

Embodied Innovation: The Distinctive Legacy of Guru Thiyam**Tarunkumar Singh in Manipuri Dance****Suchitra Takhellambam****Research Scholar****Department of Dance and Music, M.U.****Dr.M.Thoiba Singh****Assistant Professor,****Department of Dance and Music, M.U.****Abstract**

Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh (1912–1989) occupies a seminal place in the history of Manipuri dance as a visionary performer, choreographer, composer, pedagogue, and author. Commencing his artistic journey as a Pung and Khol prodigy at the tender age of twelve, he pursued rigorous training under several eminent Gurus, mastering the manifold dimensions of the Manipuri performing arts. His lifelong dedication was directed not merely toward the preservation of tradition but also toward its propagation and creative renewal, particularly beyond the cultural frontiers of Manipur and on international stages. As the founder of the first Manipuri dance institution outside Manipur, Thiyam Tarunkumar pioneered the global dissemination of the form, often performing with his wife, Smt. Bilashini Devi, in numerous countries. His pedagogical approach was distinctive: he emphasized foundational training through body conditioning, postures, tāla, and punglon before introducing actual dance movements. He further advocated the balanced use of both right and left bodily faculties, a method that instilled symmetry and discipline in the dancer's craft. Guru Tarunkumar's choreographic oeuvre—including *Naga Sikari*, *Hunter Dance*, *Chitrangada Arjun*, and *Nongdol Leima*—remains celebrated for its aesthetic innovation and profound cultural resonance. As an author, his seminal texts *Manipuri Nritya Praveshika* and *Meitei Jagoi Ahanba Lamjing* continue to serve as indispensable resources for scholars and practitioners alike, offering both theoretical frameworks and practical guidance. What distinguishes Guru Tarunkumar Singh's legacy is his holistic vision of dance as an art of synthesis—where rhythm, emotion, and corporeal expression coalesce into a refined cultural articulation. By blending fidelity to tradition with bold creative explorations, he not only safeguarded the vitality of Manipuri dance but also ensured its enduring relevance in a rapidly modernizing world. His contributions thus constitute a cornerstone in the historiography of Manipuri classical dance and its transregional evolution.

Keywords: Manipuri Dance, Choreography, Innovation, Dance Pedagogy, Cultural Preservation and Dissemination.

Introduction

Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh (1912–1989) stands among the earliest and most distinguished exponents of Manipuri dance, a pioneer whose tireless efforts carried this classical tradition beyond the cultural frontiers of Manipur to audiences across India and abroad.

Born in 1912 at Uripok Haobam Dewan Leikai, Imphal, to Thiyam Tonyaima Singh and Thiyam Ongbi Sanatombi Devi, he was the second son in a family that nurtured his artistic inclinations shown in figure No.1. As the husband of Ibemhal and Bilashini Devi, and father of the globally renowned playwright, theatre director, and educator Ratan Thiyam, his familial lineage itself reflects a rare confluence of creativity and cultural contribution. (Guru Tarunkumar Foundation:2014:4)



Fig No.1 Guru Th.Tarunkumar Singh

Tarunkumar Singh embarked on his artistic journey at the tender age of twelve, beginning as a Pung and Khol artist. His training was marked by remarkable breadth and depth, shaped by tutelage under some of the most eminent Gurus of his time. He learned Meitei Pung from Yambem Angousana, Oja Haobam Chaoba, and Oja Radhesana Rajkumar; Khol from Oja Hodam Amuyaima Singh, Oja Haobam Subidar Manjor, and Oja Haobam Gopalmaacha Singh; and Manipuri dance under Nritya Guru Padma Shri Maisnam Amubi Singh. His repertoire further expanded with Lai Haraoba training from Oja Chungkham Manik Singh and Oja Keishamthong Nongbanshaba; tribal dance from Shrijut Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh; costume (Potloi-making) from Shrijut Aribam Bondthakur Sharma; makeup from Shrijut Ngangbam Udhop Singh; Thang-Ta (martial arts) from Oja Pheijaosana Rajkumar and Oja Sorokhaibam Gopal Singh; and Maibi Jagoi from Oja Ibohal Singh. Such a comprehensive training regimen cultivated in him a holistic command over the performative, ritualistic, and martial dimensions of Manipuri art. (Taunkumar:1969:V)

By 1938, Guru Tarunkumar had established himself as a solo performer, drummer, and choreographer, introducing authentic expressions of Manipuri dance and music to wider audiences. His artistic journey intersected with cinema when, in 1942, he met the celebrated actress and cultural patron Devika Rani, founder of *Bombay Talkies*. With her support, he was appointed dance director at the company, contributing to films such as *Sujata* (Bimal Roy:1959) and *Anjaan* (Mohammed Sadiq: 1956).

In 1943, he founded the *Tarunkumar Dance Academy* in Lahore, the first Manipuri dance school established outside Manipur. Although the disruptions of World War II forced its closure when the premises were requisitioned by the Indian Army, his vision remained undeterred.

Subsequently, he collaborated with the eminent cultural impresario Horen Ghosh of Bengal, touring extensively across India and abroad—performing in cities as far afield as Rome, Aden, and Beirut—accompanied by his wife and fellow dancer, Smt. Bilashini Devi. These endeavors marked a significant step in presenting Manipuri dance on the global stage. He went on to establish the *Rajashree Bhagyachandra Nritya Kala Mandir* at Nabadwip, Bengal, and also served as a faculty member at the Uday Shankar India Cultural Centre in Kolkata, thereby consolidating Manipuri dance within both institutional and cosmopolitan contexts.

In the history of Manipuri dance, Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh shines like a pole star in the night sky—quiet, steadfast, and luminous. His contributions, though few in number, were of enduring value: rare treasures of gold in the artistic treasury of Manipur. As a scholar-practitioner, he authored two seminal works on Manipuri dance, significantly advancing both the theoretical and pedagogical dimensions of the field.

His first book, *Manipuri Nritya Praveshika*, composed during his tenure as Principal of Bhagyachandra Nritya Kala Mandir at Nabadwip, is divided into seventy-one chapters. It systematically addresses the key foundations of the form, encompassing:

1. Basic terminology, preliminary exercises, and rhythmic structures (*tāla*).
 2. An elaborate treatment of *Chaali Jagoi*, regarded as the alphabet of Manipuri dance.
 3. A detailed exposition on *Punglon Jagoi*.
 4. Essential teachings inherited from his Guru, Padma Shri Amubi Singh, including the irreplaceable elements of *Bhangi* crucial to the performance of *Rāsa Leela*.
- (Tarunkumar:1969: 16-22)

His second work, *Meitei Jagoi Ahanba Lamjing* (1977), written during his association with the Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy, provides concise yet comprehensive insights into *tāla*, *mātrā*, *punglon*, postures, and the ten *rasa*-s. Though modest in volume, this text is unique in approach: not a detached theoretical treatise, but a practical manual drawn directly from embodied practice and oral tradition.

It reflects the pedagogical ethos of Manipuri culture, wherein theory follows practice—learners first engage physically with movement, and only thereafter enter the domain of conceptual reflection.

Together, these contributions exemplify Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh's philosophy of synthesis, where rigorous training, lived experience, and textual codification merge into a unified vision. His legacy endures not only in his performances and writings but also in the countless students, institutions, and cultural networks through which Manipuri dance has flourished globally.

Movement and Softness in Dance of Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh

Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh dedicated the entirety of his seventy-seven years to the enrichment and refinement of Manipuri dance, drawing upon the wisdom of numerous masters and shaping a philosophy of movement that was uniquely his own. While he excelled as a percussionist, his deepest artistic concern lay in the cultivation of *softness*—the gentle, fluid quality of bodily motion that characterizes the essence of Manipuri dance. For him, grace was not a superficial embellishment but the very soul of the art form.

To achieve such perfection in gesture and movement, Guru Tarunkumar devised preparatory exercises that preceded the actual composition of dance. His pedagogy emphasized that students must first discipline their bodies through systematic training before approaching performance. Only after these exercises were internalized did he introduce the practice of song (*geet*) and *tāla* in conjunction with dance movements, thereby ensuring an organic integration of rhythm, melody, and expression.

Central to his philosophy was the conviction that the human soul finds its primary expression through the hands. While he acknowledged the cultural primacy of the right hand in initiating most actions, he equally insisted upon the cultivation of the left, training his students to achieve dexterity and balance on both sides of the body. This approach produced a rare symmetry in performance, elevating Manipuri dance from mere ritual execution to a conscious art of equilibrium. His distinguished disciple, the celebrated dancer N. Amusana Devi, recalled in the souvenir *Guru Tarunkumar Sanmaan* (2006): “One remarkable characteristic of a great teacher is the ability to dance with equal mastery on both sides

instilling in us the discipline of bilateral perfection.” (Guru Tarunkumar Foundation:2006:6).

The hallmark elements of his training system can be summarized as follows:

- **Foundational posture and body exercises:** Students were instructed to stabilize posture and undertake posture-oriented exercises before engaging in actual dance practice.
- **Cultivation of grace:** Recognizing grace (*lasya*) as the signature quality of Manipuri dance, he developed specialized exercises focusing on the coordinated movement of legs, arms, shoulders, neck, chest, abdomen, and thighs.
- **Integration of music and movement:** He prohibited students from leaping directly into dance. Instead, they were required to first decipher and memorize *punglon* (drum syllables) and songs, internalizing rhythm as the basis of movement.
- **Spatial versatility:** Dancers were trained to perform with equal proficiency from all angles, ensuring adaptability in both solo and group compositions.
- **Intricacy in footwork:** Manipuri dance traditionally emphasized simplicity in footwork. Guru Tarunkumar enriched this dimension by introducing greater intricacy, which he systematized and transmitted to his students.
- **Textual engagement:** He mandated familiarity with his own works, *Meitei Jagoi Ahanba Lamjang* and *Manipuri Nritya Praveshika*. These texts not only codified technical elements—such as notations, gestures, and *punglon* patterns—but also instilled an understanding of the philosophical and ethical relations between Guru and disciple.
- **Reversal of conventional pedagogy:** While tradition typically begins with bodily steps and gestures, progressing thereafter to *tāla* and *punglon*, Guru Tarunkumar inverted this order. He insisted students first master *tāla* and *lasya* structures before moving on to physical expression, thereby grounding dance in rhythm as its metaphysical foundation.

Through this rigorous and innovative methodology, Guru Tarunkumar created a pedagogical legacy that continues to inspire choreographers and practitioners today. His compositions, particularly in solo forms, reveal a nuanced vocabulary of footsteps and movements that have since been adopted and reinterpreted by later generations of Manipuri dance composers.

Style and Technique in Dance of Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh

choreographer. Although he was not himself a *Raasdhari* of the *Rāsa Leela*, he possessed deep knowledge of its technical intricacies—*bhangi*, *chaali*, and other structural components.

His creative genius lay in his ability to compose new dance forms inspired by *Rāsa Leela* songs and *punglon*, extending the tradition without rupturing its authenticity. It is this rare ability—to innovate within the bounds of inherited tradition—that conferred upon Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh a style and technique singular in the history of Manipuri dance. His art, grounded in discipline yet open to experimentation, stands as a testament to his lifelong devotion to movement, rhythm, and the eternal softness that breathes life into Manipuri culture.

***Dance Style:* Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh articulated a distinctive vision of Manipuri dance, paying meticulous attention to the positioning and coordination of the legs and hands. His style, marked by its singularity, resisted imitation and set him apart from other exponents of the tradition.**

1. ***Symmetry of movement:*** Unlike many teachers who privileged the right side, Tarunkumar Singh emphasized balanced development of both the right and left limbs. This insistence on bilateral training infused his choreography with an uncommon sense of equilibrium and harmony.
2. ***Integration of punglon:*** He designed choreographic sequences around carefully composed *punglon* patterns. These rhythmic structures could be both accessible and complex, allowing his compositions to encompass a wide spectrum of expressive possibilities.
3. ***Primacy of rhythm over melody:*** In his dance forms, *punglon* occupied a more central role than the melodic line of the accompanying song. Rhythm, rather than tune, served as the guiding principle of his creative architecture.
4. ***Narrative through rhythm:*** His approach to *punglon*-based dance differed from that of his contemporaries. Whereas others employed rhythm as accompaniment, Tarunkumar Singh constructed entire choreographic sequences around *punglon*. A notable example is his composition *Krishna Roop*, where the concluding *punglon* alone vividly conveys the divine form of Lord Krishna.

Through these innovations, Guru Tarunkumar Singh established a choreographic vocabulary that foregrounded rhythm, symmetry, and expressive embodiment, enriching Manipuri dance with a distinctive stylistic identity.

Dance Technique: Equally significant was his technical pedagogy, which stressed precision in bodily form, the disciplined execution of movements, and the unbroken coordination of hands and legs. His method combined rigorous attention to detail with a systematic progression from exercise to performance.

1. ***Foundational exercises:*** He instructed dancers to extend both hands forward and downward in a grasping motion, repeated in measured cycles. This foundational practice, described in detail in his treatise *Manipuri Nritya Praveshika*, prepared students for greater complexity.
2. ***Khujeng Nounaba exercise:*** A distinctive component of his training involved keeping the hands at different levels while moving the ankles, an exercise designed to cultivate coordination and stamina.
3. ***Codification of hand gestures:*** He systematized the *chaali* dance vocabulary by naming specific hand gestures—*Leitrengh*, *Leitrengh Namponbi*, *Leikut*, *Leikoi*, *Leichanla*, *Ekut*, and *Aonkhut*. This codification provided dancers with a structured lexicon of expressive forms.
4. ***Application of laya:*** Employing the three canonical tempos—*vilambit* (slow), *madhya* (medium), and *drut* (fast)—in conjunction with *punglon* notations, he ensured that dancers achieved clarity, accuracy, and rhythmic discipline across varying speeds. (Tarunkumar:1977:31)

By combining codified gestures, tempo variations, and rhythmic foundations, Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh developed a technical system that not only refined the physical execution of dance but also deepened its expressive and narrative potential. His pedagogy thus stands as a synthesis of discipline, innovation, and artistic vision, securing his place as one of the most original stylists in the lineage of Manipuri dance.

Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh as a Dance Composer

Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh possessed the quintessential qualities of a dance composer, blending technical mastery with profound creativity. Trained as a percussionist, his deep command over *tāla* (rhythmic cycles) and music endowed him with an exceptional rhythmic sensibility, which he skillfully translated into choreography. Endowed with a fertile imagination and unwavering devotion to his art, he consistently sought new ways of weaving narrative, rhythm, and movement into cohesive dance compositions. His very first creation,

Naga Sikari, in which he himself performed as an actor, achieved extraordinary popularity

and established his reputation as an innovative choreographer. Thereafter, he went on to compose several seminal works, including *Draupadi Syamvar*, *Hunter Dance*, and *Chitrangada Arjun*, each of which reflected his unique artistic vision.

Naga Sikari (1938): Composed during a tour program in Kolkata in 1938, *Naga Sikari* epitomized Tarunkumar's presence of mind and spontaneous creativity. Conceived as a duet and performed with Bilasini Devi, the work dramatized the life of a hillman-hunter shown in Figure No.2. The narrative unfolded with the hunter returning home weary from a day's chase, carrying his spear. His wife, embodying tenderness and sustenance, brought him food and wine in a traditional *sham* (a large bamboo basket carried on the head). Under the influence of drink, the hunter momentarily mistook his wife for prey and attempted to kill her, only to regain consciousness and reconcile in joyous dance. The work's compelling mix of folk imagery, dramatic intensity, and rhythmic vitality captivated audiences not only in Kolkata but across India, securing Tarunkumar's place in the national dance landscape. (Guru Tarunkumar Foundation:2006:2)



Fig. No.2 Naga Sikri

Hunter Dance (1939): In 1939, while touring India with Horen Ghosh, Tarunkumar composed *Hunter Dance*, a duet that bore thematic resemblance to *Naga Sikari* yet stood distinct in its narrative refinement and rhythmic nuance. Again performed with Bilasini Devi, the dance depicted the hunter's pursuit of a deer. After a tense chase, he succeeded in striking the animal with an arrow and returned home with the deer slung over his shoulder. His wife welcomed him with affection, and the couple celebrated the success of the hunt through joyous movement. As recorded in Devjani Chaliha's account of Guru Maisnam Amubi Singh, this work drew from the archetype of the "Naga hunter" and infused folk storytelling with the formal grace of Manipuri dance. The piece resonated widely, offering a layered portrayal of human struggle, triumph, and communal festivity. (Devjani Chaliha: 2015:45).

***Chitrangada Arjun* (1944):** In 1944, Tarunkumar composed *Chitrangada Arjun*, a duet inspired by the Mahabharata episode of Arjun's encounter with the warrior-princess Chitrangada in Manipur. This creation coincided with the cultural efflorescence surrounding *Chitrangada*, as Rabindranath Tagore's celebrated play, translated into Manipuri by Keisham Amubi, was being staged widely. Tarunkumar distilled this epic narrative into a lyrical duet that traced the meeting of Arjun and Chitrangada, their blossoming love, and eventual union. By adapting a pan-Indian literary tradition into Manipuri dance vocabulary, Tarunkumar bridged classical epic and regional identity, rendering the story both universally appealing and locally resonant. (Guru Tarunkumar Foundation:2006:2)

***Draupadi Swayamvara* (1940–41):** Upon returning to Manipur after his all-India tour, Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh composed *Draupadi Swayamvara* around 1940–41. Conceived as a duet and performed by the Guru himself alongside Bilasini Devi, this work dramatized the celebrated episode from the *Ādi Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* (Chapters 179–180) shown in Figure No.3. The dance unfolds against the grandeur of King Drupada's court, where the princess Draupadi's *swayamvara* was arranged. The Pandavas, then in exile and disguised as Brahmans, attended the assembly in secrecy. The contest involved striking a revolving target—an endeavor attempted by princes gathered from across Aryavarta. Lord Krishna, ever the omniscient witness of past and present, subtly intervened by eclipsing the revolving target with his *chakra*, rendering the efforts of the assembled princes futile. Alarmed by the prospect of failure, King Drupada proclaimed that even Brahmans and commoners might attempt the challenge.

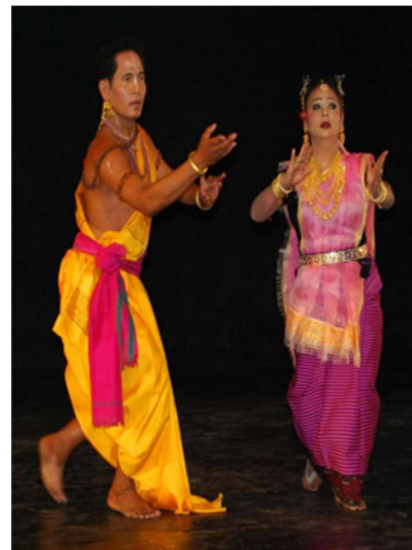


Fig. No.3 Draupadi Swayamvara

At this pivotal moment, Krishna's conch resounded, signaling Arjuna, his devotee, to step forward. The choreography meticulously traced Arjuna's journey to the center of the arena: gestures of reverence to the august assembly, salutations to Guru Drona and grandsire Bhishma, and movements embodying Arjuna's inner conflict, all culminating in the depiction of the revolving target. With measured grace and precision, Arjuna's arrow struck its mark.

Thereafter, Draupadi entered with a ceremonial garland and, in an act of solemn choice, placed it upon Arjuna's neck. The princes, humiliated by defeat, rose in indignation, their defiance dramatized in vigorous sequences of *bir rasa* (heroic sentiment). Arjuna, still in disguise, quelled their fury with valorous skill, subduing the proud challengers.

The performance concluded with a poignant revelation: Arjuna disclosed his true identity as the son of King Pandu, one of the five Pandava brothers. The choreographic framework drew upon rhythmic cycles (*tāla-s*) such as *Tintāl Machā*, *Tanchap*, and *Chālitaāla*. Yet, the aesthetic essence of the composition resided chiefly in the evocation of *bir rasa*, through which Guru Tarunkumar infused the epic narrative with both grandeur and immediacy. The work thus stood as a compelling synthesis of literary epic, rhythmic mastery, and theatrical imagination, affirming Tarunkumar's stature as a composer who could render myth into lived performance. (Guru Tarunkumar Foundation:2014:18-19)

Through these works, Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh demonstrated not only his prowess as a choreographer but also his capacity to embody cultural narratives in rhythm, gesture, and movement. His compositions served as both aesthetic creations and cultural texts—vehicles through which Manipuri dance extended its reach across India while remaining rooted in its own soil.

Selected Solo and Balletic Compositions of Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh

Krishna Nartan (Krishna Tāṇḍava): Rooted in the devotional aesthetics of the *Rāsālīlā*—particularly *Kunja Rās*, *Nritya Rās*, *Basanta Rās*, and *Dīva Rās*—*Krishna Nartan* represents a significant innovation by Guru Tarunkumar in the development of Manipuri solo dance for the proscenium stage. Conceived during his All-India tour of 1945–46, the piece reimagined traditional motifs of Krishna's divine play within the framework of a stage presentation, thereby expanding the vocabulary of Manipuri performance beyond ritual contexts. The rhythmic scaffolding employed *Mel Tanchap*, *Menkup*, *Tanchap*, *Brahmatāla*, and *Viṣṇutāla*, which collectively heightened the dynamism of Krishna's tandava-inspired vigor while preserving Manipuri's quintessential grace. (Guru Tarunkumar Foundation:2011:15)

Kanukalindi (Rāsarāja Bandanā): This composition illustrates Tarunkumar's dexterity in reconciling the devotional intensity of *kīrtana* with classical dance form. Typically, in Manipuri *kīrtana* tradition, singers, *pung* players, and dancers function in distinct roles; however, Tarunkumar sought to integrate them into a single performative flow. The musical foundation of *Kanukalindi* was composed by Guru Maisnam Amubi Singh, and it was set in *Pañcāmṭāla*. Tarunkumar elevated the piece to a classical register, synthesizing rhythm

(*tāla*), bodily movement, and lyrical devotion. In his seminal text *Manipuri Nritya Praveshika*, he detailed the interrelationship between song, *punglon*, and corporeal gesture, offering both pedagogical guidance and theoretical clarity (Tarunkumar:1969:148-224).

Ye-Sakhi: Adapted from a traditional song of the *sakhīs* in *Rāsalīlā*—which begins with the invocation “Ye Sakhi Mohana”—this work was choreographed for stage performance in 1950 shown in Fig.No.4. The composition unfolds as a lyrical eulogy of Krishna, framed within rhythmic cycles of *Mel Tanchap*, *Tanchap*, and *Chālitaāla*. Of particular note is Tarunkumar’s innovation in rendering the piece in the Bengali language, thereby situating Manipuri aesthetics within a broader cultural dialogue. His choreography endowed the *sakhīs’* song with theatrical expressivity, while preserving the devotional fervor inherent in the original tradition.



Fig. No.4 Ye-Sakhi

Nongdol Leima: During his tenure at the Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy, Tarunkumar composed his first full-length ballet, *Nongdol Leima* (1977–78), which became the Academy’s third major ballet production shown in figure no.5. Structured in seven scenes with prologue and epilogue, the ballet dramatized a cosmological allegory of the relationship between the Sun God and the Earth Goddess, Malem. Through the metaphor of divine union, the ballet articulated the interdependence of cosmic forces: the Sun’s radiance engendering seasons, fertility, and the joy of living beings, and the Earth’s receptivity sustaining creation.

N. Amusana Devi, a renowned disciple, recalls the Guru’s instruction with reverence: “Our earth is called Leima. You should act as Leima.” This gentle yet profound direction exemplified Tarunkumar’s pedagogical ethos, wherein myth was embodied not



merely as narrative but as lived, emotional truth.

Fig.No.5 Nongdol Leima

The ballet, thematically akin to *Nongdol Atiya*, reinforced Tarunkumar's vision of Manipuri dance as a medium of cosmological storytelling (Guru Tarunkumar Foundation:2006:6-7).

Sarik Makhol: Tarunkumar's second ballet, *Sarik Makhol*, was premiered on 13 January 1997, showcasing his multifaceted role as writer, director, and composer.

With choreographic contributions from Sanjram Ningol Tondon Devi and Thiyam Surjamukhi Devi, the ballet comprised seven scenes and explored the poignant tale of a *rāsdhārī* (female custodian of *Rāsālīlā*) who, following a tragic turn of events, abandoned her vocation and descended into a life of mendicancy.

The narrative traces her marginalization and humiliation, culminating in a moment of mystical redemption when, after being struck by a priest for ringing the temple bell, her ailments miraculously vanish. Transformed, she joyously resumes ringing the bell in ecstatic devotion. The ballet dramatizes themes of suffering, exclusion, resilience, and divine grace, while simultaneously interrogating societal hierarchies and the spiritual agency of women.

Through *Sarik Makhol*, as with his earlier works, Guru Tarunkumar reaffirmed his unique ability to translate epic, devotional, and folkloric material into choreographic idioms that were at once aesthetically refined and emotionally resonant. His ballets stand as enduring testaments to Manipuri dance's adaptability, narrative depth, and universal human appeal.

Conclusion

In summation, Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh occupies an indelible place in the pantheon of Manipuri dance, embodying a rare confluence of artistry, scholarship, and pedagogical vision. His contributions to Manipuri art and culture resonate not merely as historical achievements but as enduring legacies that continue to illuminate the discipline. Renowned for his mastery of the *pung* and *khol*, he stands among the most eminent Gurus of Manipur, distinguished by his profound understanding of *tālaśāstra* and its nuanced application in performance.

drum beats in *tāla*, the musical phrases in *tāla*, the dance flows in *tāla*, and all artistic inquiry converges upon rhythm (Sanakhya Ebotombi : 2009:73-74). In a manner reminiscent of this philosophy, Guru Tarunkumar dedicated himself to instilling the primacy of rhythm in his students, ensuring that *tāla*, music, and dance became inseparable dimensions of their learning.

To facilitate this rigorous training, he authored two seminal texts—*Manipuri Nritya Praveshika* and *Meitei Jagoi Ahanba Lamjing*. These works meticulously document dance forms, step sequences, rhythmic patterns, and appropriate musical accompaniment, offering a unique blend of theoretical exposition and practical guidance. They remain invaluable resources for novice and experienced dancers alike, bridging the often-divergent realms of theory and embodied practice, and enabling even those unfamiliar with dance to engage meaningfully with its principles.

A hallmark of Guru Tarunkumar’s pedagogy was his insistence on internalizing rhythm and melodic structure (*punglon* and complementary songs) before introducing choreographed movements. Students were first trained in basic exercises and postures—legs, hands, eyes, squatting positions, and related forms—ensuring that each foundational movement was precise, balanced, and harmoniously executed on both right and left sides. This duality of movement became particularly evident in duet compositions such as *Longleiu Plei*, where synchronized yet contrasting turns of the artists created a visual symmetry that captivated audiences and exemplified the grace of Manipuri dance.

Beyond his technical mastery, Guru Tarunkumar distinguished himself as a writer, choreographer, and visionary teacher. His compositions, rooted in tradition yet innovatively adapted for stage and pedagogy, reflect a rare combination of scholarly insight and artistic intuition. His disciplined approach, relentless commitment, and attention to even the minutest detail render him an exemplary figure in Manipuri dance, whose eccentric genius continues to inspire practitioners, scholars, and audiences alike.

In essence, Guru Thiyam Tarunkumar Singh exemplifies the ideal of the Guru as custodian, innovator, and transmitter of culture—an extraordinary luminary whose contributions have profoundly enriched the history and practice of Manipuri dance.

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