

Article

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A Glimpse of Manipuri Cinema



A scene from Haobam Paban Kumar's Loktak Lairembee

Manipuri Cinema starting with the first Manipuri feature film- Deb Kumar Bose's *Matamgi Manipur* released on April 9, 1972, which also bagged the President's Silver Medal for the best Regional film in Manipuri in the 20th National Film Awards, is approaching to its grand celebration of Golden Jubilee. The legacy of Manipuri cinema had its struggling past with commitment to the modern era of challenges and development. Cinema in Manipuri from pre-war period to the modern era has seen many ups and down. But the dedication of the film makers, artistes and technicians on the fertile soil of the rich cultural heritage of Manipur created a golden chapter in the history of Indian regional cinema. Manipur is the only state leading the production of films in Tibeto-Burman language in India where films are made in three different major language groups namely Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman languages.

For the first time, the privileged audience in Manipur, the erstwhile Kingdom had a rare occasion to watch a magic-lantern performance, a

precursor of motion picture at the end of 1890. It was during the festival of Christmas, the Political Agent of Manipur Frank St. Clair Grimwood organized a magic-lantern performance at the Residency (the present Raj Bhavan) in Imphal in the presence of the princes of Manipur. He brought projector from England and made himself the lanternslides from photographs. To make the show sensational, he presented the subjects in groups like -groups of Manipuris, photographs of princes and bits of the country, and arranged the sequences. The then Jubaraj of Manipur, Tikendrajit who was amongst the few audience greeted with much applause on his part when a picture of the young lady Maipakpi, whom he decided to marry her, was projected on the screen. The performance concluded with a large projection of the ex-Maharajah Surchandra in royal dress. The show was coincided with the dethrone of King Surchandra by his brother Senapati Kullachandra. Nearly two months back, the King Surchandra took his self-imposed pilgrimage to the sacred city of Brindavana on the Ganges, accompanied by three of his brothers. The departure of their beloved king from Manipur was a shock to each and every citizen of Manipur.

This was recorded in the book – *My Three years in Manipur* written by Ethel St Clair Grimwood, wife of Frank St. Clair Grimwood published in 1891. The author described the moment as, “Dead silence greeted it, and an awkward pause; but my husband changed the slide almost directly to one of a humorous character which caused everyone much amusement”. She further described the royal dress in the Maharajah’s photograph as, “This was worn only on very great occasion, usually of a sacred nature. It consisted of a coat and Dhotee made of silk of a grayish shade, embroidered all over in purple silk in a fleur-de-lis pattern”.

Manipuri audience witnessed silent Indian movies in the 1920s through touring cinema. Touring cinema entered inside the territory of Manipur with the permission of the Manipur State Durbar during the erstwhile kingdom of Manipur. The records available at the Manipur State Archives reveal that the Manager of Friends Trading Union at Dimapur applied for 10 days film shows in Manipur on January 11,

1930. The Manipur State Durbar in its meeting on January 18, 1930 chaired by A.G. McCall Esq ICS rejected the application.



Yengkhom Roma in Matamgi Manipur (1972), first Manipuri Film

Messrs B. Kawaji & Co, Calcutta submitted an application to C. Gimson, the Political Agent of Manipur on 10.11.1933 seeking permission for holding talkie shows for three months in Imphal. The Political Agent forwarded the application to the Manipur State Durbar on 30.11.1933. The State Durbar

in its meeting held on December 6, 1933, had no objection to the Company coming from 1.1.1934 to 31.3.1934 as that was a talking picture show and of an exceptional nature. The Durbar further stated that the Company would however be liable for trading licence fees of Rs 25 and income tax at the usual rates, and would be required to deposit Rs 350 in advance to cover those charges. Those films screened in the early part of 1934 could be the first talkie films shown in Manipur.

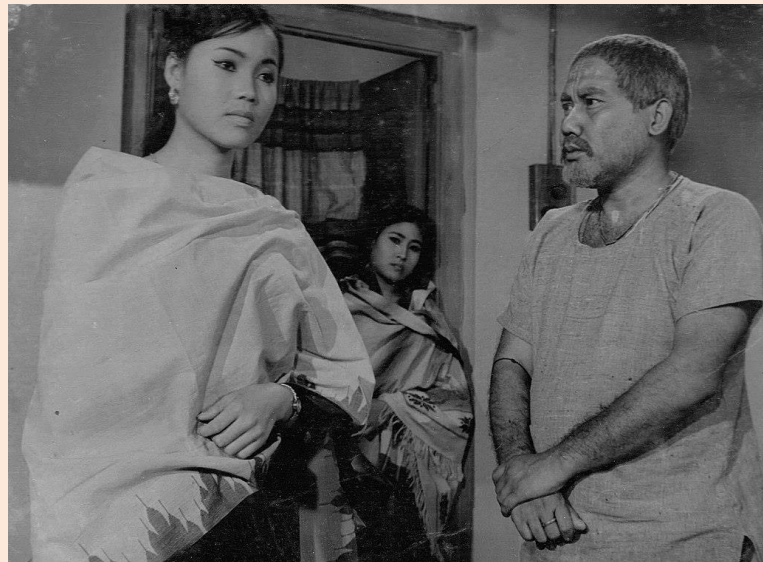
Rudimentary and makeshift film show houses were established in Manipur before the World War II. Kasturichand Jain and Ramkumar were pioneer film exhibitors who ran show houses in Manipur in the pre-war period. Kasturi's show house Manipur Talkies established in 1936 and Ramkumar show house in Imphal had regular film shows.

With the growth of entertainment business in Manipur, the Manipur State Durbar in its meeting on 1.1.1937 fixed the taxable income at 1.66 percent in the rupee of the gross receipts per film show. The Cinematograph Act 1918 (II of 1918) of the British Indian Legislature were introduced in Manipur following a resolution passed by the Manipur State Durbar presided by T.S. Sharpe Esq ICS on 15.5.1940.

Towards the end of the World War II, better organised cinema halls came up. MNB Talkies, Victory Cinema and Friends Talkies in Imphal were prominent among them.

Manipuri cinema started when Maharaja Kumar Priyabrata (1912-2005), younger brother of Manipur King Boddhachandra made non-fiction films in 1936. Popularly known as MKPB, he made films on culture and traditions of different communities of Manipur and important events with his 8 mm Bell and Howell movie camera since 1936.

His film on the reception ceremony of Assam Governor Sir Robert Neil Reid at royal palace of Manipur during his visit in Manipur from January 22 to 31, 1938 is remarkable. The film begins with the entry of the Britishers who were received by the king Churachand and his noblemen. The film consists of the shots on the ailing princess Tombisana on a sedan attending the ceremony, Manipuri flag, speech of the Governor, clapping of the British ladies in skirts sitting in the front rows, presentation of glass frame of a text to the king, vote of thanks, playing music by a band of 24 musicians and farewell handshakes.



Indira and Aribam Syam Sharma in Matamgi Manipur

Another film - Royal Palace of Manipur was made in colour. The camera positioning at the main entrance gate of the palace focuses to capture the whole panoramic view of the palace using long shot. It captures the residence of the king with the Durbar hall and then panning left horizontally, it focuses on the Govindajee Temple and the large Mandap. MKPB is known as the Father of Manipuri Documentary Cinema.



S. N. Chand, the first film director from Manipur who made Brojendragi Luhongba (1972)

MKPB informed the film critic R K. Bidur that his best satisfied film was the *Hiyang Tannaba* (Royal Boat Race) at royal moat. The Royal Boat Race was organised on January 23, 1938 in the honour of the visiting Assam Governor. The film is not traceable now.

The President of Manipur State Durbar Gerald Pakenham Stewart

also made many documentary films on Manipur in 1935. He filmed Women's Market in Imphal, Kangla (Old Palace), Konung Kang Chingba (Royal Rathayatra), Reception ceremony of the King at Bishnupur on his returning home, Mukna Kangjei (Hockey with wrestling), Sagol Kangjei (Manipuri polo), Mukna (Manipuri wrestling), Sword dance with cutting the stem of plantain, Kabui dance, Mao Dance and Anal dance. His documentary on Konung Kang Chingba is very impressive. Two elephants controlled the large crowd. All the devotees wore white dress. When the king came out on a sedan, everyone bowed their heads. His five documentary films are archived at the University of Cambridge, UK.

Anthropologist Ursula Graham Bower also made films on Tangkhul, Kabui and Thadou-Kuki tribes of Manipur in 1939. Her 50- minute long documentary film – *Culture and Crafts of Manipur* (1939) is in the Pitt Rivers Museum of the University of Oxford, London. It is a 16 mm film and has four reels. The film contains embroidery, traditional dance and weaving of Kabui tribes of Kambiron in Tamenglong district of Manipur; spring dance and Nungbi pottery of Tangkhuls in Ukhrul District; weaving and brass casting of Kuki tribes, Pottery of Meiteis at Waikhong, playing musical instrument and weaving of Chiru tribes. She mostly filmed on the tribes of Manipur. Some of her films were made in colour.

After the World War II and before merger into the Indian Union, the erstwhile Kingdom of Manipur attempted to make a Manipuri feature film. Under the patronage of the king Boddhachandra, a film company called- Shri Shri Govindaji Film Company in 1946 started

making a film on *Mainu Pemcha*, a popular historical play of Rupmahal Theatre. From the business angle, it was later switched over to Hindi. The maiden venture met with rough weather from all sides despite spending around Rupees one and half lakh, and crashed midway. Selected pieces about nine reels were screened uncensored and un-edited in a few cinema halls in Imphal. The tempo naturally died down to low ebb for many years before a fresh enthusiasm was born long afterwards.

Towards the end of 1960s, intellectuals and students in Manipur raised their arms to preserve their identity and looked for answer. The Film Society of Manipur, the first Society of Manipur was established in 1969. It organized both Indian and foreign film festivals in Manipur and conducted film discussions regularly. It was the third oldest film society in the North East India.



A scene of Olangthagi Wangmadasoo directed by A. Syam Sharma, a blockbuster film defeating Ramesh Sippy's Sholay

BIRTH OF MANIPURI CINEMA

The simultaneous release of *Matangi Manipur* at three theatres namely- Usha Cinema and Friends Talkies in Imphal and Azad Talkies in Kakching on April 9, 1972 marked the beginning of an

epoch in the history of Manipuri cinema awakening the Manipuri film goes into the reality of a Manipuri feature film for the first time.

Woven around the story of a Manipuri family in Imphal, the film portrays the contemporary Manipuri society where the old order is changing to a new one as the time changes-sometimes towards creating a better life and sometimes a bad way of life.

To make the film, the equipments and technicians were engaged from Manipur. Even the film director, Debkumar Bose, a Bengali was engaged from Calcutta. Except a few two-three outdoor locations in Manipur, all the shots were taken in a Calcutta studio. Salute was



Aribam Syam Sharma's Imagi Ningthem, a winner of Grand Prix in Nantes in 1982

accorded to the bold producer Karam

Monomohan, an exhibitor and distributor, who never looked back in pioneering the film production without visualizing any loss or gain onto the film.

Making a film in Manipur which had a small population and poor economy was a distant dream in those days. It needed huge amount of money, manpower and all resources to get it done. Finding a viable market was beyond imagination. Bollywood movies flooded all cinema halls numbering around 10 in Manipur where the Manipuri audiences had a craze for Bollywood movies in its melodramatic stories, enchanting songs and romantic stars.

During the latter part of 1960s and the beginning of 1970s, when the mainstream Indian cinema flourished to its zenith and on the other,

the emergence of New Indian Cinema; there was a strong urge among the art loving people of Manipur to have their own films. And among them was Sapam Nodiachand (1935-1989) aka S. N. Chand. He quitted the government job in All India Radio, Imphal and sold his properties with a firm determination of making the first Manipuri film. An ardent film society activist of Film Society of Manipur; he established his film company- Sajatia Pictures in 1970 and picked up *Brojendragi Luhongba*, a short story penned by renown litterateur Dr. Lamabam Kamal. He engaged technicians and hired film equipments from Calcutta. He first showed the seed of the New Indian Cinema in the soil of Manipur. A multifaceted personality in music and theatre, S. N. Chand became the first Manipuri film director when he completed his feature film in 1972.

S.N.Chand, in a true sense, was the father of Manipuri cinema. Like Dhundiraj Govind Phalke in making the first Indian film- Raja Harishchandra in 1913 and Jyoti Prasad Agarwala in making the first Assamese film –Joimati in 1935; S. N. Chand was the one-man army shouldering various responsibilities of producer, director, screenwriter, dialogue writer, lyricist, playback singer, music director and leading actor of the film when there were no basic amenities to make a film in Manipur.

Prior to the shooting of *Matamgi Manipur*, the shooting of *Brojendragi Luhongba* started in the early part of the year 1971. Due to his acute financial constraint, the film took a long time and could not be the first Manipuri feature film. After clearance from the censor on December 30, 1972; *Brojendragi Luhongba* was released on January 26, 1973 at Usha Cinema and Friends Talkies in Imphal and at Thoubal Cinema in Thoubal.

In the releasing function of the film held at Usha Cinema, the stalwart S. N. Chand stated, “It is not a successful business, it we treat the filmmaking in Manipur as business. However, being a devotee of arts and worshipper in artistic skills, and with a thought that the rich Manipuri culture could be shone in the world, I have taken the whole responsibility of making this film sacrificing all I have possessed.”

The film was set in the backdrop of unique historical places, enchanting landscape of plain and hill areas, beautiful tribal dance and typical traditional performing arts- Pena and Bashok of Manipur. The thematic concept of the social film seeks to establish that honesty of purpose must be maintained in every sphere of life; otherwise one cannot achieve the success and honour of life. The film revolves around a clash of the modernism and traditional values and reveals that the traditional values are so worthy for one's identity. It was a true Manipuri film made by the first son of the soil.

S. N. Chand also scripted and directed another Manipuri film- *Ngak-E-Ko Nangse* (1974) under the banner of Poonam Pictures of Wangkhem Basantakumar. The film with commercial elements depicts the impact of fast growing alien culture to the Manipuri society, its crisis and realization of the truth and one's identity at the end. Without any credit, he extensively helped G. C. Tongbra, a distinguished dramatist, in making his directorial debut film- *Khutang Lamjel* (1979). He also acted in R. K. Kripa's *Ingallei* (1990).

After *Matamgi Manipur*, the Manipuri films namely *Saaphabee* (1976), *Olangthagee* (1977), *Wangmadasoo* (1980) and *Imagi Ningthem* (1981) all directed by Aribam Syam Sharma, continued to win national film awards, occupying prominent place in the Indian cinema. Till the release of *Imagi Ningthem*, Manipur produced only eight feature films. It showed that half of the total production could be of deserving films at the national level.

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

The year 1982, Manipuri cinema's completion of 10 years was a remarkable year that the Manipur cinema got a unique place in the international arena. In November 1982, Aribam Syam Sharma's *Imagi Ningthem* (My Son, My Precious), the lone entry from India bagged the Grand Prix in the



Aribam Syam Sharma on the set

competition section of the 4th Film International Festival of Three Continents, Nantes in France. It was a historic moment that *Imagi Ningthem* became the first Indian film to receive the top coveted prize in the Nantes International Festival.

Perhaps *Imagi Ningthem* was the most acclaimed Manipuri film so far made. The film weaves a sensitive tale of a boy who, following his unmarried mother's death in childbirth, is brought by his grandfather. The boy's father is traced by a lady school teacher and finds to be married with her sister; but her sister is only happy to adopt the boy as her own. The film travelled in many international film festivals held in New York, Denver, Locarno, Toronto, Montreal and Hong Kong; and introduced Manipuri cinema of the tiny State of Manipur to the world. Master Leikhendra, the child artiste of the film bagged the Best Child Artiste award in the National Film Festival.

In 1991, Aribam Syam Sharma's *Ishanou* (The Chosen One) represented the India in the Uncertain Regard of the Cannes International Film Festival, France. The film is about Tampha, the young wife having a small child, who is possessed by the divinity of the mysterious Maibi phenomenon, experiencing a series of violent fits of vision and trance and runs away from home in a frantic nocturnal quest of her Maibi Guru for initiation into the sect of the chosen. The family breaks away. Behind the colourful spectacle of the traditional Manipuri life, into which Tampha almost loses herself to the mysterious, there conceals the pains of a mother who can no longer nurture her child growing into stranger.

Ishanou bagged the Rajat Kamal for the Best Regional Film and the Special Mention for the main actress Anoubam Kiranmala in the 38th National Film Festival in 1991. The film was screened in the Indian Panorama section of the 22nd International Film Festival of India 1991 and in many International Film Festivals at London, Seattle, Singapore, Toronto, Vancouver, Fribourg, Hawaii and Nantes.

It will be tough to find a successful film maker like Aribam Syam Sharma who can make all categories of films excellently. He made not only blockbuster films in mainstream cinema but also made great off-beat films of international repute. He also made many remarkable documentary films.

His first feature film- *Lamja Parshuram* (1974) under the banner of N S Films released at Pratap Talkies in Imphal on April 24, 1974 became the first super hit Manipuri film. Kangabam Tomba in the role of Lamja Parshuram and Bedamani in the role of Indrani became the stars overnight after release of the film. Huiem Manglem emerged as film comedian from the film. Raj Kapoor's super hit film- Bobby screened simultaneously at Usha Cinema in Imphal could not get the momentum of *Lamja Parshuram*. The film ran 15 weeks with the celebration of 100 days screening.

Syam Sharma's third feature film- *Olangthagi Wangmadasoo* (1979) under the same banner became the all-time blockbuster and longest running Manipuri film in the history of Manipuri cinema. It was released at Friends Talkies in Imphal on January 18, 1980. It was made on the first original screenplay of renowned Manipuri writer M. K. Binodini. It was a well-crafted film with box office elements infused with regional flavour. It contained eight songs composed by a dual Joy Shyam. Surprisingly, the disk record of the songs went out of stock just after it was released.

The film had a tough competition with Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay*, the blockbuster Hindi film for a long run. *Sholay* was screened at Usha Cinema in Imphal. With the attraction of the cinegoers by adding one and two reels during the running, *Sholay* achieved to run 28 weeks record in Imphal, but could not compete with the Manipuri film. *Olangthagi Wangmadasoo* marked the longest running Manipuri film so far in the history of Manipuri Cinema with the record of 32 weeks celebrating its silver jubilee. "The latest film *Olangthagi Wangmadasoo* has broken Imphal's box office record held by *Sholay*" was the intro of the full page article published in the popular film magazine- FILMFARE (February 16-28, 1981) with photographs.

The film also bagged the National Film Award in the regional film category.

In the field of documentary, he made over 40 films of different subjects marking its uniqueness. His ballet film *Sangai- The Dancing Deer of Manipur* (1987-88) produced by Sangeet Natak Akademi received the citation- '*Outstanding film of the year 1989*' from the British Film Institute London. In recognition of his contribution in the Indian documentary cinema, Government of India conferred him Dr. V. Shantaram Lifetime Achievement Award in the 10th Mumbai International Film Festival 2008 organized by the Films Division.

All his films have significant contents or issues for academic discussion. His films fabricate with social traditions and cultural practices ranging from ancient to modern times. He is a philosopher and perfectionist who can see the depth of the ocean when he finds an ocean. He received six National Film Awards in feature films and nine awards in non-feature films.

When the Manipuri cinema was unheard in Manipur, Maibam Amuthoi Singh aka M. A. Singh did his three year diploma course in film editing from the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune in 1971 and further studied in film direction from the same institute. His first feature film- *Sanakeithel* (1983) directed and edited by him introduced an example of neo-realism in Manipuri cinema. The loss of human values and gradual downfall of the society are shown in the film. The film received the National Film Award and was selected in the Indian Panorama of the International Film Festival of India. M.A. Singh's second film- *Langlen Thadoi* (1984) released at Shankar Talkies in Imphal on June 29, 1984 heralded the arrival of colour film in Manipuri cinema.

Kongbrailatpam Ibohal Sharma was a film enthusiast devoted in different fields of cinema. He ran a photography shop named X- Cine Studio at Paona road in Imphal. There, he ran a film institute called Film Institute, Manipur and conducted classes on film making. He was the founder president of the Manipur Cine Development Co-

operative Society Ltd. He was the president of Imphal Cine Club and organised good film screening at the mini studio of his shop.

K. Ibohal Sharma produced the internationally acclaimed Manipuri film- *Imagi Ningthem*(1981) besides shouldering the responsibility of cinematography in the film and thus, became the first Manipuri cinematographer in Manipuri cinema. His maiden feature film- *Shambal Wangma* (1993) bagged the National Film Award in 1993 and was also selected in the Indian Panorama.

Laimayum Banka Sharma and Moirangthem Nilamani Singh made meaningful Manipuri films targeting the audience with the flavor of commercial taste. They treated the film as the medium of mass communication. Dramatist G. C. Tongbra made an experimental film – *Khuthang Lamjel* treating the Manipuri audience with a new taste.

L. Banka Sharma's *Yairipok Thambalnu, Meichak, Poppy* and *Urirei Madhabee* were prominent Manipuri films that hit the box office. Moirangthem Nilamani's *Khonjel, Paap* and *Khamba Thoibi* gave a different taste of Manipuri cinema to the Manipuri audiences. G. Narayan Sharma was a successful film producer producing half a dozen Manipuri films besides making films.

Young film makers Oken Amakcham and Makhonmani Mongsaba led the bandwagon of film makers of the second generation. Oken Amakcham's *Khonthang* (1992) and Makhonmani Mongsaba's *Yenning Amadi Likla* (2007) were selected for Indian Panorama. Oken Amakcham's *Mayophygi Macha* (1994) and Makhonmani Mongsaba's *Chatledo Eidi*(2000) bagged the national film award. Later, Oinam Goutam's *Phijigee Mani* (2011) received the National film award besides getting selection in Indian Panorama. Khwairakpam Bishwamitra, L. Surjakanta Sharma, Ksh. Kishorekumar, Chan Heisnam, R. K. Kripa and M. Kumarjit were few film makers who dedicated their life to the growth of Manipuri cinema in the second generation of Manipuri cinema.

Haobam Paban Kumar's debut feature film- *Loktak Lairembee* (The Lady of the Lake) hit the headlines for its world premiere in the Busan International Film Festival 2016, South Korea. The film bagged the top award- Golden Gateway in the Jio MAMI Mumbai International Festival 2016 where the film was the India premiere. The film featured as US Premiere on December 9, 2016 at the film festival organised by the Museum of the Moving Image (MoMI) and The India Center Foundation, New York. The film was also screened in the Dubai International Film Festival (December 9-13, 2016) and became a favourite in International festival circuit. The film will be screened in the 67th Berlin International Film Festival (February 9-18, 2017).

The film narrates the sufferings of the fishermen who live in huts built on floating biomasses of Loktak Lake. In 2011, the authorities in the name of protecting the serenity of the ecosystem, burnt down the huts leaving thousands of fishermen homeless.

The film tells how Tomba, one of the victims, lives with a harrowing nightmare of looming displacement.

One day, Tomba finds a gun hidden within the biomass. He transforms himself to an assertive man. One day, an elderly lady who mysteriously wanders in the lake, knocks on his door in the middle of the night. He chases her and commits an unintended crime.

The film bagged the Best Film on environment/ Conservation/ Preservation in the 64th National Film Awards 2016 and created a history of Manipuri cinema that a Manipuri feature film won an award in one of the main categories of the National Awards.

Paban Kumar said that the independent film makers in Manipur were surviving on their own feet without any support from the government which the other States did. "We are able to make our films with the strong passion on cinema. How long we will venture into the film journey in such rough weather", he remarked.

Maipaksana Haorongbam, an alumnus of Jyoti Chitran Regional Film and Television Institute, Guwahati bagged the Rajat Kamal for

the best Manipuri film in his feature film- *Eibusu Yaohanbiyu* in Natioanl Film Awards 2015. His latest film in Tangkhul dialect- *Wonam*(2018) entered in the competition section of Itanagar International Film Festival 2019. Makhonmani Mongsaba's *Magi Matambakta* was screened under Unsung Incredible India at Bengaluru International Film Festival 2019.

ON DOCUMENTARIES

Manipur is the leading State in the North East India producing a large number of remarkable documentary films. Legendary film maker Aribam Syam Sharma made over 40 documentary films. All the documentaries were mostly based on culture. He got nine national film awards in documentaries- *Deer on the Lake* (1990), *Indigenous Games of Manipur* (1991), *Meitei Pung* (1992), *Orchids of Manipur* (1994), *Yelhou Jagoi* (1996), *Thang-Ta: Martial Arts of Manipur*(2000), *The Monpas of Arunachal Pradesh* (2002), *Guru Laimayum Thambalngoubi*(2006) and *Manipur Pony* (2012).

In recognition of his contribution in the Indian documentary cinema, the Government of India conferred him Dr. V. Shantaram Lifetime Achievement Award in the 10th Mumbai International Film Festival, 2008 organised by the Films Division. All his documentaries are made with significance identifying and highlighting the important aspects of subject tracing it from its origin and coming down to the contemporary situation.

Haobam Paban Kumar, an alumnus of Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata in direction and screenplay writing emerged as a bright star in the North East India in the field of documentary cinema when his 77-minute long film- *AFSPA 1958* received two grand prizes namely the International Critics Award of FIPRESCI and the International Jury Award at the 9th Mumbai International Film Festival, India 2006.



Haobam Paban Kumar

He became the first Swarna Kamal awardee film maker of Manipur when his film –*AFSPA 1958* bagged the Best Non-Feature film award in the 56th National Film Awards 2008. The film depicts the wave of protests both violent and peaceful in Manipur aftermath the rape, torture and death of Thangjam Manorama, a 32-year old woman. The citation of the jury says that the best award is given to *AFSPA 1958* for a courageous depiction of the non-violent resistance of the people of Manipur to protest against a legislation, which undermines the value of self-respect and the fundamentals of democracy. The documentation process by various crews and the way it is chronicled offers multiple perspectives.

He also got another two National Film awards in his non-feature films- *Mr. India* (2009) as the best social issues film and *Phum Shang* (2014) as the best investigative film. His five films namely *Ngaihak Lambida*, *The First Leap*, *AFSPA 1958*, *Mr. India* and *Phum Shang* were screened at the non-feature section of the India Panorama of the International Film Festival of India.

His film- *Phum Shang* put another feather on his cap when it received the Golden Conch for the best documentary film below 60 minutes in the international competition section of the 14th Mumbai International Film Festival 2016. The film travelled around the world to take part at major international film festivals.

Sanju Bachaspatimayum is another documentary film maker of Manipur who makes films on contemporary social issues. His films- *Shingnaba*(2008) and *Heart to Heart*(2010) received the National Film awards. Elangbam Natasha won the National Film Award for best narration/voice over in Sanju Bachaspatimayum's *Sanakeithel* (2008). Oinam Doren, Ronel Haobam and Borun Thokchom also picked up National film awards in their documentary films. Cameraman Irom Maipak bagged the National Film Award for the best cinematographer in Aribam Syam Sharma's non-feature film – *The Monpas of Arunachal*

Pradesh (2002). Doordarshan plays an important role for bringing up the documentary film makers in Manipur.

Ashok Veilou son of Thaipei Peter of Purul village in Senapati District who was currently pursuing final year post graduate Diploma in Direction and Screenplay writing at Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata of India showed his talent in filmmaking when his 13 minute 33 second fiction film in Poumai language *Tao-Tai* (Seed) bagged the best short film in national best short film category in the 22nd Kolkata International Film Festival held in November 2016.

Again, the selection of Bobo Khuraijam's non- feature film- *Ima Sabitri* as the opening film of the Non-Feature film section of Indian Panorama and Haobam Paban Kumar's *Loktak Lairembee* in Feature film section of Indian Panorama of the 47th International Film Festival of India 2016, Goa made Manipur proud.

2016 A GLORIOUS YEAR OF MANIPURI CINEMA

The year 2016 too, witnessed the glory of Manipuri cinema having won awards in every category – Feature, Non-feature and Best writing on Cinema of National Film Awards 2015 for the first time. Calling him 'the ideal film whisperer in Manipur'; Meghachandra Kongbam, the film columnist of Manipuri daily- *Poknapham* was conferred with the Swarna Kamal for the best film critic. In her speech at the National awards ceremony on May 3, 2016, Ms Advaita Kala, Chairperson of the Jury of Best Writing on Cinema described, "His writing for cinema goes beyond film criticism and enters the realm of finding common ground. His contribution is manifold and sets an example of how meaningful writing can transcend the limits, the time limits indeed enforced on it by the release of the film".

An alumnus of Jyoti Chitaban Regional Film and Television Institute, Guwahati, Maipaksana Haorongbam bagged the Rajat Kamal for the best Manipuri film in his feature film- *Eibusu Yaohanbiyu*. Meena Longjam a Ph D degree in Mass Communication

from Manipur University became the first lady film maker from Manipur to have won the National Film Award. Her non-feature film— *Autodriver* picked up the Rajat Kamal for the best film on social issues. It proved that those who studied in the professional courses got the recognition with the awards.

Haobam Paban Kumar bagged the Golden Conch in Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) in 2016 in his non-feature film— *Phumshang*, and the Golden Gateway in Jio MAMI Mumbai Film Festival in 2016 in his feature- *Loktak Lairembee*.

CRISIS IN MANIPURI CINEMA

When Manipuri Cinema somehow became fit to survive on its own both commercially and qualitatively, it met a major crisis in the exhibition sector in 2000. On September 12, 2000; the proscribed Revolutionary People's Front had imposed an indefinite blanket ban of screening Hindi films in cinema halls and video parlours against the custodian death of its Central Bureau Secretary in the hands of Assam Rifles on September 10. Against the will of the militant outfit, Assam Rifles show its might transmitting Hindi film songs through use of public address system from the hilltop of Chinga in Imphal where the cantonment occupied. Regular Hindi film shows for general public with free entry were organised at the cinema hall of the Assam Rifles cantonment in the Kangla, at the heart of Imphal city. This led the militant outfit more resentful and the dictate remained forever. All the 58 cinema halls in the State which were survived on Bollywood Hindi films were closed one after another. The few Manipuri films made two or three in a year could not support the market. With the fall of market, there was fall of the production of celluloid films. Film makers switched over to make low cost Manipuri video films to save a few of the cinema halls, which was against the policy of the Government for survival cinema halls in the country. It is very unfortunate that there is no any cinema hall in the State equipped with digital technology except that of state-run Manipur State Film Development Society auditorium.

JOURNEY GOES ON

Even there is rough weather in Manipuri cinema which has not its State Film Policy; the film makers, the technicians and the artistes are still facing the challenges to make a vibrant Manipuri cinema.

In a short span of five decades, Manipuri cinema bagged 38 National Film awards- 17 in feature films (14 best regional feature film + one child artiste + two actresses), 18 in non-feature films (16 best films in different categories+ one Narration/Voice Over + one Cameraman) and three in writing on cinema (two film critics +one best book). Out of these awards, A. Syam Sharma alone fetched six awards in feature film and nine awards in non-feature.

Nine Manipuri feature films and 21 non-features were selected in the Indian Panorama of International Film Festival of India

In the international scene, A. Syam Sharma bagged the Grand Prix in Nantes in 1982 in his film- *Imagi Ningthem*. He became the first and only Indian to receive the top prize in the festival. Haobam Paban Kumar bagged the Golden Conch in Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) in 2016 in his non-feature film- *Phumshang*, and the Golden Gateway in Jio MAMI Mumbai Film Festival in 2016 in his feature- *Loktak Lairembee*.

Bearing the torch of new era of Manipuri cinema by the present generation, the film journey still goes on. They are hoping for the vibrant Manipuri Cinema at least before the celebration of its golden jubilee in 2022.

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