

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE INAUGURAL FUNCTION OF THE 3-DAY FESTIVAL OF DANCE DRAMA ON 16TH JANUARY, 2019 AT THE AUDITORIUM OF JNMDA, IMPHAL

Prof. H. Tombi Singh ji, Vice-Chairman, J.N. Manipur Dance Academy,

Shri L. Upendro Sharma, Director, J.N. Manipur Dance Academy,

Friends from Electronic and Print Media,

Respected Gurus,

My dear young Artistes and Students of the Academy,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to be here at the Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy for the inaugural function of the 3-Day Festival of Dance Drama. It is, indeed, a privilege to have this opportunity of witnessing the Dance-Drama "Shakuntala" choreographed by Late W. Lokendrajit Singh ji, a renowned Choreographer of Manipur on the occasion of completing 43 years of the Production Unit of JNMDA.

As you are all well aware, the Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy was established in the year 1954 under the patronage of the late Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. It is the first National Institution of its kind in India for Manipuri Dance. When Pandit Nehru visited Manipur in 1952, he saw a presentation comprising of a number of Dances such as Manipuri, Naga and others. He observed, "The normal Dances that we see elsewhere in India (excepting, of course, the classical dances like Bharat Natyam) seemed pale and insipid in comparison with the show at Manipur". It goes without saying that Manipur is today best introduced to the world through her rich performing arts and culture and not through her geographical position and size. It is through the Manipuri dance that the world has known the existence of such a tiny State in this far-flung North Eastern part of the country. Artistes from this State have given innumerable shows in our country and abroad and have brought commendation and

recognition from various foreign countries. The grace and power attracting the viewer's mind is superb in the elegant Manipuri dance which is a delicately sensitive type of classical dance.

Here, I would like to reiterate that Manipuri dance is not the art of Manipur alone, it is also an art of India as a whole. Hence, its development is as important as the development of other aspects of our total cultural heritage. It is, therefore, our bounden duty to preserve, nurture and enrich Manipuri dance and culture so that it may continue to enrich the Indian culture. I feel proud to say that I belong to the family of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, my great grand uncle who led the cultural movement in the country after independence. He established Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies funded by the Ministry of Culture and Maulana Azad Centre for Indian Culture (Cairo), for the promotion and propagation of Indian culture. He also founded the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the Sangeet Natak Akademi of which the JNMDA is a constituent unit. He carried forward his passion for Indian culture even during the days of his imprisonment by the British.

I am pleased to know that the Academy is at present conducting various courses in Raas, Lai Haraoba, Nata-Sankirtana (Ishei), Nata-Sankirtana (Cholom), Nata-Sankirtana (Pung), Tribal Dance and Thang-ta. I have no doubt that the introduction of some other classical dances in this Academy with an objective for their dissemination among the artistes of the State will further enrich the Academy. Nata-Sankirtana is indispensable for any religious function of Hindus in Manipur, as it forms a part of the rituals. This art form has been given due recognition by UNESCO when it was listed as intangible cultural heritage in the year, 2013. The students of the Academy have excelled in their chosen field and they have spread Manipuri dance far and wide. Their contribution is immense in the preservation of the rich cultural heritage of the State.

I am happy that the J.N. Manipur Dance Academy, which was established more than 60 years ago with the sole objective of preserving and propagating Manipuri culture, particularly dance, has been devoting itself whole heartedly to this noble cause since then. I express my appreciation for the Gurus for their dedication and commitment. I am also happy to learn that the Academy's Production Unit has been doing exceedingly well, bringing out various forms of Dance-Drama which have brought international fame. I congratulate the artistes who are playing different roles in the Dance-Drama "Shakuntala" which we will witness in a short while from now. After assumption of the office of the Governor of Manipur and Chairperson, J.N. Manipur Dance Academy, I have witnessed number of cultural shows and dance-dramas staged by the Academy. Still my interest for this art form remains the same as ever. Therefore, I do not intend to take much of your time as everybody must be eagerly waiting to see the beautiful Dance-Drama.

My good wishes to all the Artistes, Gurus, Choreographer and all those associated with the staging of this Dance-Drama "Shakuntala" which by itself is the gem of a literary work. I once again thank the organisers for inviting me to this function.

Thank You,

Jai Hind.