

## Festival of Ramkatha - 12th - 15th March, 2008

### Ram Katha in Wari Leebal Style from Manipur



Warileeba, Manipur

Wari Leeba is a narrative form of story telling and it has been a tradition over the past several centuries in Manipur. Wari Leeba has become increasingly popular in Manipur because it captures the festive mood of the people and the people of Manipur have a native inclination towards story and music.

The place of performance is generally a mandav or an outhouse usually in front of a Meitei house where the performer sits surrounded by an audience. The performer sits on the weed mat covered with a white cloth known as Vyas Asan. The performer has no instruments. He uses a pillow instead. He beats the pillow with his open hand when he builds a tempo or wants to draw the attention of the audiences. There is immense use of voice modulation. The rise and fall of voice and visual methods make the narrative very exciting.

The general belief is that the tradition of story telling in Manipur for the first time evolved during the time of Khagemba. The present practice of worshiping the sacred book on a stool was introduced by Shri Jiuram Sharma. Today this form of art has become an essential part of festivals like Swasthi Puja, Heijinpot (pre marriage function), Yum Shangaba (house warming), death ceremony, Phiroy (death anniversary), Kalen Wari (summer season story telling), Mera Wari (winter season story telling), Kang Wari, Tarpan Wari, Janmasthanmi, Radhasthanmi etc.

The artist in the workshop performed the Sundar Kanda performance started with a ritual of prayers followed by Mangla Charan and then the story telling. The Manipuri Ramayana is based on the Kritivasa Ramayana. The performer is dressed in no other colour except white, as he symbolizes peace. The

performance requires only one performer who is the master of the show.

This narrative art of Manipuri Wari Leeba which was once popular among the Manipuris for various occasions, religious, social, or festive occasions in the presence of the king, is gradually losing its importance due to the passage of time. However, as a few spirited youngsters keen to preserve the tradition of their age-old Gurus, Wari Leeba still enjoys its place of importance as in the past in the context of the great social and ritual festivals. It plays a great role in the construction of socio-cultural-religious history of Manipur.