*.

These three plays of Moirang Parva are just a small portion of an epic story. However they have a key role in the entire narrative and reflect many aspects and styles of the dramatic genre. They manage to capture the nuances of a dramatic rendition of the story too. These plays provide valuable insights about the Manipuri society of the past as well as the present.

Chapter 3.

The Three Plays.

Een Chingba

(Casting the fish-net)

Act I

Dusk has set in, the town Crier doles out a relentless stream of beats with his Dholok (drum) making an announcement as he moves in circles all over the stage.

Leikai-lakpa³⁵: All the daughters of Kege³⁶ shall head towards the Loktak lake on the

Morrow to net some fish and leading them is none other than the royal

Princess, beloved daughter Thoibi. It has been decreed that no man shall

enter the premises of the lake whilst the task of fishing is in progress.

If anyone of them are out there already, call them back, heed this warning

for it is a Royal Command.

If any male will disobey this command, he will be trussed up and

³⁵ The town-crier.

³⁶ Young women were referred to as daughters of the province they lived in.

drowned beneath the depths of the Loktak lake.

Or else the offender will be exiled to Sugnu³⁷ for his folly.

If you have not heard it, hear it now!

If you did not know about it, know it now!

Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

(*exit Leikai-lakpa*)

Khamnu: Tolen³⁸ can you hear me, come out here now.

Khamba: What has come up now, sister of mine?

Khamnu: All the women of Moirang are going to Loktak lake to cast our *Eens*³⁹

and try our luck in the fishing event today and I will take part in it too.

In case you got hungry when I'm away, sister has left some fish and rice

for you in the *ngarubak*⁴⁰. You can eat that and don't you go out

anywhere.

And keep a close watch over the house, alright.

³⁷ A remote and savage area in Manipur.

³⁸ Little brother, an endearing term used to address younger brothers by their sister.

³⁹ A fishnet used by people of Manipur.

⁴⁰ Refer glossary. A basket.

Khamba: You take your leave now sister, do not fret for this little brother of yours is perfectly capable of taking care of himself as well as the household, even in your absence.

Khamnu: You always say that whenever I leave you alone and when I'm not here you end up doing just the opposite. Do you know how anxious I feel when you mingle with the townsfolk of the land of Kege.

It is better to lie low for a while, have a little patience my little Prince.⁴¹

Khamba: I will not disobey you or your orders, O sister of mine.

Khamnu: Good, good child, let me take my leave then.

(Khamnu and Khamba exit)

Act II

Led by Thoibi, all the women of Moirang are walking with a song in their hearts and on their lips, heads covered with scarves, tung-gon(bamboo baskets) tied to their waist, long(spear) in their hands, some of them carry the poles used for supporting the nets.

⁴¹ Khamba and Khamnu are poor and prefer to remain isolated so that none may know about their plight.

(chorus)

O dearest friends of mine,

Treading the waters of Loktak,

Come forth, let's catch some fish

And celebrate with a grand feast.

We shall trail the fish' tail

See who fills the tung-gon fast

Look for the perfect spot to go

And lay all our eens in a row.

(all of them leave still singing. Khamba enters.)

Khamba: Where on earth did she keep the fish for me? I have searched every nook
corner, and its not there in the basket either. With the onset of mid-day
my hunger is getting ravenous too. If there was a wee piece of fish, it
would have been a tasty affair, this meal of mine. No matter where I
search, I can never find it. Could it be that a mischievous sprite whisked
it away from right under my nose?

Now that I cannot find it, I might as well go and meet my sister. I will

ask her to spare some of her catch for me and come back here and have my meal peacefully.

Oh! And I will get an opportunity to see all those girls and women attending to their *eens* as well. And to catch a glimpse of the Princess Thoibi in the act of maneuvering her *een* will be a wonderful sight indeed.

Yes, I will go there now.

(exit Khamba)

Act III

Many women come in, some casting their nets, others arranging and preparing their nets to do so. Everyone chatters and laugh in an animated manner.)

Thoibi: My dear Senu, I shall cast my net here at this end of Thamankhong⁴².

Senu: *sings aloud*

Aah...like a mirror is the Loktak,

⁴² The place where the ill-fated romance begins. The act of casting a net becomes symbolic too as parallel can be drawn with Thoibi's plot to get Khamba's attention.

At land's end of Thamankhong,
At the foothills of Mount Sendra
Where meets the water and the land
Her ladyship Thadoi Thoibi's,
Beautiful legs are clenched over
The pole of the Een, heaving
Like the lotus flower blooming...

(voice fades gently)

At this moment, Khamba enters, looks around.

Khamba: The banks of Loktak lake are filled with boats of all shapes and sizes.
I will just grab one of them and paddle away. Eh! This one has an oar too,
this is an opportune moment now. I will take this one then.

Acts like he's getting into the boat and paddles away.

I can glean a lengthy and clear path between these marshlands⁴³. I shall
take this route now.

A strong gust of wind suddenly comes, the boat seems to sway out of control.

⁴³ The area around loktak is marshy.

Gosh! The wind is blowing oh so fast, I can no longer maneuver the boat anymore. The God of the winds has set me adrift on a course of which I have no clue whatsoever. What kind of a life incarnate is this? Am I bound wander endlessly like this?⁴⁴

The boat careens out of control in the gale and dashes towards the spot where Thoibi has cast her nets, into the framework of her fishing net(hang-gel). The frame breaks into pieces.

Thoibi: *(surprised and shocked)*

Oh dear! Oh mother! What on earth is this, right on top of my Een.

It would seem like no other possible route ever existed for your boat.

Khamba: It was not my fault. I had no other option at all.

Thoibi: Hey Senu, where are you? come here and catch hold of this

Miscreant and his boat.

The Loktak lake is such a vast expanse and here you are as if the

entire area was concentrated at this very spot. This seems to be a

deliberate act on his part, with his chauvinistic male ego playing

⁴⁴ An element of divine intervention.

its role.

Khamba: It is not so, I was helpless and it was inevitable.

Thoibi: Haven't you heard the name of Thoibi, daughter of the Prince
Chinghuba?

Khamba: Not just the name, I am familiar with her person too.

Thoibi: It was heralded that today is the day when the Loktak lake is strictly
off limits to all men. Are you sure you did not hear about it?

Khamba: I did not hear such a thing.

Thoibi: And why didn't you hear?

Khamba: I was out trying to earn a square meal for the day.

Thoibi: And what about this broken frame of my Een?

Khamba: I will fix it.

Thoibi: *(to Senu)*

Go Senu, go and tell my friend⁴⁵ to come right now.

I'm truly agitated.

⁴⁵ Khamnu.

Senu: Ho...O..my dear friend, please come over here.

Khamnu comes near Thoibi, brother and sister are both confused and appear quite uncomfortable.

Thoibi: *(addresses Khamnu)*

My friend, it is futile for me. I haven't caught any sort of fish and my Een has a broken frame. I will not stay any longer. I'm ashamed of myself for I have failed miserably in my task. All of you can still go on with your work, as for me, I feel bitter and completely dejected.

(addresses Senu)

Senu, what is the matter with you? I asked you to capture this lad. He dared to mock us assuming that we are weaker and inferior in comparison to men.

Senu tries to truss up Khamba's hands with a rope, and then notices the chain around his neck and looks closely at the turban wrapped around his head. Senu moves to Thoibi's side and whispers animatedly in her ears.

Senu: The golden chain which adorns his neck, the scarf that he uses to wrap around his head, all these items are those which you gave the poor and

needy Khamnu.⁴⁶

Thoibi: *(secretively)*

Oh yes, it is. You are right my friend.

(addressing Khamnu)

Daughter of Moirang, my dear friend, this young lad who is waiting,
do you recognize him?

Khamnu: *(in a surprised tone)*

I haven't got the faintest idea of who he might be, my Lady.

Thoibi: My needy friend hailing from the land of Kege, do you still have
the gold chain and the silken shawl which I gave you some time back?

Khamnu: I still have them, my lady.

Thoibi: Well, don't lose it my friend. Keep it with care alright. I shall
return now for I have to take this other matter to the court of the King
today.

Are you staying back?

I don't intend to give in so passively anymore.

⁴⁶ In an earlier episode, Thoibi gifted many items to Khamnu.

Khamnu: *(scared, with tears in her eyes)*

Please don't, my Lady. This foolish lad of Moirang, helpless and destitute, happens to be my one and only brother. Spare him the punishment to be doled out by the court of law in Kege-Moirang. Please forgive this poor soul's insolent trespass as it was out of ignorance.

(begs Thoibi, bowing to her)

Thoibi: Oh dear! My dearest friend, how was I supposed to know. So he is your brother than.

(addresses Khamba)

Gosh! You are so adorable, my dear little brother. Do not be offended, my lad. I was unaware that's why I kept on blabbering without a thought.

Khamnu: My lady, if anybody sees us now, a scandal will rock the entire land of Kege, let us just ask my younger brother to go home now.

Thoibi: Don't be alarmed my dear. When the elder sister goes fishing, it is but natural for the little brother to accompany her. It is no one's affair. Let

him stay by my side.

Stay lad, stay here. My dear friend, its better for you to go back and tend your own *een* now.

Khamnu moves away to another spot and resumes her task.

(to Khamba)

Are you listening lad, listen to what your elder sister⁴⁷.

Khamba: *(a little annoyed)*

I am not such a young lad as you make it sound like, you know.

Thoibi: *(smiles in a coy manner)*

What is the matter, lad? Your elder sister, Khamnu is a good friend of mine. Forget about our own age, don't you think that given the circumstances, you ought to address me as your elder sister too?

Khamba: Yes, you may be right, but I prefer not to be referred to as younger brother time and again.

Thoibi: Leave that aside for a while. Listen, let me tell you something that is very important. As you very well know, your sister is all alone and has

⁴⁷ Thoibi taunts Khamba treating him as a youngster. She teases him to see his reaction.

to manage the entire household on her own and this heavy burden has definitely started taking its toll on her. The time has come for you to ease your sister's burden, you have to settle down now.

All you have to do is simply choose the girl whose heart you covet the most. Point her out to me and leave the rest to me.

Now don't be shy, trust me.

Khamba: If you insist I will tell you but then you cannot go back on your word.

Can you keep it?

Thoibi: My father is the Monarch of Moirang. Choosing a suitable girl for you, my dear brother, is not a very tall task for me. Nothing is impossible if I will it, now tell me, who is this girl that you want the most?

Khamba: I long for none but one in the entire land of Kege-Moirang.

What if my yearning is beyond your grasp, no, I won't say it.

Thoibi: Tell me, lad, tell me now. Who is she?

Khamba: The only woman that I seek, the one that I have been longing for is none but this one.

*Saying so, Khamba points his finger to the crystal clear water of the Loktak lake where Thoibi's reflection is glistening on the surface.*⁴⁸

Thoibi: Oh...My...! So that's the one.

(in a shy and loving manner, she speaks)

I have been pining for an eternity just to hear your dulcet voice,

My dear one. Long has my heart been ravaged by these unfulfilled

dreams, my days of torment are finally over now.

Khamba: My lady, knowing what your heart-song is, it seems even the moon

is just a grasp away,

with your love in my soul and faith in my body,

I will stand firm now and no army of men will be able to

Budge my feet even an inch.

Thoibi: Promise me that you will lead me to the love for which we were destined.

Senu: *(a prayer)*

O Loktak, within the confines of your boundaries,

With the water of Thamankhong as sacred witness,

⁴⁸ The association of Loktak and Moirang lore is reflected in this incident.

Woman and Man both, take vows in your name,

Bless them for eternity.

(end)

Kao-Phaba

(Taming of the Bull)

ACT ONE

Venue: Thangjing Peak and with a view of Thangjing Lake

Lord Thanjing is arriving.

Thangjing. Where are you? O! Leimaren Langon Changkhoubi Ayangleima
Panthoibi, My Soulmate. My dearest, can you hear my yearning call?

Panthoibi. My Lord, my Master. Protector of mine home, my land of Kege Moirang
I am here. I wait for your orders and errands. Please guide me.

Thangjing. Hear ye, my beloved Wife! The end is near for the Crimson Bull of the
land Of the Khumans, grazing regally by the banks of the Ikop Lake.

The dice has been cast, the Act of Moirang has begun.

Its time for you, my Darling, to do my bidding. Go to the land of the
Khumans. And lend your helping hand in the taming of the Bull.

Panthoibi. My Lord, your wish is my command.

I take your leave, O! king of Gods.

Thangjing. Go! Go! My Beloved.

Perform your duties well and retrace your steps back to my arms.

I shall await your return eagerly.

[Panthoibi bows and seeks Lord Thangjing's blessing.]

Thangjing leaves, Panthoibi leaves]

ACT TWO

Venue: The path that leads to Loktak lake.

Night time. Angom Nongban swaggers around in gay abandon.

Nongban. By God! This is a wonderful time indeed.

The Lord Thangjing favours me even though the folks of the land of
Moirang absolutely detest me.

[nongban mutters away strangely in an ecstatic state, walking earnestly.]

Shoura arrives and waits for quite some time]

Shoura. Goodness gracious! God! Which evil Spirit has possessed this man.

[moves in an angry way]

Oh! Lord Shelungba.

Nongban. [*jumping in surprise*]. Who in the blazes is that?

Shoura. [*laughing gleefully*]. Hee! Hee! Your humble servant, it is me, Shoura

O! Noble Knight.

Nongban. Hey dog! Son of a slave! You nearly gave me a heart attack. I could have easily fallen into the abysmal depths of the lake and that too at this unearthly hour. Anyway, where have you been? Have you any idea how long I have been waiting for you.

Shoura. What kind of fair treatment is this, my noble knight?

At your behest, I your servant, Shoura went and delivered your invitations for the feast to be held tomorrow in honour of the '*Ningol Lakpa*'. While I was away on your orders, you, sire, abandoned me.

Nongban. How loyal this lowly servant of mine is. Hey Shoura, I am truly sorry for my grave mistake in mistreating you. Will you forgive me, my boy?

[*pauses a while...*]

Hark! Silence! Listen Shoura.

Did you hear that?

Shoura. What? Where, sire?

[*he moves quickly towards Nongban's side in a frightened manner*]

How dare a tiger cub roar in front of thee?

Is it hiding behind the bushes? I will end its miserable life.

[girths his loins, anticipating an imaginary adversary]

Nongban. What tiger cub are you blabbering about, Shoura? Didn't you hear my question properly? Is there something amiss?

Shoura. Who would not be nervous, my brave Lord?

Given the lateness of the hour, the eerie shadows of the moonless night and this strange behaviour on top of everything. Your humble servant, I, Shoura am at my Wits end, my soul gripping tightly at the very end of its tether.

Shoura's five souls and its sixth shadow included. Ku...ku...ku..!⁴⁹

[Shoura grips his fist tightly around his pocket and secretly mimes the act of eating an imaginary object]

Nongban. Shoura, how long has it been since you arrived here? Tell me, my man.

Shoura. Son of Kege Moirang, whilst you were immersed in your own soliloquy.

I arrived.

Nongban. Those poor and needy three ngayonbi⁵⁰ had a brief discussion with me.

⁴⁹ *Thawai Mi Loukhatpa* (refer glossary)

They had come from the land of Heiren Khunja.

Hey Shoura! Were you eavesdropping, listening intently to every word that I purged a few moments back? Tell me the truth, did you hear my divine musings, Shoura?

Shoura. Alas! You have been enchanted and possessed by the spirits or the Heloi(s)⁵¹. I'm sure about that. Now your servant, Shoura's decked with cold sweat at this moment for fear.

Nongban. Hai hai⁵²! Shoura, your master can feel the chills reaching out from the core of my body. Let's hurry home. My man.!

[walks away in glee yet again]

Shoura. *[with folded hands]* O! Leirak Shathouba, Loktak Lairembi, Lord Thangjing
And all you gods of my homeland Moirang Kege, I'm just an ignorant, innocent devotee of thine all. Even if you whisk away the Noble Knight Nongban, kindly spare this harmless midget, Shoura, I implore thee.

[goes away]

⁵⁰ fisherwoman

⁵¹ Wood nymphs that lure men with sor

⁵² A form of lament/distress

ACT THREE

Venue: Thongleng's courtyard

[thongleng is seated. Chaoba and Khamba arrives]

Chaoba. Maklouren⁵³, wait for a while, just loiter around. Let me awaken your Iku

Panthou⁵⁴.*[goes in]*

Hark! Just take a look at him. Neither awake, nor asleep is he, look at his beetle like eyes that go round and round, rotating and blinking and his hideous moustache that is growing all over his face. He is such a disgusting person. If I tried to awaken him from his reverie, he would curse and shout at me at his loudest, crudest and most uncouth manner. And to top it all, he is a lumbering giant in size.

...My friend, friend Thongleng...hey Thongleng.... just take a look at him.

[approaches from behind]

my friend Thongleng.

[pushes him violently, Thongleng bursts awake and instantly reaches for his sword]

⁵³ Khamba

⁵⁴ Father

Thongleng. Eee...yah! Who in the blazes is this? Who dares disturb my siesta, waging a war without a hint of a warning?

I shall slay your sour soul. I will invoke the sixty nine demons indeed.

Hai-ha!

Muba! Muktram!

Set my dogs free, unleash them, unsheathe your swords.

Chaoba. Its not a battle my friend.

Thongleng. Why on earth won't it be?

Chaoba. It is not a feud, my friend.

Thongleng. It is war indeed. Attacking when I was sleeping and least prepared.

Great warrior that I'm, now they will have to answer my Blade.

Hai...ha!

[thrusts his sword violently, Chaoba intervenes hastily]

Who is it? Who dares hold me back?

Chaoba. It is me, friend.

Thongleng. Me, who me?

Chaoba. It is me, Chaoba, your bosom buddy.

Thongleng. [*opening his eyes*] Chaoba!

Chaoba. Yes, my friend.

Thongleng. You could have been killed.

Chaoba. True indeed, my friend.

Thongleng. And how dare you hold my sword?

Chaoba. There's no battle onslaught, my dear friend. I was only trying to wake you up.

Thongleng. [*mockingly*] Eeya! Hey, Chaoba, how dare you disturb me while I was enjoying my nap. I shall plunge this very sword in your big, fat belly.

Chaoba. You can kill me later, first listen to what has been announced in the Royal Court.

Thongleng. And why on earth did you attend the Royal Court's proceedings? I bet you went there begging for favours again.

Chaoba. Miserable old fool. You don't even know heads and tails of the situation and you are not even bothering to listen properly.

Your beloved son, Nongyai Khamba⁵⁵ is going to die tomorrow.

Thongleng. What are you talking about, Chaoba? What is it that ails my beloved son,

⁵⁵ Khamba

Tompok?

Chaoba. Old Man! Khamba will be affected and die of the *Kaoren* epidemic.

Thongleng. Are you trying to make a fool of me, Chaoba? There is no such thing as 'The Kaoren' epidemic in the entire stretch of the land of Kege Moirang. I shall indeed impale you upon my sword.

Chaoba. Believe me, hey Old Man. There is such a deadly disease. Your one and only, precious Khamba who is here today will no longer be there tomorrow.

Thongleng. Are you a *Maibi*⁵⁶, simpering idiot, that you are prophesying my beloved Son, Khamba's untimely demise. How would you even know?

Chaoba. The wily Nongban has successfully imitated the act of being an Oracle(*maibi*). Seated amidst plantain leaves, *langthru* *mapop*⁵⁷ adorning his ears, he has proclaimed that unlike the earlier sacrificial creatures which were required before, this season we need to offer the unharnessed Red Bull that grazes by the grassy banks of Ikop Pat⁵⁸. The land of Kege Moirang shall flourish and prosper only when the blood of this particular Kaoren anoints the thirsty earth. Only then will the King of the land have a prosperous and fulfilling life. Thus spake Nongban seeing the plight of the people and the King, your brave son Khamba, came forward volunteering

⁵⁶ Refer glossary

⁵⁷ refer glossary.

⁵⁸ Name of a Lake

to capture the Kaoren alive at sunrise tomorrow and present it as an offering to the Lord Thangjing.

That's why I'm saying again, he's here today, no longer will he be there tomorrow, my Old friend.

Thongleng. [*laughs contemptuously*] ha! Ha! Ha! Words coming from the mouth of the Pride of the Angom clan⁵⁹ befits the very nature of their kind indeed. Tell me, my friend, what will be the Prize for the brave act capturing this mighty Kaoren?

Chaoba. The hand of the King's daughter⁶⁰ as reward for the brave man daring to take up the challenge and performs the task, this is the news that has been announced far and wide, all over the Kingdom.

Thongleng. Hey, Chaoba! Tell me, where is my beloved son Tompok? Which place has he gone to now?

Chaoba. Your son is here, my Lord.

[*enter Khamba*]

Khamba. Father, I am here at your very feet, awaiting your blessings.

[*bows to Thongleng respectfully*]

Thongleng. My son, *Sha-jou*⁶¹.

⁵⁹ Refer glossary

⁶⁰ Thoibi

Khamba. Yes, my father.

Thongleng. My son, Tompok.

Khamba. Father!

Thongleng. Are you afraid?

Khamba. Father, your son has no fear for the Kaoren.

Thongleng. Spoken like my true son that I have, my boy! Like father, like son.

You, certainly, are the true begotten fruit of my seed. Come to my arms,
your father's arms.

[Embraces Khamba]

...why should you worry at all for such an easy task about taming and capturing such a small, little bull. Just tell me if you are scared, I will do the task myself. As far as the prize being offered is concerned, you, my son, shall take it.

Chaoba. All this while, I've been trying to avert this tricky situation and the subsequent outcome of events. And he had to go and spoil it all.

Let them all go crazy, I don't care a damn anymore. I shall go home now.

[Chaoba leaves]

⁶¹ Big bodied: metaphor for Khamba

Thongleng. Go to Hell, Fatso...! Who invited you here anyway?

My son, have you seen this Kaoren that grazes by the grassy banks of the *Ikop pat*.

Khamba. My father! I have not even set eyes upon the Kaoren till now.

Thongleng. You have never ever set eyes upon this Kaoren and you volunteered to perform this mighty task, with supreme confidence in the strength of your muscular arms. Ha! Ha! Ha! Have no doubts, my beloved son, I will describe the bull vividly for you.

Ho...hey! Are you listening, Thonglengbi⁶², I have to show my son what the Kaoren looks like.

Get me some water...

My son, the Kaoren that grazes by the banks of *Ikop pat* is no ordinary bull. The colour of the bull's hide is a shade of crimson red, a streak of copper runs along its spine, adorning it and gently does it sway, the bushy tail. Its right horn is encrusted in gold, and the left one in silver. All of its eight hoofs are gold plated. This Kaoren has a name, '*Ngangba Ningthi Pamheiba*' . and now I will teach you the craft of taming the Kaoren.

Follow my lead, my son and listen to me, your father and make yourself familiar with the lore of the Kaoren.

⁶² Thongleng's wife

ACT FOUR.

Venue: Khamnu's residence.

[*evening time. Khamnu is anxiously anticipating her brother's return*]

Khamnu. The king of moirang sent his palanquin bearers for my younger brother with a message in the tow, hailing him to come at once. And yet, even with the onslaught of the evening twilight, he has not returned. I am anxious to know where he is.

My Lord Thangjing, King of all the Gods, I implore thee, let no harm come my brother's way. I pray thee.

[*prays in earnest. Khamba arrives and speaks about his task that lay ahead.*]

[*Khamnu ushers him inside the house with the intention of telling him more information about the kaoren and its history.*]

ACT FIVE

Venue: A road

[evening time. A Man with a drum, the Town-crier beats on his drum, crying out loud his message]

Messenger. Hear! Hear! People of the lands of Khuman and Moirang, all of you listen to what I am saying. Tomorrow, as the sun heralds the coming of daytime, Khamba of the Khuman clan has proclaimed that he will catch the raging bull, Kaoren which has been running wild near the banks of Ikop pat in the land of the Khumans, the Kaoren that is so strong and powerful that even the winged birds dare not fly across its domain, and upon capturing this splendid bull, with the Two Kings⁶³ and their subjects as the witness of the completion of the mighty task, he will offer it as the quintessential sacrificial animal at the altar of the Lord Thangjing.

All you citizens, young and old, may come and witness this heroic quest tomorrow. Hear-hear-hear!

[moves away still heralding his message]

⁶³ Kings of Khuman and Moirang.

ACT SIX

Venue: Land of Khuman⁶⁴.

Morning hour.

Khamnu and Thoibi convey their wishes and prayers to Khamba in order to succeed in his task, the catching of the Kaoren. After doing so, they leave quickly.

The King of Moirang, Chingba sends Khambato go and catch the Kaoren.

ACT SEVEN

Venue: Ikop pat shore.

[Khamba calls for the Bull]

Khamba. Where has this Bull gone off to, I cannot get even a glimpse of its backtrail. I shall call him by his name now.

...Hey! Hey! O! Ngangba Ningthi Kaoren⁶⁵ who grazes along the grassy banks of Ikop pat, can you hear my voice?

⁶⁴ A kingdom neighbouring Moirang.

⁶⁵ The Bull/Kaoren

I challenge thee, come and test your mettle against someone who is your equal in strength and cunning.

Come forth! Come forth! O! Kaoren.

[warning sign of an approaching bull is audible]

Oh! What is this unearthly object that is approaching me? O! King of the Gods, Lord of Ikop Pat, Serpent King⁶⁶, I never meant to offend thee with my ignorant challenges. I was simply accosting the Kaoren that resides somewhere in your vast abode.

Please forgive my unintentional acts of folly, I beg thee, my Lord God.

[Khamba bows in obeisance...than he observes carefully]

Khamba. *[murmurs]* Hee! That is not the Python Lord, Pakhangba. It is the Kaoren that I seek. Aah! How beautiful he is, this Kaoren and the description I knew matches his very noble appearance perfectly.

[Both the Bull and the God seems to be approaching together. As the bull moves in closer, Khamba brings its tethering line so that it is visible for the Kaoren to see. At this point, the bull becomes tame and calm of his own accord. Khamba moves in and ropes the Kaoren, successfully capturing it thence.

⁶⁶ Pakhangba refer to glossary

Khamnu and Thoibi also came and took blessings and prayed to the Bull.

They leave.

At this moment, Nongban roars like a tiger, obviously trying to frighten the Kaoren hoping that it would attack Khamba and gore him to death in its fear but the Bull charges towards him and he has to flee.

The cunning Nongban attempts yet again to lead the Bull away. This time pulling at the end of the tethering line, however this time, the Bull attacks him, butting his head and the injured Nongban has to run away for dear life.

Khamba once again leads the Kaoren away].

ACT EIGHT

Venue: The spectators stand, Royal section.

Lords and Nobles are seated. Nongban comes rushing in.

Nongban. My Lord, my Saviour, my King of Kings, I Nongban, your humble servant offer you my greetings and salutations.

Ningthou⁶⁷. My loyal servant, what is the matter with you? You have come in such a filthy, foul and frightened state with strange tidings on your lips.

Tell me, quick. I'm anxious to know what is it that you have to tell me?

Nongban. Your majesty, the Kaoren Bull that I, your dutiful servant, Nongban captured has been snatched away from these very hands of mine by my friend, Khamba.

I have come here seeking justice in your wise and erudite counsel.

[upon hearing Nongban's words, everyone gets puzzled, disbelief and shock particularly evident in many cases.

Khamba arrives in the meantime and upon hearing that, sets the bull free so as to prove the truth of the matter by doing the task all over again.

Nongban fails to accomplish it and Khamba easily succeeds in doing so.

All the people cheers with joy and applauds loudly. He is showered with riches. And after the festivities, he leaves with the Bull in his tow].

⁶⁷ King.

ACT NINE

Venue: Chinghuba's residence.

Mamaton and Senu are discussing about Thoibi's absence from the house.

Thoibi comes back at this time, mother and daughter converse with each other for a short while. They talk about the event of the catching of the Kaoren.

Chinghuba too comes back and narrates the events and outcome of the competition.

Thoibi and Senu are delighted and coyly ran inside.

ACT TEN

Venue: Lord Thangjing's Abode

The King, Khamba, accompanied by a Priest comes with the Bull. After anointing themselves with water sprinkled by tairen⁶⁸ leaf, the Bull is offered to Lord Thangjing.

Everybody has left. Khamba and Khamnu are left behind. Khamnu weeps...

Khamnu. Father, orphaned at a very young age, you raised the two of us, brother and sister, as your own children. All of this that is happening is by the grace of our Lord Thangjing. If we offended or hurt you in any way,

⁶⁸ A sacred Tree

please forgive us father. We have been blessed that we met you in this lifetime.

Kaoren. My darling daughter Khamnu, beloved son Nongyai⁶⁹, go back now. When the fifth day has dawned, only than shall the two of you come to me, your father.

Khamnu. Are you weeping after seeing our plight, O! Father.?

Khamba. Sister, its time we headed home.

[Khamba takes Khamnu away]

After some time elapses, the Bull starts speaking...

Kaoren. Protector of all that you survey, Guardian of the land of Kege Moirang, Lord Thangjing, will you set my soul free from my earthly body?

O! Lord Thangjing, it has been five lonesome days I've been here in your abode. Now I long to travel beyond the veil of death and seek my rightful place beside my beloved 'Pathou and Ngangkheima'⁷⁰

My beloved daughter Khamnu, my son Shajao Nongyai, my time is here now. Come near my side, my dears.

[Khamnu and Khamba are seen bringing fodder for the Kaoren]

⁶⁹ Khamba

⁷⁰ Refer to glossary

Khamnu. Father, take this fodder which I have gathered from the fields near the Loktak Pat.

Kaoren. My dear child, I will not eat it anymore. If I ate this fodder, it would only delay my final journey which I'm ready to undertake very soon.

[*sniffs at the fodder but does not eat it, gently caresses his two children*]

Hey! Lord Thangjing, my time has come. Set my spirit free. I will take rest beside my 'Pathou and Ngangkheima'. For I will have to return once more into this world, as the Keiren incarnate⁷¹. And then I will avenge the wrongs that my children had to suffer

My beloved daughter, my son, I have to go now, my time is finally here.

O! Lord Thangjing Koirenlai.

[*the Bull sits down quietly*]

(end)

⁷¹ Kaoren will reincarnate itself as Keiren in the final chapter of Moirangparva

Waiting for Thoibi at Southern Tera-Khuga.

ACT I

Nongban: Hey hey Shoura!

Shoura: Ibungo⁷² Shelungba, lord Shelungba!

Nongban: Well lad, we have arrived. Here we are now near the banks of Tera-Khuga
River in the southern part of Kumbi.⁷³

Shoura: We have reached, my Lord, we are finally here.

Nongban: Listen, don't you dare go dilly-dallying around or fiddling unnecessarily
with your clumsy hands and feet.

This place is untamed and wild, the forest is full of dangerous creatures.

Shoura: I will do thy bidding, O lord.

Nongban: Hey...hey Shoura.

Shoura: Yes, my lord, lord Shelungba...

⁷² Manipuri term commonly used for addressing a male with respect. Lord/sir

⁷³ A village near Moirang.

Nongban: Tell me, my lad, where are my loyal servants?

Koloi Yengai Kaba, Khetri Leikum Changba, Churamani, Churanthaba

Did any of these people turn up at all?

Shoura: All of them are here, my lord Shelungba.

Nongban: Where are the fruits and flowers then?

Where have you kept the oranges and the lemons I asked for?

Shoura: Here they are, I have made arrangements for all that you need and want.

Nongban: Say lad, didn't I ask you to bring bushels of fruits, baskets brimming to the top and fully laden.

Shoura: My Lord, I made sure that the baskets were fully loaded to the point of bursting.

Nongban: Hey Shoura!

Shoura: Yes, lord Shelungba...

Nongban: I, Nongban of the Angom clan⁷⁴, have come here all the way from Moirang.

Shoura: Yes...you came

⁷⁴ One of the Meitei clans.

Nongban: The Precious Daughter⁷⁵, set adrift from the direction of Kabaw land⁷⁶
is on her way. Shoura!

Shoura: Oh yes, lord Shelungba.

Nongban: This place where we are now is halfway through on her return journey.
Let us wait right here.

Shoura: Aah...yes. A sound idea indeed.
Let us wait then.

Nongban: Hey hey! Don't be such an upstart idiot now, lad.

Shoura: I won't be, my Lord.

Nongban: Hey Shoura!

Shoura: Yes, Shelungba.

Nongban: Can you see the *Tera*⁷⁷ tree that grows yonder?

Shoura: Your humble servant sees it now.

Nongban: Well, you climb straight to the top now and see if you can glimpse
any sign of someone or something approaching from the direction

⁷⁵ Thoibi

⁷⁶ Burma, there Thoibi was exiled for about three months by her own father.

⁷⁷ Refer glossary.

of Kabaw land.

Shoura: I will watch very carefully and keep my eyes peeled.

Nongban: The moment you catch a sight of Mabemma⁷⁸ ...

Shoura: The very moment I see...(when I do see)

Nongban: Let me, your lord Nongban, know immediately without any delay.

Shoura: Yes, lord Shelungba.

Nongban: Hey...hey. Go, climb up till you reach the top and I assure you this,
I will set you free from your bondage for good.

Shoura: Set me free from slavery,(excitedly) if that be the case.

O Lord Shelungba, here, watch me climb up to the heavens itself.

Nongban: Yea ..aah! till the skies?

Shoura: To the very skies...

Nongban: Where on earth do you intend to go now?

Shoura: To Heaven!

Nongban: Eh! And what will you do there, fool?

Shoura: (speaks to himself in an aside)

⁷⁸ Thoibi, glossary

Go up, procure a lightning bolt and throw

it aimed at this hateful one...DANG...DANG!

Nongban: Hey you, son of a stupid slave, climb up there you idiot.

Oh! What a buffoon. Climb up, lad, go now.

Shoura: I'm climbing, O lord Shelungba, I am.

This *tera* tree is huge indeed, and I am not exactly built as a giant.

Will I be able to climb up at all, I wonder (climbs)

My lord, she is coming, she is arriving now.

The precious daughter, Princess Thoibi is on her way here.

Nongban: Aha...hey...observe carefully, lad, are you sure?

Shoura: Mother of God! O Lord Shelungba, all the men and women accompanying

Her are wailing and lamenting some kind of a tragedy.

Nongban: Hey Shoura, why shouldn't they lament and cry? *Mamom Langlen*⁷⁹

Thoibi has a jovial nature which is infectious. And because of this when she

sought refuge in the land of *Kabaw* for three moons⁸⁰, all the citizens of

Kabaw became her loyal and devoted lot.

⁷⁹ Refer glossary

⁸⁰ Meitei people followed the lunar calendar.

So on this fateful day, when beloved Thadoi⁸¹ bids farewell to her place of exile, Kabaw and embarks on her journey for home, the land of Kege, these people are lamenting in earnest.

Shoura: (shrieks)

Aaieeee....!

Nongban: Hey Shoura, laddie, what is wrong?

Shoura: Aaieeee...!

Nongban: What is the matter Shoura?

Shoura: Aah...she is drifting away, towards the river bank, lord Shelungba!

Nongban: Hey...Shoura, don't be so hasty and jump to conclusions, do observe carefully.

Shoura: I will do so, my lord Shelungba, I will.

Gosh! O Shelungba, she arrives in such grandeur and much fanfare.

Nongban: Of course, Shoura, she obviously will.

⁸¹ Thoibi

Shoura: A fine young man comes with an earthen pot in his hands.

Nongban: They will carry one for sure, Shoura. What if she gets thirsty on the way,
After all its such a long and tiring journey.

Shoura: Eh! My Lord, here comes four more lads with the palanquin on their
shoulders.

Nongban: Surely they will carry that, Shoura...hey Shoura, get down here
this very instant, get down.

Shoura: This servant of yours shall take the plunge now.

Nongban: Hey! You will die for sure.

Shoura: Your humble servant will not die that easily.

Nongban: Son of a miserable slave, and why not so?

Shoura: I am...ummm...I'm the Lord of the lizards, that's why.

Nongban: Oh God! You stupid slave, get down here, this very instant.

Shoura: Here I come, your most loyal servant!

(jumps down suddenly)

Nongban: Hey Shoura, the beloved daughter Thoibi's beauty is past compare,
Where do I even begin?

Shoura: Beautiful, O lord Shelungba, exquisitely beautiful.

Nongban: Such a rare beauty, and I, Angom Nongban, shall be the Judge.

Shoura: Please do so, my Lord, please do so.

Nongban: She conspires with the lotus in bloom, and the stem itself is thorny.

Shoura: It is, it is.

Nongban: She is in league with the lily too, and moss gathers around its root.

Shoura: it gathers, it gathers.

Nongban: The darling Princess is beyond compare.

Shoura: Absolutely O lord Shelungba, absolutely.

Nongban: And any adornments, whatever she desires, I, Nongban shall get it.

Shoura: Excellent notion, my Lord Shelungba.

Nongban and Shoura eagerly waits for the arrival of Princess Thoibi, a faint tune being hummed is heard, they continue to wait.

Thoibi Loi Kaba

(Thoibi's return from exile)

Act I

(Tampak escorts Thoibi on her return to the land of Kege Moirang. Thoibi follows)

Tampak: Ha Ha! O Golden Princess, let this old man escort you back to your
homeland Kege, let us embark on this journey now.

Thoibi: Grand father, please lead the way.

Tampak: *(Sings)*

Come, come, O my Golden Child
Grandpa will stride first,
Precious, the next step is your turn,
Let wild elephants be there
Grandpa will pull out its tusk,
Let man-eating tigers be there,
Grandpa will break its teeth,

Come, come, O Golden Child
Grandpa will stride first,
Precious, the next step is your turn.

The path we take is long indeed
My little one will be tired and beat.

Thoibi: Grandpa, this long and tedious journey has taken its toll on me.
Will you please sing another song to soothe these tired limbs and
weary soul?

Tampak: Eh...eh! My little one yearns for a song to lift her spirits...Aha...sing I
shall, sing I shall, why won't I?
(Hums a sweet sounding tune, with no particular words)

Thoibi: Grandpa, what is that which can be seen in the horizon? Which mountain
is it that obstructs your beloved child's return to her own home?

Tampak: Ah...ah! It breaks my heart my precious, to know that when you were
away for just a short span of three moons, you have lost all memories of even
the name of the magnificent hill of Moirang.
The hill that we see afar "*Yaosurakpa Khouden Ching Khongjai*
Nganba"⁸² hill is its name, O Precious One.

Thoibi: O Hill "*Yaosurakpa Khouden Ching Khongjai Nganba Hill*"
will no longer be your name.

⁸² Khongjai – a tribe

For I, Thoibi, yearned for a glimpse of my beloved home
In this homeward bound journey
And you, O swaggering hill,
Defiantly stood in my way
Henceforth you will be known as
The Hill of the Enemy,
This I ordain, for eternity.

Tampak: Call it whatever you please, O Princess!
Not only that. If you wish, please curse it to oblivion
And may it be destroyed to nothingness.

Thoibi: Grandpa, let us proceed.

Tampak: Allright, O Princess, I will take the lead once again.

Thoibi: Grandpa!

(Just a little further, Thoibi glimpses a 'Pe'. On discovering that the 'Pe' belongs to Angom Ningthou, Thoibi panics)

After seeing Nongban with his *Pe*, I am suddenly consumed with anxiety.
This man has come with his entourage of attendants and servants.

Grandpa, I spent three months in exile in the land of Kabaw just because I refused to be a part of his harem. I think it is better that we should turn back and head for Kabaw once again.

Tampak: O Princess, what is it that I am hearing?
How can you be so weak and cowardly?
All of this time I thought you were truly
Courageous and clever, and now you cry like a coward.
Remember, this man Nongban is just a conceited fool.
The time has come for you to plot and conspire
Spin a web like a spider,
Pretend to be what you are not, and mask your true self, Princess.

Thoibi: Will that be better, Grandpa?

Tampak: Yes, yes, my Princess.
Go, go now! O Princess, I will wait for you at Chengei bank of the lake.

(Tampak leaves, Thoibi stays)

Act II

(Nongban, Shoura, enter)

Nongban: Hai Shoura! Her Ladyship is on her way and there should be no room for embarrassment. Go now; get some decent clothes to present yourself in front of Thoibi.

Shoura: Allright! My Lord Shelungba, I will go and groom myself.

(Both Nongban and Shoura engage in exaggerated manner of grooming and adorning themselves. Adjusts the Pe, holding it upright. Thoibi enters.)

Thoibi: Hello. Who art thee?

Nongban: It is none but us, your Eetei Nongban Kongyamba. We have been waiting for you all this time.

Thoibi: *(Sarcastically)* And we presumed that you were some sickly cranes lying around.

Shoura: Aah... my lady, we thought your arrival was the flight of some ill-fated spirit.

Nongban: *(To Shoura)* hey...son of a suffering slave.

(To Thoibi) My Lady, it's me, your eetei.

Thoibi: O Eetei Nongban Kongyanba

Here we are now, at southern Kumbi Tera

Don't you like the way I call you so?

Won't you wait just a while for me?

Nongban: O lotus eyed beauty

Many moons have passed since I saw you last,

Like a moonlit water lily you are,

Let this soothing breeze blow over these turbulent waves,

Grace us with your presence, O Precious One.

Thoibi: Dear Eetei, I am exhausted after such a long and arduous journey,

If you have a mat, where I can rest my weary limbs for a short while,

Would you mind giving it to me?

Nongban: Hey Shoura, haven't you heard, where is the mat?

Shoura: Oh Lord Shelungba, your humble servant shall arrange for one
immediately.

(Shoura unrolls a mat, lies down on it)

Nongban: Hey you, son of a simpering slave, how dare you sleep on it without my permission?

Shoura: Oh Lord Shelungba! This place where we are is infested with all sorts of wild and untamed growths and creatures. What if the place where you intend to take rest is laden with thorns and poisonous weeds. I did it to ensure your comfort, this humble servant of yours has nothing but the best intents for you.

Nongban: Aah...that is true indeed. Shoura, check if the spot is comfortable and get rid of all the unpleasant items.

Shoura: I will see to it, I will. Aah, it is alright now.

Nongban: My lady, please step in and take a seat here.

Shoura: This way, this way, my Lady.

Nongban: (*eagerly*) My lady, please come in, please come.

Thoibi: Ho Eetei, I will take a seat then, alright.

(Places her staff at the right hand corner, bows briefly in respect and takes her place on the mat)

Nongban: Hai Shoura!

Shoura: Shelungba, Shelungba!

Nongban: Look, your Lady's face is the fairest of them all, isn't it?

Shoura: It is fine indeed, Shelungba, it surely is.

Nongban: Such a beauty like her, when paired with a man of my looks and grace, it seems like the moon and sun have left their divine presence.

Hey Shoura, I can't bear to see even a drop of perspiration on my lady's face.

Shoura: Alright, my Lord, I will get to the task.

(Starts fanning closely)

Nongban: Shoura, you son of a stupid slave. Is that the way you fan a person? Why do you have to go so close to her?

Shoura: Oh Lord Shelungba, forgive me. I won't make a mistake now.

(He moves afar, starts fanning again)

Nongban: Hey Shoura, what kind of an idiot fans a person fan from such a distance?

Shoura: *(Angrily)*

I can't take it anymore, Lord Shelungba. At first you say it is too close for comfort and then you say I have moved too far away again. It is beyond my abilities now, I give up.

(Adjusts his clothes, prepares to leave)

Nongban: Shoura, you are such a clumsy fool.

Shoura: How will I ever learn? Right from the crack of dawn, all I hear is 'Shoura, clean the stable: Shoura, sweep the yard: Shoura, wash the clothes'.

Everything is dumped on me, my Lord.

Nongban: Hey Shoura, listen to me. Let me show you how. Not too near, not too far.

All you have to do is pick the right spot and then you go.

Shoura: Aah...Lord Shelungba, your servant understands now. Not too slow, not too fast. I will move as much as it needs.

(He fans for a while, continues fanning himself after that)

Nongban: Hey Shoura, you son of a stupid slave.

Thoibi: Dear Eetei, if you don't mind, please do come in and spend some time here with me or am I asking too much of you?

Nongban: Hey Shoura, my lady wants me to stay by her side and chat with me.

Shoura: Aah...do go in. Please move, Lord Shelungba.

(Nongban is flustered with excitement at the prospect of sitting next to Thoibi and moves restlessly near her. Seeing the staff kept by Thoibi, he seizes it and flings it afar)

Thoibi: Eetei! What have you done? When puddles and drains of water were in my path, I used to measure their depth with this staff. When snakes appeared, this very staff was my only protection. It is no ordinary staff, it is a powerful talisman blessed by my ancestors and revered by all.

Nongban: Then my lady, what penance do I offer for this grave error that I have committed?

Thoibi: Eetei! Please admit your mistake and pray to the staff for forgiveness.

Nongban: Shoura, my Lady commands me to beg forgiveness of this staff that she has revered and cared for a long time.

Shoura: Prostrate yourself before the staff, Lord Shelungba.

Nongban: Hey Shoura, on this fateful day I have to beseech a wooden staff to forgive my follies. So it would be better to let this matter remain a secret, do you understand?

Shoura: These lips of mine are sealed, it is enough that I, Shoura, know about it.

Nongban: O staff, favoured by the Ancient Ones,
Thine servant Nongban, I have in ignorance wronged you
I seek your pardon, please forgive me.

(Bows and touches the staff with his forehead thrice and prays with folded hands.)

In ignorance, I have erred grievously.

Shoura: If ignorant and unseen acts are thine sins,
It is not sacrilegious, O Kongyanba.

(Girths his loins, than Nongban prostrates himself again and touches the ground with his temple for three times, prepares to sit down but Shoura drags him away.)

Nongban: Oh God! You son of a slave.

Shoura: Lord Shelungba! My lord, why did you bow your head again and again?

Nongban: Hey, listen to me, her father is the king of the land of Moirang and she happens to be the only child. Now who do you think will be the heir apparent to the Royal Throne?

Shoura: Aah! My lady is obviously the chosen one.

Nongban: That is the very reason why I have decided to touch her resting mat with my temples as a sign of gratitude and reverence. If I refrained from doing so, will I not become an outcast?

Shoura: If my Lord is perilously close to being an outcast, I would suggest that my Lord should prostrate before my Lady and pay penance over and over again.

(Shoura mimes the act of penance in an exaggerated manner and nudges Thoibi)

Nongban: Hey hey Shoura, that is enough. Stop.

Thoibi: Dear Eetei, after my long exile spent in the land of Kabaw, all my senses have become numb, I have lost all my taste buds too. Don't you have any sort of food and fruits for me? I want just a taste for long have I been deprived of such luxuries.

Nongban: Oh my Lady! Sanahal⁸³ go and get the baskets laden with the finest of fruits. Bring forth the oranges and lemons that I have brought for the Lady. Make sure that none but the most fresh and ripe ones are brought.

Shoura: As you wish, Lord Shelungba.

(Shoura comes in with the fruits, starts eating them himself)

Nongban: Hey Shoura, son of a slave. How dare you serve leftovers to the Lady?

⁸³ Shoura

Shoura: Eh, eh! My Lord, your perception is wrong. This place is wild and untamed and what if some poisonous snakes or dirty insects have already infused these fruits with venom.

I am testing these fruits so that when the Lady eats them, nothing untoward may happen to her, O Lord Shelungba.

Nongban: Aah, that is true indeed. Shoura, you are right, if the fruits are poisoned, my Lady would be a victim of a deadly dose of venom.

Well Shoura, give it to your Mistress, give it now.

(Shoura is ordered to offer the fruits to Thoibi, he does it. Thoibi grabs a fruit and sniffs at it and starts to eat.)

A song is heard from the background⁸⁴

“Oh dearest friend of mine,
Hear my words and touch not the fruits,
Listening to the words of Angom Nongban,
If you were to eat the fruit.

⁸⁴ A chorus of divine interference

Nay, will you ever reach your destination,
Nor shall you and your beloved meet again.
Bound to the knees of an elephant he shall be
Dragged away by a horse you will be.

Heed my words and touch not the fruits,
Listen, Oh dearest friend of mine.”

(Thoibi ponders over this timely warning)

Thoibi: Aah! Eetei Nongban, what odour is this that emanates from these fruits that you have given me? The slightest whiff of it has affected my already fragile constitution, the fever that I contracted in Kabaw is gripping me all over again.

Oh mother! Oh my God! Mother!

Nongban: Hey Shoura! Come here, take it out, take it out.

(Shoura wraps up Thoibi with her sheet laid on the mat and tries to carry her out.

Nongban bellows at him.)

Hey, you son of a simpering slave!

Shoura: But you ordered me to take her out, didn't you?

Nongban: Egad! I meant the fruits basket, you idiotic buffoon.

Shoura: Uh...huh! All right Lord Shelungba. This humble servant will do so right away.

(Shoura takes away the fruit basket, Nongban is left staring incredulously. Shoura comes back, swaggering and confident.)

Nongban: Hey Shoura, did you dispose the fruits properly? Are you sure that the sickening odour will not affect anyone again?

Shoura: Yes, Lord Shelungba. This servant of yours buried it deep down and no foul odour will trouble you anymore today, though tomorrow is a different matter altogether.

(Thoibi's Kabaw fever worsens.)

Nongban: Hey Shoura, I will tackle the problem myself. If this illness had a face, I would grab it by its neck and fling it so far away.

Thoibi: Oh Eetei, if you can cure me please make me alright with your shamanic powers⁸⁵.

Nongban: Ah..ah...my Lady, let me chant,
Ha...ha...Kabaw fever, hungry one,
Meant for animals you are,
Why have you inflicted sufferings on a person?
This is not your path to tread,
Go, go back where you belong.
Isu, isu, isu!

(After the chant, he retreats next to Shoura)

Hey Shoura, is she better now? Is she better?

Shoura: Oh Lord Shelungba, she has definitely improved.

Nongban: So it has reached its end?

Shoura: Umm...my Lord, my lady is no more.

Nongban: What? I was referring to the Kabaw fever.

⁸⁵ Maiba

Thoibi: *(Her condition deteriorates)*

Oh Eetei, after you administered your healing chants, my illness seems worse. I am sure your healing powers are no match for the spirits of this hellish fever. Oh...mother...oh...Lord.

Nongban: Oh...Princess...My Lady.

On this fateful day, Nongban was awaiting your return from you exile. Presuming that my Angom clan would be brightened by your presence. Oh! Is it preordained that at this very crossroad of South Tera, Thou shalt desert me so fast. Aah...Shoura!

Shoura: Lord Shelungba, My Lord.

Nongban: O Shoura...the five essence of her Ladyship's soul are lost in the far reaches of this land...go now and seek them out.

Shoura: The Lady's five elements of the soul
Like the tumble weeds trail the eagle's flight and roll

Are all lost to us...oh...My Lady

In death, your deathly pallor seems even more beautiful!

Nongban: Eh...huh...son of an idiotic slave.

(Addressing Thoibi)

When you were suffering from this infernal Kabaw fever,

What kind of treatment and medication was administered to cure you?

Tell Nongban and I shall mount my steed and search every nook and corner for your medicine.

Thoibi: Eetei Nongban, whenever this wretched fever marked me whilst my stay in Kabaw, I used to grab the reins and mount a horse which immediately cured me, O Noble one. Hand over your steed, *Karuba* to me just once, this I beg thee.

Nongban: Hey Shoura...it seems that the cure for her Ladyship's suffering can only be treated with a horse ride. Make haste and bring my steed right here.

Shoura: Alright My Lord Shelungba.

(Exit Shoura, returns miming the act of leading a horse)

Here My Lady, I have brought your steed beside you.

Thoibi: Eetei, you can perch atop the palanquin and I will ride the horse, what do you say?

Nongban: Aah...My dear, precious one. You mount your ride now and I shall get in the palanquin.

(Thoibi makes a gesture of straddling a horse, Nongban on a palanquin.)

Such a fine sight we make, O Precious One, a fine sight indeed,
Being a daughter-in-law of the Angom clan truly befits you.
Lest you forget the threshold of the Angoms,
Look out for a tall flagstaff hoisted in your path.

Thoibi: O Eetei Nongban Kongyanba
Let me, your dear sister, ride the horse
And thou shalt travel in the palanquin
Thus we travel all the way to my Kege-Moirang.
Isn't it a fetching sight indeed
This manner of my riding your steed
A *sangam* I shall proceed ahead
A *loukhai* I will step back
One *lourak* forward

One *sangam* back again
One *paree* forward
And one *lourak* back again
O Nongban Kongyanba
Undesired thou art by women
Like a ragged and weathered *kangdroom* you are
A tattered basket, oh so old
Like a sieve that has outlived its purpose.
Today, at this ominous time
If you intend to capture me in your clutches
This curse I lay unto you
Let the man-eater *Keiren* maul you to death,
And if you no longer covet my affections,
I pray to the Lord that blessed be thee
With one who truly deserves you more than me
For I, the Darling daughter, have chosen
To tread the path which shall lead me to the Khuman
O Kongyanba, now my journey shall begin.

Nongban: Hey Shoura, her Ladyship's steed is so swift that I am utterly incapable of gaining on it. Will you chase it and capture for your Lord?
Are you ever listening to my pleas?

Shoura: This servant of yours heard it differently my Lord.

(Repeats Thoibi's words uttered just before her departure)

That is how I heard it.

Nongban: What? You stupid slave. You heard it all wrong. The horse galloped like the wind and that is why we have been left behind.

Ho...O dear Princess, your eetei Nongban is here

For seven years in a row

Never have I been beaten by anyone

Seven years I have been the reigning champion in *lamjen*

That is the reason why I am called Kongyanba Nongban

It was a blessed day indeed when I was born

No other day shall ever compare to it

The divine Goddess *Khurai Leima* favours me

The pride of Angom clan, trusted I am by the King.

Hei ..hei shari sho

(Nongban suddenly pounces upon Shoura mistaking him for the horse Karuba, and tries to pin him down to the ground)

Shoura: O Shelungba, my lord, it is me, Shoura, your poor servant.

Nongban: Oh no...where on earth is the Princess than?

Shoura: Uh! She was here just a moment ago, moving hither-thither in circles.
Could it be that mother Earth has swallowed her whole?

Nongban: Damn! It was a close shave indeed for her because I, Nongban had all but
captured her. She deceived me, slipping away like that.

(consoling himself) Aah !Never mind Nongban.

(Exit Nongban and Shoura)

Act III

(Thoibi enters)

Mamaton: My darling daughter, let me call you darling daughter.
My dearest child, it is you.
On your return from the exile to Kabaw
From father's orchard.
The most beautiful flowers in bloom
And the choicest of fruits I have brought
Come, eat with mother.
Let's adorn ourselves with the flowers too.
Stop your steed before my presence.

Please stop, dearest daughter, stop.

Thoibi: Oh mother.....mother I shall call you aunt of mine,
Today on your daughter's return from exile
My father, Lord Mathang Khanba, had burnt the path I was to follow
through Kumbi ground.
And Angom Nongban Kongyanba,
Like a bloodhound he was,
This ill fated daughter of yours,
Like a deer trapped in woe I was,
The vile hunter preyed on me.

Instead of eating the delightful fruits with you mother,
Rather than adorning ourselves with your exotic flowers,
Mother please take a sheet,
And remove the trail made by my horse,
On this fateful day, I beg
Mother of mine, please do not ask me to halt here.

Senu: *(Senu thinks aloud)*
In the entire land of Kege Moirang, like sisters we are,
We ate from the same plate, slept in the same bed.

And now she has not even acknowledged Senu , her dearest ally, it grieves
me so and no longer do I have any reason to live anymore.

O Lady Thoibi of Moirang,

When you lived here in Kege Moirang land

Your maid Senu, I, was your constant companion.

Traipsed together, ate together

And now you did not even look towards this maid's ride.

What is it that troubles you, what secrets are you hiding from me.....

O Thoibi of Moirang.

Your humble maid, Senu, at this spot

No longer do I mean to live alone.

With your great steeds hoof

I urge you to trample me beneath

I surrender my life to you.

O Moirang Thoibi, please halt,

Halt your horse, I beg thee

My Lady!

Thoibi: Aah Senu...Senu dearest.

There in a strange land of Kabaw

Towards the lay of land in the direction of Kadang bridge

I stayed for merely three moons

This place I call home, the land of Kege Moirang.

How would I ever forget...huh...dearest?

For you and you only, Senu.

From the foreign land of Kabaw Senbi

Through the direction of Kabaw bridge

Woven with '*muga*' (silk) threads of Kabaw.

This exquisite '*charei*' (cloth) made with utmost care

I have brought...dearest.

Today I ask you, refrain from stopping my steed.

O dearest head for home, Kege Moirang.

Land beckon you Senu,

Go back my dear.

To my father Mathang Khanba

Deliver this message of mine.

This ill-fated daughter

At the house of poor orphans⁸⁶
I have reached, tell him this now
Tomorrow when the dew drops of dawn are lit
Come to the place where Lord Melei Langba resides
Go now...My dear.

Senu, for you only have I got this exquisite 'charei'
I give you this beautiful charei
We will make merry once again
Today, at this fateful hour
Refrain from stopping my horse, My dear.

(Thoibi gallops away once again)

Act IV

Thoibi: O Bumble Bee of Moirang, listen.
The daughter exiled to Kabaw has returned
Will someone please please catch hold of this steed of mine.

⁸⁶⁸⁶ Khamba & Khamnu

(Nobody answers, Thoibi cries for Khamnu's help)

O dear friend of mine
O sister, are you there?
Is your precious brother there?
If your brother is there,
Your sister from the land of Kabaw is here.
Please help me stop this steed of mine.
Stop him please.

Khamnu: My dearest 'Nongyai'
Can you hear this voice filled with despair?
This call of distress ringing in your ears
Is the voice of a Kabaw lass,
She is in peril.
A woman who has never ridden a horse
Is straddling a steed, on this day
Tame this stallion
Let this be your clearance
The debt that you owe me, my dearest brother.

Khamba: *(Step forward)*
As you wish, my dear sister.

Thoibi: Like the snares set in the fields
Or the ones near the house
Caught in them will this bird die
Or do you plan to capture it alive?
The time is here, my dear, for you to choose.

Khamba: Unlike the snares set in the fields
Or the ones near my house
Die it shall not in my snare
For I intend to take it alive
On this blessed day
I shall tame your steed,
My Lady!

Thoibi: hey! Hey! O Karuba, steed of Nongban
Today I shall see his strength, go forth now
O beloved of mine
Once you were tied to the legs of an elephant
And still alive you are
Your mettle I shall see then.

Khamba: O Precious One,
Hold on tight to the horse reins

If you fall and lose your precious life,
This poor orphan shall be forever, My lady.

*(Thoibi whips her horse once again to ascertain that Khamba has lost some of his
marvellous strength)*

Khamba: Oh! I asked her to grab hold of their reins tightly and yet she slackens her
grip and incites the steed again. She wants to know my prowess than.

O dear Lady, let go of the reins now.

Wrap your arm around the neck of your steed

Let me test my fate now.

I will prove my mettle now.

As the son of Puremba,

As Thonglen's sire, as Chaoba's nephew,

As Pheiroijamba's brother-in-law

As the brother of the daughter of

The Khuman clan.....here I am.

*(Holds the steed steadfastly, than Khamba lifts Thoibi off the saddle and both of them
leave together)*

Chapter 4

Conclusion.

The lore of Moirang is as ancient as the inhabitants of the land. These tales are deeply enmeshed in the lives of the local populace and continue to inspire many forms of literary and artistic expressions. A remarkable story that intertwines the mystic elements of an ancient people with a vividly unique existence which can still be glimpsed in snatches and flashes in the form of obscure and arcane tales of yore, this is the lore of *Khamba and Thoibi*. Epic and divine, many forms of narrative exist in perfect harmony, complementing and inspiring each other. This story is not merely a folklore which has been passed down since time immemorial, it is an intrinsic element in itself of the culture of Manipuris, particularly the Moirangs. The tale engulfs various aspects of our life and identity. One may question the veracity of this particular statement as to how can it be possible that such an ancient tale has any kind of influence in these modern times? This is the very objective of this research work. To work out a correlation of our existence with the myths and legends that pulsates through the veins of our social structure. In the course of my research, the objective which I sought at the beginning of my endeavour began to mould, splinter and finally emerge as an understanding of a cosmos that was lying dormant, a story which ingrained itself in the innards of the umbilical chord, told and retold through the generations, parent to child.

The Moirang cosmos has always been governed by three elements, namely

- The God Ibudhou Thangjing: the chief Deity and the Creator of Kege-Moirang who came down from the heavens in the shape of a boar and reigned over the land for seven incarnations.
- The Loktak Lake: the lake which has been the source of livelihood and venue of many a symbolic events.
- The aesthetic sense of the Moirangs(people of Moirang): the people of Moirang are known for their refined cultural traits and have always been associated with the gentle and graceful art forms.

In this matter, the passage of time has not affected the whole set-up very much. The core elements still remain and many traditions are still practiced like the olden days. For instance the tradition of *Lai Thangjing haraoba*(pleasing of the God Thangjing) is an annual event that has been continuing since time immemorial. This practice is a ritualistic festival which is held for a fortnight or more. The creation of the universe by the Lord God Shidaba(Lord Thangjing) is celebrated by all. The manner of this festival is a unique and mystical affair where the devotees show their undying allegiance and devotion to the Almighty with performances of different forms of dance, martial art, songs and plays. The *Lai Thangjing Haraoba* can be further classified into three different kinds of *Haraoba*. The first is called *Yumpham haraoba* where the Lord God Thangjing foretells His wishes for a peaceful and prosperous year. The next one is the *Lamthokpa haraoba* where He bestows his blessings upon the people by dwelling amidst them and

protects the lay of the entire land with its fields of crops, hills and plains. The third is known as *Khongchingba* and it depicts the cleansing of the polluted and stained places including the water bodies. All of the three forms have common ceremonies known as *loudaba*(preparation of the paddy fields for cultivation), *phouhunba*(sowing the seeds for plantation), *loutaba*(replantation of the paddy plants), *lourokpa*(harvesting), *lamjel*(race), *mukna*(wrestling)etc. These practices have remained more or less the same for ages.

The concept of *Kumei*⁸⁷ is significantly attached to the ethnic fabric garbing the Meitei⁸⁸ identity. In order to understand the multilayered meanings associated with the aforementioned concept, we need to take a further and far closer look in terms of many a fundamental.

In the case of religious beliefs and practices of the Meiteis, *kumei* becomes a symbolic receptacle of glorifying the divinity of the ancient Gods and a form of offering obeisance to these very Gods. Another aspect of the Manipuri Cosmos⁸⁹ is vividly reflected in a cultured form manifesting itself in the mould of the *Kumei*.

When the harvesting season arrives, the people of the valley begin a celebration of the fertility and success of the harvest. Thus numerous occasions are transformed into euphoric moments of joy and ecstatic instances of cheer. In all these riot of utter bliss, one can differentiate two distinct kinds of *kumei*. The first one is that of natural exuberance, an event which is universal and truly an act of Mother Nature taking its course. Like the blossoming of flower-buds into full fledged radiant beauties become

⁸⁷ A festival or celebration or theatrical.

⁸⁸ People of Manipur residing in the valley whose native language is Meiteilon.

⁸⁹ An environment centered around the life in the valley.

kumeis in the purest sense of nature. On the other hand, another form comes up which is concocted by men, of men and for men. One such form of *kumei* is the one known as Shumang Leela.

Keeping these basic fundamental assumptions in mind, I have given a definition of Shumang Leela which is lacking but, I hope, will accentuate the understanding of this art with reference to my earlier statements.

“ A play enacted by a certain troupe of artistes in the courtyard or a spacious ground near the premises of a community without any extravagant stage props and set-ups: a performing space or platform surrounded by the audience from all the four corners and amidst these spectators, these talented actors engage the entire attention of the audience, making them a part of the plot with nothing but the tools of their witty remarks and histrionic abilities. In doing so an amazing effect is reproduced, and that is the evoking of a catharsis at its most sublime and simplest of forms within each and every individual present at the venue of the play. Such a kind of play is what the Manipuri Shumang Leela really is.”

Manipuri Shumang Leela is also known as *Jatra* or *Jatrawali*. According to many experts and scholars in Manipur, the term *jatra* has been appropriated from its counterpart in Bengali and Sanskrit. This particular word has numerous meanings associated with it. For instance, a religious connotation is there to begin with. And then a visual performance of an act or play staged without any of the conventional props and

methods is also called *jatra* too. When a Shumang Leela is referred to as *Jatra* or *Jatrawali*, it can be accepted and justified upto a certain extent.

Translation is not an easy task. It is difficult and extremely challenging as it manages to test the translator's knowledge, of not only that which is related directly to the subject matter but a number of issues which exists in tandem with it. Mere knowledge becomes an insufficient tool and information and material alone cannot suffice the needs of the task at hand. The need to understand the concept and the ability to correlate them in a coherent manner becomes more significant. The very first hurdle was the problem of language. The differences between the two languages, English and Manipuri are vast and problematic. During the actual process of translation, difficulties arose due to the non-availability of corresponding words time and again. A number of words that exist in the Manipuri language have no counterparts in English and due to this, some of the dialogues and songs had to be either omitted or considerably modified. For example, in the 1st Act of the play *Thoibi Loi-Kaba*, page 69, I have omitted a lyric verse which *Tampak* sings for Thoibi and the actual lines are

Ha....

Chingi khoimudi lamleima

Lamgi chekla leiteng tharakpi

Pombi lishing

Chekla nangna pamel usa da tongduna

Koo koo koo khongbadi ishu gi

Pukning laima nungoli sanahal.

These lines are written in archaic *meiteilon*⁹⁰ and most of the words do not have an equivalent English version. Another reason for some of these problems is the lack of a comprehensive and authoritative Manipuri to English dictionary.

Another major problem which cropped up in the course of my research was the non-availability of proper Moirang Parva scripts. Till date, there has been no record of any Moirang Parva script having been printed or produced officially. All of the plays have been either performed by actors well versed in the oral renderings of the plays or based on skeletal scripts written by themselves and the directors with a large amount of improvisation being made during the staging of the play itself. The script which I have produced as a work of translation is not an official, textual printed format with copyright. Based on a lot of hand written notes and bits gathered from various sources, including some theatre groups and theatre enthusiasts, I have made this attempt to bring forth an English version of the Moirangparva's dramatized episode of *Een-chingba* or Casting the Fish-net, *Kao-Phaba* or Catching of the Bull and *Thoibi Loi kaba* or Thoibi's return from exile. I have largely borrowed from the taped renditions of Pena performances and taken liberties that are no doubt, a little extravagant at times.

However, as I delved deeper into the intricacies of the archaic Manipuri language, I could discern several valuable insights and a curious map of my own identity emerged. Despite the difficulties in writing this translation exercise, it became quite an enjoyable experience in itself.

⁹⁰ Manipuri language.

The region of Manipur in the present day scenario is caught up in a chaotic environment which is worsening day by day. A sub-culture of nepotism amidst the chaos is weaving its way into the already fragile social set-up where differing groups are constantly on the edge. The valley of Manipur has become a cesspool of crime, once considered as a melting pot of many cultures of different tribes existing in peaceful harmony. We have convoluted the concept of culture into a dividing force rather than nurturing it to let it be a cohesive factor. However, even in the bleakest of circumstances there are reasons in the most unlikely places which never fail to inspire people. The reflections of culture are directly mirrored in artistic expressions and our culture lives on in the form of these expressions. The fact that theatre forms like the Moirang Parva has survived till date still makes a difference in a positive way. The values and tradition that the people of Manipur had since the very beginning are still alive. In the chapters of our ancient folklores and beliefs, we can glean a form of immense purity which is our true identity and that is there for us to seek.

glossary

- Angom* . A clan to which Nongban belonged.
- Ibungo* An endearing term used to address a young lad by his elders.
- Kangdroo(u)m* A ball made from bamboo roots used for games played by the Meiteis.
- Kaoren*. The Bull; an incarnate of Lord Thangjing.
- Karuba* Nongban's horse
- Kege Moirang*. The land of Moirang
- Khuman*. A clan to which Khamba belonged
- Khurai Leima* Goddess of Khurai, a province of Imphal.
- Loktak*. The largest lake in Manipur, it is a part of Moirang.
- Lanthrei Mapop*. A medicinal plant used in rituals.
- Laurak* measure of a crop field
- Laukhai* Another measure, bigger than *laurak*.
- Mabemma* A form of addressing a lady of royal patronage, Thoibi is addressed thus
in the play
- Maiba* Shaman or Medicine-Man

<i>Maibi.</i>	Female Oracle; usually in the service of the local deity, living a life of celibacy and austerity.
<i>Mamom langlen</i>	Beloved Daughter in archaic form of Manipuri.
<i>Muga Charei</i>	A silken shawl woven by the maidens
<i>Ngarubak</i>	A basket made by matting thin blades of bamboo to be used as a container to keep food items, especially dried fish.
<i>Ningol Lakpa.</i>	Celebration of homecoming of a woman from her husband's house
<i>Nongyai</i>	Khamba was also known as nongyai.
<i>Pakhangba.</i>	Ancient Deity/ Serpent Lord.
<i>Pari</i>	measure of crop field, 2.5 acres
<i>Panthoibi.</i>	Lord Thangjing's wife.
<i>Pathou and Ngangkhreima.</i>	Khamba and khamnnu's parents who died leaving them orphaned.
<i>Pe</i>	A wooden umbrella
<i>Sangam</i>	Measure of crop field, 0.5 acres

Shangbai Basket for measuring corn/rice

Tera cotton plant

Thawai Mi Loukhatpa .A ritual which is followed when a person has a narrow escape, to avert any more untoward events.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Achouba, Hemam, *Yakairol, Loktak Patki Sheitharol*. Workshop on Oral Tradition and Folklore of Loktak Lake and Moirang, Org. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi and MFDC, Imphal. October(28-30), 2007.

Amubi, Irom, *Moirang Kangleiron*, Khagempali Panthak, 1994.

Anganghal Singh, Hijam, *Khamba-Thoibi Sheiren: The Complete Works*, Hijam Romoni Singh, Yaiskul 2005.

Bormani, Sarangthem, *Moirang Saiyon, Ahumsuba sharuk, Khamba-Thoibi*, Sarangthem Boramani, 2006.

Dorendro, Loitongbam *Nungshi sheihou: Moirang Parva*, 2007.

...*Moirang Parva: The Indigenous Traditional Secular Theatre of Manipur*, 2006.

...*Khamba-Thoibi, Moirang Parva*, 2006.

...*Khamba-Thoibi Luhongba: Moirang Parva*, 2007.

Hodson, T, *The Meitheis*, Low Price Publication, New Delhi, 1908.

Ibohal Singh, Ph., *Khamba-Thoibi(Loikum-Loika) Moirang Kangleiron(Folk Play)*, Arts and Culture Dramatic Association for Women Artist(ACDA), Moirang, 1988.

..., *Kangla Vichar: Moirang Kangleiron*, ACDA, Moirang, 1989.

...*Khamba-Thoibi Lei Langba Jagoi*, ACDA, Moirang, 1989.

Ibohanbi, Thokchom, *Anganba Matamgi Manipuri Sahityada Imagery*, Kalpana Publications Imphal, 1997.

Jati Devi, Moirang, *Leirang Thambal Sheithaba*. Workshop on Oral Tradition and Folklore of Loktak Lake and Moirang, Org. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi and MFDC, Imphal. October(28-30), 2007.

Kanhailal, Heisnam, *Theatre for the Ritual of Suffering (A Project)*, Heisnam Publications, 1997.

Nodiya, Ngangoiba, *Moirang Leishem Khunshemba*. Workshop on Oral Tradition and Folklore of Loktak Lake and Moirang, Org. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi and MFDC, Imphal. October(28-30), 2007.

..., "Moirang Kangleiron Neinaba", *Yageirel* 2(1987):5-7.

Premchand, Nongthombam, *Rituals and Performances: Studies in Traditional Theatres of Manipur*, Cultural Resource Centre, 2005.

[Type text]

Sanakhya Ibotombi, Haorokcham, *Manipurda Theatre amasung Drama*, National Theatre Studies Publications, 1987.

Shyamsunder Singh, Ayekpam, *Manipurgi Shumang leela amasung theatre*, (Manipuri shumang leela and theatre), Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, 1980.

Singh, Ibotombi, “ *Thangjing Haraoba Phamlon Takpa* ”, *Yageirl* 6(1984):5-7.

Somorendra, Maibamcha, *Kege Pung Ngangoi Lammitlon Moirang Thangjing Chingailon*, Sumanta Store, 2005.

Suh Joseph Che; “*The Translation of Drama: Principles and strategies*” *Translation Today*, 2.2. 2005.

Birchand, Thangjam; “*Charairongba*”, Gose, Suro. Audio Cassette, Master sound; 1997.

Birchand, Thangjam; “*Puya Mei Thaba*”, Gose, Suro, Vedvati. Audio Cassette, Royal sound; 2003.

Mangoljao, Th; “*Khongjom Parva:Kao-Phaba*”, K.Jayanta, Audio Cassette, Royal Sound 2004.

Secondary sources:

Basanti Devi, Laishram, *A Study of Political History of Manipur from Pakhangba to Khagemba(33 A.D. to 1652 A.D.)* Diss. Department of History, Manipur University, 1988.

Dena, Lal Dr., *History of Modern Manipur(1826-1949)*, Orbit Publishers-Distributors, New Delhi, 1991.

Goshwami, Hareshwar, *History of the People of Manipur*, Kangla Publications, 2004.

Gunindra, Paonam Dr., *Manipuri Culture da Mityeng Ama*, Poknapham Publications, Imphal, February 2000.

Ibochaoba Singh, Oinam Dr., *Folklore Machak: Khomjin-peishinba amasung Neinaba(Folklore Material: Collection-Archiving and Analysis)*, Nepen Institute of Manipuri Folklore, 2005.

Ibohal Singh, Wahengbam, *The History of Manipur(An Early Period)* Manipur Commercial Co. Imphal , 1986.

Jayantakumar, B. Sharma, *Manipurgi Khunning Eshei(meitei)*.

Morse, Belinda, *Calamity and Courage: A Heroine of the Raj*, Book Guild Publishing, Sussex, England, 2008.

[Type text]

Nalini Parratt, Saroj, *The Religion of Manipur: Beliefs, Rituals and Historical Development*, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1980.

Raha, Kironmoy, *Bengali Theatre*, 3rd ed. National Book Trust, India, 2001.

Shamungou, Khangembam Dr., *Moirang Kangleironda Sha-Ucheksing*.



