

Ningthoujam Priyolata Devi (Dec 2021). Deliniating Trimurti Gurus On The Progression Of The Manipuri Raas

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Deliniating Trimurti Gurus On The Progression Of The Manipuri Raas

Ningthoujam Priyolata Devi

Abstract:

Manipuri Raas was formulated based on Srimad Bhagavatam and Jahadeva's Git Govindam as an imaginative world of Krishna Leela in dance form that centre round the divine affairs among Lord Krishna, Srimati Radhika and the Gopis to further inspires the minds and characters of general audiences. Invigorating all relics of Radha-Krishna cults, the Manipuri Raas was constituted with application to indigenous dance forms clubbing into the Lai Haraoba being inherited for generations since mythological period. Rajashri Bhaghyachandra, the founding architect of Manipuri Raas Dance with conglomerating contributions from Pandits and Maichous of his time, presented to the world the unique Manipuri Raas Dance as one among the few classical dance of India. Many Gurus and performers have been come out as stern devotees to Manpuri Raas nanf among them there have been born of three exponents who uplifted the Manipuri Raas to its unmatched uniqueness and they were no other than (i) Guru Takhelchangbam Amudon Sharma, (ii) Guru Shri Maisnam Amubi Singh and (iii) Guru Shri Haobam Atomba Singh . Aware of the valuable contributions from other gurus, these three exponents have been regarded as the trimurti exponents of Manipuri Raas whose lives and works are aimed to put in this paper.

Key-Words: Manipuri Raas, Development of Manipuri Raas, Values in Manipuri Raas, *Guru Takhelchangbam Amudon Sharma, Guru Shri Maisnam Amubi Singh and Guru Shri Haobam Atomba Singh*

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Introduction:

Rajarshi Bhagyachandra (1748-1799 AD) composed three Raas forms that were wholeheartedly dedicated to Lord Govindaji and they were the *Maha Raas*, the *Kunja Rraas* and the *Basanta Raas*. The Raas forms were produced as synchronized offshoots of the adopted Vaishnavism and the traditional knowledge and dance forms of Meitei community of Manipur. The eternal sacredness of the Raas dance played by Lord Krishna, Srimati Radhika and divine Gopis, was introduced to Manipur in 1701 AD in the form of Raas Leela and it has been exquisitely and popularly performing for generations and recognized toady as one of popular classical dances of India. Again while the milieu is a community gathering on religious perspectives with adoption of the Vaishnavism and corresponding divine plays of Lord Krishna, Srimati Radhika and the Gopis that is soulfully believed to have played in the Brindavana, the traditional cultural and knowledge system of Meitei community have been tactfully permeated in the constructions and presentation of the Raas Dance in Manipur which is reason behind its uniquely emergence as a classical dance. Interestingly, starting from the time of Rajashree Baghyachandra and his team of gurus and pandits there have been many gurus and performers contributing their best in the development of the Raas Dance of Manipur. But among them, there came out three exponents namely Guru Amudon Sharma, Guru Amubi and Guru Shri Haobam Atomba Singh and they are known today as Trimurti Gurus for their unmatched contributions in the progression of Manipuri Raas.

Development of Raas Dances:

The origin of the Meitei/ Manipuri dance forms can be traced back to the the “Lai Haraoba” which is believed to have been in existence during the mythological period of the Meitei concept of the cosmology and almost all forms of dance are included in the Lai Haraoba. The myth says “The Almighty *Guru Sidaba* gave assignments to his sons for formation of the Universe. The elder son *Ashiba (Achiba)* started to form the Universe but his

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brother *Haraba* disrupted all the works and so he was unable to complete his father's assignments of forming the Universe and he reported the conditions to his father. Guru Sidaba then produced *Nongthangleima* , a beautiful lassie and asked her to console the wilderness of Haraba. Nongthangleima playing with beautiful movements and gestures controlled the minds and erratic activities of Haraba and during which Ashiba completed the task for formation of the Universe. It is further accepted that the body movements and attractive gestures that goddess Nongthangleima played to tame Haraba were the first dance forms that is known today as *Jagoi*". The word 'Jagoi' came from the Meitei word '*Chukoi*' in the old Manipuri manuscripts. The *Jagoi sathek* (Dance forms) that were used by the Gods and Goddesses came down to human history and the dance forms by human being on the earth are regarded as to please the Gods and Goddesses seeking blessings for prosperity and thus the "*Lai Haraoba*" (Lai=God and Haraoba=Pleasing/ Happiness)came into existence. And Lai Haraoba is regarded as the root of all forms of Meitei dance forms.

Hinduism came into Manipur in the 15th century as Brahmins reached the land destination from their escape-routes from the heinous impacts of the Muslim rulers and it happened during the reign of *King Kyamba* (1467-1508 AD). A Vishnu Temple was erected at a place of some 25 km away from Imphal and the place was known as Bhisnupur (now Bishenpur) and Bengali norms of Kirtana was introduced as religious practices. Later under the initiative of brahmin Santidas who hailed from Sylhet, Vashnavism was introduced in Manipur in the 18th century and king *Pamheiba* adopted it and he became powerful patron of the religion. New forms of *Kirtana* such as *Bangladesh Pala* also known as *Ariba Pala* which is partially similar to *Ojha Pali* of Assam, was introduced in Manipur. Then followed by activities of translating parts of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana into Bengali Scripts which itself was started to replacing the old Manipuri scripts (*Meitei Mayek*) and thus Hinduism in the form of *Ramandi Vaishnavism* and Bengali Scripts became the popular religion and medium of literary works in Mnaipur. *King Baghyachandra* (1759-1798 A.D.) and majority of the people of his time adopted Vaishnavism and there introduced Raas Leela based on the

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Krishna Leelas with dance forms of Lai Haraoba and the myths and rituals of Hinduism became popular practices of majority Meitei community. But it cannot be ignored that there were many *Maichous* (Pandits) and people who strictly adhered to the original Meitei religious practices and indigenous way of living and struggled for sustenance of the same as it is emerged out again as popular practices today. Here *R.K. Priyogopalsana*.says, “ The crusade of religious conflict between Santidas and the King on one hand, and the seven Maichous backed by the people on the other hand, turned the whole country into ruin and anarchism. Simultaneously, another group of preacher of Gouriya Sampradaya (sect) from Nadia in Bengal appeared on the scene. This group or religious sect was more symbolic of humality, devotion and humanity than that of Santidas. They were stern devotees singing Harinam Kirtan and the divine love of Radha and Krishna”.

On Values in the Manipuri Raas:

As regards the definition of *Raas*, there are various opinions in the different books. One source says: “The Leela played by *Shri Krishna* at *Brindavan* along with the *Gopis* was complete with all the 'Rasa' (taste, which is Samuha Rasa) and therefore, it is called Raas.” And Raas is defined in the book '*Raas makhal amasung nungi masak*' by Srimati Kshetrimayum Ongbi Thouranisabi Devi in the following words, “*That kind of leela performance which can only be tasted by the inner self and also externalized for visionary experience and which is created only to be enjoyed by the inner and outer selves of the devotee is called Raas*”. And E. Nilakanta gives a very brief definition that “*Sarva rasa; kadamba moy raas: What all the Rasa are mingled is called Raas.*” Shri Irengbam Gulamjat Singh, another scholar says, “*In every age, Bhagwan Shri Krishna incarnated in different forms and played many leelas. Those leelas captivated gods, demons and the entire universe. But, however the Bhagwan himself could not captivated. Yet in the present Raasleela Bhagawan himself is captivated. Therefore, it is said that Raasleela is the crown of all the other leelas. This kind of dance is known as Raasleela in Manipur*”. Shri Surchand Sharma says,

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“When all the creatures search for the origin of the sweet melody which captivated them, and when they find the origin and find the eternal bliss Sachidanand, the combined dance form of the one who is giving bliss (Purush) and the one who is receiving bliss (Prakriti) is called Raas”. After considering the above opinions, the gurus have concluded that the Raas is that leela played by Lord Shri Krishna along with Brajagopis (females) at the Kunja (grove). As to the history of Raas dance in Manipur, how it was introduced in whose reign and where it was performed, Shri Elangbam Nilakanta further writes , *“As a result of his vision of Shri Govinda in dream and as a result of his devotion to Lord, the image of Shri Govinda was first inaugurated on Friday the 11" of Hiyangei (Kartik, Akadashi) of Sakabda1701 (Christian era 1779) and simultaneously performed Raas dance for five days consecutively at the Raas mandal of Langthabal palace and that Raas is regarded as the first Raas of Manipur dedicated by Shrijut Maharaj”*.

That Raas was first performed in Manipur by inaugurating the image of Shri Govinda is recorded in the Royal Chronicle *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, thus: The year of Heisnam Khungam Saka 1698 *Sachifu* month began on Friday . *Hiyangei* month began on Thursday ... On the 12'h Friday at the 1 a.m. morning of Monday at the *khen* (moment) of *Mahendri* the image of Shri Govinda was installed. the year of *Maibam Chakrapant Saka* 1701 the 5" Monday is *Sanghranti* of *poinu*. On 11' Friday, the image of Shri Govinda is inaugurated: at the *Rasmandal* of Canchipur. Raas is performed for 5 days. The three main dance forms *Maharaas*, *Kunjaraas* and *Basanta* raas was created during the time of Bhagyachandra and the other two dances *Nitya Raas* and *Diva Raas* were created and added during the reign of subsequent kings. In this connection E.Nilakanta Singh writes: The ‘Maharaas’ ‘Kunjaraas’ and ‘Basanta raas’ was dedicated during the reign of Shrijut Bhagyachandra and this fact is supported by the book ‘Ningthou chahi’.

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Sketching Lives of Trimurti Exponents in Manipuri Raas Dance:

There occurred many a timely changes in the evolution of Manipuri classical dance. Selecting source materials from the folklore traditions of ancient Lai-Haraoba dance forms and rites and rituals, usages of the Meiteis rites-de-passage, King Bhagyachandra formed the Jagoi Achouba with aesthetic creativity and performed it for five consecutive days at the royal palace. It was the starting point of the long march of Manipuri dance from this isolated hill state of India to international recognition and fame. This great art form began to attract the attention of outsiders when it was taught and shown at Shantiniketan, Bombay and with Uday Shankar's guidance at Almorah (U.P.) by Manipuri gurus during the pre and post-independence period. The gurus who brought the dance into international focus with untiring Zeal and efforts putohd are Laishram Kullabidhu, Yambem Mahabir, R.K Priyagopalsana, Shantikishore, Indubhusan, Tarunkumar, etc. prominent among them; three gurus are selected here in this study. They are: (1) *Shri Takhenchangbam Amudon Sharma*, (2) *Shri Maisnam Amubi Singh* and (3) *Shri Haobam Atomba Singh*. The contributions made by these three gurus for the upliftment of Manipuri Raas dance was so great that the trio is regarded by the dancers of Manipur as the 'Trimurti', just as the staunch Hindus regard the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati as the Triveni Sangam and revered Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar as eternal gods. E. Nilakanta Singh writes about this triumvirate when they passed away from this world, "Most of the great gurus having their distinctive styles (gharana) of singing, drumming and dancing have now passed away. The so-called Trinity of contemporary Manipuri Raslila gurus viz; Amudon Sharma, Amubi Singh and Atomba Singh associated with the reawakening of Raslila in India and abroad in the post-independence period are no more." The biographical accounts of the life and works of these gurus are found sparsely in different books published in Manipuri at Imphal. The three exponents who are recognized today as

Trimurti of Manipuri Raas may summarily be understood with briefly sketching of their lives and works as follows;

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1. Guru Takhelchangbam Amudon Sharma

The versions translated into English by the researcher are given here: Shri Takhelchangbam Amudon Sharma was born on Thursday of the new moon of Hiyangei, Sakabda 1808 at Brahmapur Khongman Mangjil. His great grandfather Ramananda Thakur was the Raasdhari of Shri Govinda during the time of Rajarshi Bhagyachandra. Since then the generations' upto Amudon Sharma had been serving the post of Raasdhari of Shri Govinda and the prestine Manipuri dance. From a very early age, Shri Amudon Sharma began to teach Raas dance, following the footsteps of his forefathers.

Guru Amudon Sharma's first guru is Ojah Kanhai Sharma. This teacher is his father's elderbrother. At first, he learnt Meitei pung. Next, he began to learn dance. Then he became a renowned Ojah of both Pung and dance. Finally, he became the Raasdhari of Shri Govinda during the reign of Maharaj Churachand and continued to hold the post during the times of Bodhachandra and Okendrajit successively. Amudon Sharma was the Pungyeiba Hanjaba of Bamon Pala of the palace. He travelled to places like Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, etc. he served as a teacher at Parimal Academy for sometime. He was also the honorary Principal of Govindaji Nartanalaya without pay. And also served as a teacher at J.N. Dance Akademi for sometime as well as he was also a Ratna of the Brahma Sabha. In the year, 1954 A.D. Bodhachandra Maharaj conferred him the title of Nrityacharya Shiromani. In 1958 Sahitya Parishad gave him the title of Nritya Guru. In 1961, he got Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. In 1972 the President of India conferred him the title of 'Padma Shree' This Guru was expired on 10' March, 1974. Another version as given by another source book runs thus:- Padmashree Guru Amudon Sharma was born at Khongman Mangjin (Brahmapur) within Imphal city. This guru held the post of principal dance guru of Shri Govinda after the demise of Guru Khomdon Sharma during the reign of Sir Churachand Maharaj. Four generations held the post of Shri Govinda's dance guru including this guru. There was Ramananda Thakur during the reign of Bhagyachandra Maharaj, there was Bamon Thourani

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Sabi during the reign of Sir. Chandrakirti Maharaj, Kanhai Sharma and Khomdon Sharma during the reign of Churachand Maharaj and finally he held the post of Guru during the reign of Bodhachandra Maharaj. His predecessor Guru Khomdon Sharma is the father of this Nrityacharya Shiromani. Thus being traditional handed down through generations, the dance form propounded by him is the most believable. The prestine purity of the old Raas dance style of Shri Govinda can be seen only in his pung, songs and dances as he always maintained the old styles of his predecessors.

Guru Amudon Sharma served as dance guru of Shree Shree Govindaji Nartanalaya which was established at the royal palace during the time of Bodhachandra Maharaj. He taught the students without taking any fee since the inception of this institution. The renowned dancer of Bombay, Kumari Sabita Mehta is his student. The Guru was also worked as the principal of Nehru Manipur Dance Akademi, Imphal. In 1960, he was awarded 'Sangeet Natak Award' for his contributions in Manipuri

dance and in 1972 again, the President of India honoured him with the honorific Padma Shree' for his contributions to dance and music. Guru Amudon Sharma left this world for his heavenly abode on March 11, 1974 at his own house of Khongman Mangjin (Brahmapur) at the age of 85. Another version of the life history of Guru Amudon Sharma by another author is also given here:- Shri Takhenchangbam Amudon Sharma was born on Thursday, the new-moon of Hiyangei, of Sakabda 1808 and Christian era 1886 at Brahmapur, Mange Makhong, Imphal. The name of his father is Shri Takhenchangbam Khomdon Sharma (Raasdhari) and mother's name is Srimati Tharo Devi. Shri Amudon's uterine brothers and sisters are four; namely -Shri Thambal Sharma, Amudon Sharma, Radhamohon Sharma and Taruni Devi. Guru Amudon's forefathers were all prominent figures of this state in the service of Shri Govinda's dances and music.

After the death of traditional gurus, Shri Amudon Sharma succeeded his forefathers and served Shri Govindaji as the Raasdhari. One particular thing about Amudon Sharma is that he participated as a pung player of Nata Sankirtana since he was 20 due to the encouragement of

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the gurus. These have made him to serve Shri Govind as the Hanjaba of Bamon Pala. And consequently he received Sanakhuji (gold-bracelet), Tal and Khamen Chatpa etc. during the time of Bodhachandra Maharaj. This Guru propagated the art of Meitei Jagoi by establishing an institution called Manipur Kala Bhavan' in collaboration with Shri Nandeibam Muhon Singh (Muhon Girani) in and around Christian era 1949-50. On the other hand when Shri Shri Govinda's Nartapala was established on Nov. 20 of Christian era 1954 Shri Guru Amudon Sharma worked as its principal following the Guru Parampara tradition. The Guru propagated dance education during his younger days by going to many places of Assam like Cachar. And he was also the visiting guru of Jawaharlal Nehru Dance Academy. In recognition of his contributions to Manipuri dance the Guru was awarded the prestigious award of India ' Sangeet Natak Academi Award' on February 28, 1961 Christian era. The Manipuri Sahitya Parishad awarded the title of Nritya Guru' on July 30 of 1972. And again Shri Amudon Sharma was honoured by the President of India Shri V.V. Giri by awarding him the coveted title of Padma Shree' on March 25 of English era 1972. Besides, Shri Bodhachandra, the Maharaj of Manipur honoured him for the life time by giving the guru the title of 'Nrityacharya Shiromani'. The renowned Guru Shri Amudon Sharma passed away on Saturday, the 9th of March of English era 1974, leaving behind the art of Manipuri Badya and Nritya Kala. G. Surchand Sharma paid homage to Guru Amudon Sharma in the following words:-“This venerable Brahmin is now at the helm of the Dance Department of Shri Govindaji's temple. He has been teaching the students of the Shri Govindaji's Nartanalaya regularly without taking a single farthing ever since the start of this institution during the time of the late Maharaj Bodhachandraji.... Guru Amudon never gives up the original and is not prepared to make any departure from the past forms. And this he defends in the name of tradition and his ancestors. Guru Amudon is one of the most orthodox of the living Gurus in Manipur.”The methods of study initiated by Guru Amudon Sharma when the Shri Shri Govindajee Nartanalaya (Govt. Dance College) are still prevalent upto this day.

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2. Guru Shri Maisnam Amubi Singh

Now we have a look into the life and works of Guru Maisnam Amubi Singh, the second of the esteemed trio-Gurus. Shri Khulem Chandrasekhar Singh writes about him in the following words:- Shri Gur Maisnam Amubi Singh was born on the morning Monday amavashya of English era 1881 (no mention of the month). His father whose name is Shamu Singh Major is a renowned person. Mother's name is called Sanachoubi (Dhakendrani) Devi. Guru Amubi Singh started to participate in the Raas dance when he was 4/5 years of age. Moreover, he acted as pung player of boys' pala and girls' pala, leader of the Gostha and Mahaprabhu etc. he also learnt the martial arts of Thang -ta during his childhood.

He also learnt arts under the guidance of the gurus like Konsam Chura, Phurailatpam Chaonu Sharma, Ningthoujam Chaomacha, Maibam Keipha, Laishram Mangoljao, Gurumayum Amu Sharma, Maisnam Ibungohal (his own elder brother) etc. Guru Amubi Singh suffered many hardships as a young man. His mother died when he was 11/12 years old. And his father who had been transported to Andaman was settled finally at Brindavan and took care of by his son (Amubi) for about seven years was expired. Later he became a publicly renowned Ojah. He began to attend the royal palace on duty to play Pung at the Gostha leela played there. When Guru Jhulon Macha expired he (Amubi) replaced him as the pung - player. Next, he taught various kinds of dance- items. Churachand Maharaj sent Guru Amubi as leader of dance troupes to different parts of India to propagate the art. He met Uday Shankar at Bombay. Shankar hired and made him instructor of Meitei Jagoi at his Sangeet Vidyalaya at Almorah for Seven (long) years. After the second great war (Guru Amubi) worked at 'Sangeet Bharti' of New Delhi for about one year. Books like (1) Chali , (2) Bhangi Pareng Achouba, (3) Bhangi Pareng, (4) Manipur Jagoi were written by him. He retired from service in 1969 after working for 15 years at the Akademi. He remained as a visiting Guru for some years. Sahitya Parishad gave him the title of Nriitya Guru'. The Rashtrapati gave Akademi Award (11/4/56). And also 'Padma Shree' on 21st April 1970.

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Another version about the life and works of Guru Amubi Singh is given below:-Padmashree

Guru Amubi Singh who is known all over India for Manipuri dance was born in the morning of Monday Aagrahayan Amavashya, Sakabda 1803, November, English era 1881. Guru Amubi was born at the place where the Imphal Municipality office building is now standing, and which was known once as Arambam Leikai. Guru's father Shri Maisnam Shamu Singh was a renowned person. Formerly he was the Shelungba of Ahallup pana and during the reign of Shri Chandrakirti Maharaj he became colonel major and Hanjaba of Pung Pala and became a widely known Ojah. And Guru's mother Sanachoubi (Dhakendrani) Devi too was indulged in dance and music since her younger days and finally became even the Sutradhari of Raas. As fertile valley produces good crops guru Amubi Singh was born and brought up in an artistic atmosphere of dance and music since childhood. At the age of five he acted as Krishna in the Raas dance. Then afterwards he participated in Nipamacha pala of Gouraleela, played the pung in the khubak eshei of girls, acted as cowherd leader in Gostha leela, and Mahaprabhu (of Gouraleela) and such art activities paved the way to make him a competent guru in future. Besides, he learnt many forms of martial arts of warfare like Thang-Ta and Mulna kangieie which were indispensable for us, the Meitei from his father, the Major. Thus he learnt many things from many gurus during his childhood. Among them mention may be made of Sarvashri Konsam Ojah Chura Singh, Phurailatpam Ojah Chaonu Sharma, Ningthoujam Ojah Chaomacha Singh, Maibam Ojah Keipha Singh, Laishram Ojah Mangoljao, Gurumayum Ojah Amu Sharma, Meisnam Ibungohal Singh (guru's uterine brother) etc.

Next comes the sad period of Guru Amubi's tragic life. His father Colonel Major was sent away to Andaman and Nicobar by the British government and his mother died when he was only 11/12 years old. Soon afterwards his elder brother Thungohal too left this world. Thus after facing many hardships, he spent his life at Brindavan, where his father Major Sham Singh was spending his last years of life after returning from Andaman. There Guru Amubi Singh spent seven years until his father's death. Then afterwards he came to Manipur and dived himself deep into research works of dance and music without any care for food and drinks.

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At first he learnt from Ojah Shulon macha. Then he became a publicly known person after researches from teachers and his own efforts. The period was Guru Amubi's heyday when his talents began to blossom. Then suddenly he was called upon to play the pung for a Gostha-astami Leela performed at the royal palace and that began his career. Then after the death of Ojah Jhulon macha he replaced the post of pung -player formerly held by his master. Next, he participated in (organizing) many Basanta Raas and Nita Raas leelas. Now guru Amubi's talents could no longer be concealed. The time for taking great responsibility has come. In the year (English era) 1914 Guru Amubi was selected as the leader of the dance troupe which Sir Churachand Maharaj sent to propagate the Meitei dance to different big cities of India. During that tour he met Shri Uday Shankar who is internationally famed and titled 'Nataraj' at Bombay. On the request of the famous dancer, Guru Amubi thereafter spent seven years teaching Manipuri dance at the dance school at Almorah (U.P.) established by the famous dancer. After the second Great War he began to work at 'Sangeet Bharati" situated at New Delhi for about one year. But circumstances compelled him to work as a principal teacher of the newly established dance college in Manipur (the present Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Akademi). It was the Guru's firm belief to work something for the new college of his homeland. He took great responsibility as supervisor of this college in producing commendable dance compositions and showing them around the world. He also filled the void left by lack of dance literature by writings books like, (1) Chali, (2) Bhangi Pareng Achouba, (3) Bhangi Pareng, (4) Manipuri Jagoi (songs of four kinds of raas) etc. and they remained as immovable properties of Manipuri dance. After contributing valuable services to this Akademi for about 15 years he retired from work in English era 1969. But the Guru's blessing and vision did not end. Even after retirement he attended the Akademi four times a month as a visiting guru for a long time.

In recognition of his invaluable contributions, the Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Imphal awarded him the title of 'Nriya Guru' for the first time. Next, the President of India honoured him by giving 'Sangeer Natak Award' on 24-4-56. And again on 21" April, 1970 English era,

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recognizing him as an extraordinary guru of Manipuri dance honoured him with the title of Padma Shree'. Padma shree guru Amubi Singh reached the feet of God on June 26, 1972 English era at the age of 91. The source book entitled 'Manipuri Raas amasung atei Krishna leelashing' gives the following about the life and works of Guru Amubi Singh thus:-

Shri Guru Amubi Singh, the publicly renowned guru of Manipuri dance was born on the morning of Amavashya, Monday of agraayan, Sakabda 1803, November, 1881 English era. His birth place is where the present Imphal Municipality building stands (which was once known as Arambam Leikai). Guru's father Maisnam Shamu Singh (Major) was a renowned person. At first he was a Shelungba of Ahallup Pana, then became a major and a Hanjaba of Pung-pala during the reign of Chandrakirti and thus became a publicly renowned person. And his mother Sanachoubi (Dhakendrani) Devi, who was the daughter of Senapati Shajouba started her life to dance and music since her younger days and finally became a Sutradhari. Guru Amubi was brought up as good crop planted on fertile fields under the care of parents devoted to dance and music. When he was 4/5 years he started to act as Krishna of Raasleela. In the next stages he took part in the boy's pala of Gouraleela, played Pung in girl's Khubak eshei, leading cowherd of Gostha Leela, acted as Mahaprabhu etc. thus pave the way for becoming a competent guru in future by participating in several artistic activities. Moreover, the indispensable Meitei martial arts of warfare like Thang -Ta, mukna Kangjei etc. were also learnt from his great grandfather, the major. His childhood gurus were many among them mention may be made of Sarvashri Konsam Ojah Chura, Phurailatpam Ojah Chaonu Sharma, Ningthoujam Ojah Chaomacha, Maibam Ojah Keipha, Laishram. Ojah Mangoljao, Gurumayum Amu Sharma, Maisnam Ibungphal Songh (his own brother) etc.

The next phase is Guru Amubi's tragic life. Guru's father colonel major was transported to Andaman & Nicobar. When he was 11/12 years, his mother too expired and soon his elder brother Ibungotomba too died. After facing such hardships he had to look after his father, who being released from Andaman was living at Brindaban and there he served his father for seven years until he died. Thereafter, he returned to Manipur and emerged himself in research works

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of dance and music forgetting himself to take food, drinks and sleep. For the first time he learnt under the guidance of Ojah Jhulonmacha. Thus he became a renowned guru by the grace of his gurus plus his own untiring efforts. It was a time of Guru Amubi's fame was beginning to illuminate. Then suddenly he was called upon to play pung at a Gostha leela organized at the palace and from then onwards he began to attend the palace. Then he became a pung player after the demise of Ojah Jhulonmacha. Next, he was fated to organize Basanta raas and Nitya raas leelas. Now Guru Amubi could not be concealed. The great responsibility has come for him. Guru Amubi was appointed by Sir Churachand Maharaj to lead the dance-troupe which was sent for the propagation of Manipuri dance to different big cities of India. In the course of his journey he met Uday Shamkar, the famous artiste at Bombay. With his ardent request, Guru Amubi was appointed the teacher of Meitei dance at his dance school of Almorah for seven years. Then after the Second World War he began to work at the "Sangeet Bharati", situated at New Delhi for about a year. But he was compelled to work as principal of the dance college (the present Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance College) which was newly established then. It was the Gurus firm belief to assist his level best to uplift the college of his homeland.

As a supervisor of this dance college, he took great responsibility in producing good dance form for performance around the world. He contributed invaluable property to dance literature by writing books like (1) Chali, (2) Bhangi Achouba, (3) Bhangi Pareng, (4) Manipuri Jagoi (songs for four Raas forms). After contributing invaluable service for 15 years at the dance Akademi he retired from service in the English era 1969. But the Gurn's blessing and guidance are still indispensable. Even after retirement he looked after the affairs of the Akademi by attending four times a month as a visiting Guru. Recognizing his invaluable contributions, the Manipuri Sahitya Parishad gave him the title of "Nriya Guru" for the first time. Next, he was honoured by the President of India by giving him Akademi award in 1956 English era. In 1970 the President of India honoured him with full respect as an important guru of Manipuri dance by giving the title of Padmashree'. Dr. (Mrs.) Kapila Vatsayan expressed

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the following words all about the contributions made by late Guru Amubi: "... he was a pioneer in spreading the message of the Indian tradition in all its vitality, sanctity, capacity for assimilation and continued reformulation ... he was apparently born to be a transmitter of the traditions from one part of India to the other." Prof. E. Nilkanta appreciated the guru in the following ways: "Guru Amubi Singh was responsible for the modern pattern of various items on the stage, based on the authenticity of the tradition. He made a continuous attempt to enrich the expressional content of Manipuri dances by composing a few dance dramas and solo pieces... the guru struggled to project an image of subdued eloquence in such a manner that the discerning audience do not take it as something creative and innovative... His art represents a strange combinations of tradition and innovation." The Guru Amubi took great responsibility of introducing Manipuri dance with new experiments not only to Manipur but also to many places of India.

3. Guru Shri Haobam Atomba Singh

A brief account of the life and works of a Guru Haobam Atomba Singh taken from the book Manipur Kalakar Anisuba Saruk' is given here: On December 10 of English era 1885 Atomba Singh was born in the Haobam clan. Birth place is at Uripok Haobam Dewan Leikai of Imphal. Education: This Guru can read and write well. Song, dance and Pung etc were well trained from early childhood. Haoba Chaobi Singh, the guru of Pung initiated him in the realm of dance. Gouraleela and other allied dances were learnt under the guidance of Oiah Jhulonmacha. After learning dances for 17 long years, he presented dance shows before Prince Albert, the Son of Queen Victoria at Calcutta, following the order of His Highness Maharaj Churachand Singh. At that the audience was charmed by the beauty of Meitei dance and got certificates as well. The artiste was a renowned person all over India. And Vishwakavi Rabindranath Thakur appointed him as instructor of Manipuri dance at his Shantiniketan.

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The Guru worked for 16 years in this institution. Rabi thakur showered many a gold medals and certificates on the beauty of the dances. Professor Kalidas Nag of Nritya Bharati conferred many certificates too. The artistes travelled to various places of India. There are many disciples of this Guru in different states of India. Many Manipuri artistes like Leipaklotpi Devi are all disciples of this Guru. And even now his disciples are propagating Manipuri dances. Among his disciples mention may be made of Srimati Rita Mukharjee, Jhaveri Sisters, Sabita Mehta, Prahlad Ghosh, Bipin Singh, Bhimbhai, K.Desai, Banamali, Hariupal etc. In the English era 1954 this Guru returned to Manipur and became a teacher at J.N. Dance Akademi. After a few years he retired from service. In the English era 1973 State Kala Akademi gave him Scholarship. This artiste wrote a book on dance and published it. This artiste breathed his last on Friday 21" of English era 1975. His name and fame will remain eternal forever. "Guru Atomba Dance and Music Institute' was established in his memory. Another source book gives the following account on the life and works of Guru Haobam Atomba Singh, thus: - Guru Haobam Atomba Singh was born 10' December of the English era 1885. During his childhood, he learnt up to only class III at the first English High School the Johnstone School. As he was born in a very poor family, he entered the profession of carpentry at a tender young age. The person who initiated him to the world of dance was one renowned teacher of Pung. During the lifetime of the Guru, 17 years were spent in learning the Meitei dance. He is a person who loves the old tradition of Manipuri Dance. During his younger days, the Guru was much fame at both Assam and Bengal. Kavi guru Rabindranath Thakur appointed him professor of Manipuri dance at his Shantiniketan and honoured him by awarding 'Grynnny Gold Medal' by the poet himself. As the Guru had spent 16 years in Assam and Bengal there began to emerge many dance students under his guide. Srimati Rita Mukherje, Jhaveri sisters, Nrityaguru Rajkumar Senarik Singh (Cachar), Guru Bipin Singh (Cachar) etc. are all disciples of Guru Atomba. He was professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Akademi and a member in the panel of members selected by the Government of India for the Manipuri Dance. And in the year 1957 the President of India honoured him by awarding the Sangeet Natka

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Akademi Award. And in the year 1973 he got the title of fellowship along with Rs. 1000/-.

Guru Haobam Atomba Singh died on February 21, English era 1975 at his residence of Uripok when he was 90. A condolence meeting of his death was held on 22/2/75 at 9.00 am by his family members at his residence along with representatives of Guru Amubi Nritya Vidyalaya, Manipuri Jagoi Marup, Simanta Patrika and representatives of Law College students. Those who assembled in the meeting prayed for his soul to remain in eternal peace and observed two minutes' silence. It is written in the book 'The Pre World War-II Form of Ras Leela' about the Guru thus:- "Haobam Atomba

was born on the 10th December 1885 at Uripok Haobam Dewan Leikai, Imphal. He was well-educated and learnt the art of dance, music and drumming etc. from early childhood. At the age of 17 he gave performance in Manipuri dance before Mr. Albert, the son of Queen Victoria in Calcutta on the orders of the late Maharaja Churachand Singh and got a certificate of excellence. He served as a dance teacher in Shantiniketan on the behest of late Kavi-guru Rabindranath Tagore. He was a well-acquainted and popular artiste of India who worked for 16 years in Shantiniketan. In recognition of his dedication in the field of dance, Rabindranath Tagore awarded him a Gold Medal and certificate of merit etc. He was also awarded Nritya Bharati'. His disciples include Smt. Rita Mukherjee, Savita Mehta, Prahlad Ghosh, Bipin Singh, Bhimbhai K. Desai, Banamali, Hariupal etc. Guru Atomba came back in 1954 and worked as a teacher in J.N. M. Dance Akademi. Sangeet Natak Akademi award was conferred to him in the year 1958; State Kala Akademi awarded him scholarship from 1973 till his death. He wrote a book on Manipuri Dance and established Guru Atomba Dance and Music Institution. The Guru expired in 1975.

E. Nilakanta Singh expressed about him in the following words: "Guru Atomba was a great traditionalist to the point of orthodoxy. He was not prepared to make any compromised with accepted style of movement and never fated any deviation."

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Conclusion:

It will not be an exaggeration to say that the contributions to Manipuri Dance made by these gurus regarded as the eternal Trimurti of Manipuri dance are almost a wonder. But it is a regrettable thing to note that the source books and references written by authors of bygone days about their life and works suffer much from inconsistencies and discrepancies. This is a great disappointment to young, ardent and up-coming researches of Manipuri dance. These source- books suffer too much grammatical incongruence, errors in spelling etc. since those books were printed in hand- composed printing presses before the advent of computerized offset printing. Press-devil might have crept in while those books were in press but one thing comes up for consideration that the authors seem to write without much insight, checks and cross- checks. Some examples are given here:

1. There is inconsistency of dates of the death of Guru Amudon Sharma though the year is the same. Khulem Chandrasekhar gives the date as 'March 10' 1974 in his book while Prof. Sanasam Dhaneswar Singh gives it as March 11' and Phanjaobam Iboton Singh states it to be as on 'March 9 in their respective books as reference in this study.
2. The year in which Sangeet Natak Award was given to Guru Amudon Sharma is 1961 English era in the books of Khulem Chandrasekhar and Phanjaobam Iboton Singh while in the book of Dhaneswar it is given as 1960 English era.
3. The year of conferring 'Nritya Guru' title by the Manipuri Sahitya Parishad to this respected Guru is also different. In Chandrasekhar's book it is stated as '1958' while in the book of Phanjaobam Iboton Singh, it is stated as '1972', What a gulf of difference.
4. As regards the bio-data of Guru Shri Maisnam Amubi Singh there is difference of dates when the Akademi Award was conferred on the Guru. It is 11/4/56 in the book of Chandrasekhar and 21/4/56 in the book of Sanasam Dhaneswar. A difference of 10 days.
5. The year of awarding "Sangeet Natak Akademi Award to Guru Shri Haobam Atomba Singh also suffers from inconsistency. It is 1957 in Dhaneswar's book while it is 1958 in Haobam Ibochaoba's book.

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6. Last but not the least one major blunder made by Prof. Sanasam Dhaneswar Singhin his book is the use of the word 'Purel' which means the great grandfather in Meitei society. He writes that Colonel Major Shamu Singh is the father of Guru Maisnam Amubi Singh but he again states the major' as his Purel' (the great grandfather). How can a father become a great grandfather so suddenly? Yet, in spite of all these incongruities and press- devilry which have crept in the reference books, one fact is quite certain that Manipuri Classical Dance was made internationally known thanks to the contributions made by the

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