

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR AT THE INAUGURAL FUNCTION OF THE 47TH ALL MANIPUR SHUMANG LEELA FESTIVAL, 2018-19 ON 27TH FEBRUARY, 2019 AT TH. IBOYAIMA SHUMANG LEELA SHANGLLEN, IMPHAL

Shri M. Lakshmikumar Singh, Commissioner (Art & Culture),

All the participating Shumang Leela Groups,

Members of the Media,

Distinguished Invitees,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me enormous pleasure to be here today on the occasion of the inauguration of the 47th All Manipur Shumang Leela Festival, 2018-19. At the very outset, I would like to convey my heartiest felicitations and congratulations to the prize winners on this occasion.

While organizing such a festival, it would be worthwhile to recall as to how the Shumang Leela flourished in the State in the past. The term 'Shumang Leela' stands for 'Open Air Performance' generally in the courtyards of residential houses. Originally, it started as a comic genre presented before the kings and noblemen which ultimately developed into the present form of courtyard enacted play. Shumang Leela or Manipur Courtyard theatre is as popular as Jatra of Bengal, Tamasha of Maharashtra, Bhavi of Madhya Pradesh and Nautanki of Uttar Pradesh.

Over the generations, it has evolved not only into a popular entertainment medium for the common man but has also become a powerful medium for mass education. Stories of Harischandra, Sati Savitri, Ram, Prahlada and episodes from the Mahabharata, Ramayana and other mythologies have been successfully staged in this medium. The story of Moirang, the immortal love story of Khamba and Thoibi and other historical events related to Moirang have also been conveniently used by Shumang

Leelas in the style called 'Moirang Parva'. In the earlier days, Shumang Leela Groups contributed to the promotion of humanism, tolerance, confidence, devotion, truth and justice through their performances. They had not only adopted Shumang Leela as their livelihood but also contributed their best for the betterment of society. This needs to be remembered by the present Shumang Leela activists with gratitude.

It is a unique feature that the Shumang Leela Groups are composed of exclusively male artistes where even feminine roles are played by male artistes. In a later development, groups comprising entirely female artistes have also come up and they have gained prominent presence in many festivals. I am informed that altogether twenty-two groups including twelve Female Shumang Leela groups are participating in the present festival besides ten Male groups. I hope that the present Shumang Leela festival will provide a good opportunity for the performers to show their artistic talents to the audience and also help in standardizing the present Manipuri Shumang Leelas on the whole.

No doubt, the Shumang Leela has today developed both theatrically and artistically. I am happy to learn that the present day Shumang Leelas have been trying to focus on the issues of moral values, unity and integrity as well as brotherhood and friendship among various communities in the State with the objective of strengthening the very social fabric which binds the people of Manipur together. The Shumang Leela, thus acts as a catalyst in bringing about peace and harmony in society. I am hopeful that it will continue its endeavour to achieve its set goals. As we are well aware, our state passes through difficult phases of ethnic tension, conflict and mistrust arising from time to time. Hence, the need of the hour is to do away with these issues which are a blemish on our age-old peaceful co-existence. It is the responsibility of all of us, irrespective of caste, creed, religion and language to preserve and promote the unity and integrity of the State, for

which peaceful co-existence in Manipur society is essential. I would like, therefore, to appeal to all sections of the people of Manipur including the Shumang Leela groups to contribute their best in their respective capacities with sincerity, discipline and confidence for ensuring peace in Manipur so that the State of Manipur can move towards progress and prosperity.

I compliment the Manipur State Kala Akademi (MSKA) for their relentless efforts in organizing festivals, exhibitions, seminars, workshops and instituting awards and scholarships for art and culture personalities over the years. I am confident that the present Shumang Leela Festival organized by the Manipur State Kala Akademi (MSKA) will help in enhancing the standard of Shumang Leelas in Manipur. I hope that the Manipur State Kala Akademi (MSKA) will continue to contribute their best in order to achieve their aims and objectives.

I, once again, extend my felicitations and congratulations to prize winners in this function and also exhort other performers to rise to the challenge and strive for winning recognition and prizes in the coming festivals.

I thank the organizers for inviting me to this function.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.