

Article

Meghachandra Kongbam

Screenwriter M. K. Binodini in Indian Cinema



Legendary film actor Kangabam Tomba, film critic R K Bidur, M K Binodini and Meghachandra Kongbam during 5-day Manipur Festival at Swabhumi, Kolkata in January 2003

In the aftermath of the emergence of New Indian cinema in the 1970s, which significantly impacted Indian regional cinema, several well-known writers in Indian literature transitioned into screenwriters for their respective regional cinemas. Among them, three writers—M. T. Vasudevan Nair in Malayalam Cinema, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi Cinema, and M. K. Binodini in Manipuri Cinema—stood out prominently in

screenplay writing. They not only played a crucial role in elevating the quality of Indian cinema and propelling it onto the global stage but also undertook the challenge of asserting that screenplay is a literary form. Interestingly, these three writers formed a tripod of influence in Indian cinema, representing the Dravidian, Aryan, and Tibeto-Burman language families.

M. T. Vasudevan Nair, born July 15, 1933, is a renowned short story writer and novelist in Malayalam literature. His novel *Kaalam* received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1970. He was also honoured with the Jnanpith Award for Literature in 1995 and the Padma Bhushan in 2005. Not only did he contribute to numerous classic films in Malayalam, but he also revolutionised the art of screenwriting. With approximately 55 screenplays to his name, he became the most awarded screenwriter, clinching four national awards: *Oru Vadhakkan Veergatha* (1989), directed by Hariharan; *Kadavu* (1991), directed by himself; *Sadayan* (1992) by Sibi Mayalil, and *Parinayam* (1994) by Hariharan. A section of his screenplay, *Iruttinte Athmavu*, is included in school classes, while the complete screenplay is studied at the degree level.

Vijay Tendulkar (January 6, 1928 - May 19, 2008) is a renowned Marathi playwright. He was honoured with the Sangeet Natak Akademi for playwriting in 1970 and the Padma Bhushan in 1984. *Shantala! Court Chalu Ahe* (1971), directed by Satyadev Dubey and based on Vijay Tendulkar's screenplay, is considered the precursor to the new Indian cinema movement in Marathi cinema. His screenplays for *Samna* (1974), *Sinhasan* (1979) and *Umvartha* (1981), all directed by Jabbar Patel, not only received National Film Awards but also elevated Marathi cinema. *Samna* was nominated for the Golden Bear Award at the 25th Berlin International Film Festival in 1975. In 1977, he won the National Film Award for Best Screenplay for his screenplay for Shyam Benegal's *Manthan* (1976). He wrote eleven movies in Hindi and

eight movies in Marathi. Tendulkar published a book featuring two screenplays - *The Last Days of Sardar Patel* and *The Mime Players* (2001). In the book's preface, he stated, "These are not transcripts of the films as created by the director, but screenplays as I originally wrote them; people unconnected with films have read them and found them absorbing and effective as written material." Undoubtedly, Tendulkar defined the unique position of a screenplay in the realm of filmmaking and literature.

M. K. Binodini (February 6, 1922 - January 17, 2011), renowned for her short stories and novels, emerged as a well-known screenwriter in Manipuri Cinema. Aribam Syam Sharma, an acclaimed filmmaker, owes much of his success to the prolific writer M. K. Binodini. Through her screenplays, A. Syam Sharma gained national and international recognition. Notable among them is Syam Sharma's national award-winning film *Olangthagee Wangmadasoo* (Beyond the Pale of Summer/1979) and internationally acclaimed films like *Imagi Ningthem* (My Son, My Precious/1981), *Paokhum Ama* (Only Answer/1983), *Ishanou* (The Chosen One/1990), and *Sanabi* (Grey Mare/1995) all penned by M. K. Binodini. In his book *Living Shadows* (2006), Aribam Syam Sharma expressed, "Some of my best films have been a product of collaboration with her (M. K. Binodini). It would not have been possible for these films to be given birth without my collaboration with her."

Binodini has been associated with Manipuri cinema since its inception. In the first Manipuri feature film, *Matamgi Manipur* (Contemporary Manipur/1972), directed by Deb Kumar Bose, she was a costume designer

and lyricist. Her romantic song "*Lapna Lotna Leiyu, Nakna Nakta Leppu, Nangse Eigini Eigi*" (Hide at a distance, Stand behind me, You are mine, My sweetheart) sung by Chongtham Kamala and composed by Aribam Syam Sharma still evokes delightful memories from the film. Since 1960, she has been actively involved with Syam Sharma in establishing Roop Raag, a prominent musical and cultural organisation in Manipur. Her residence at Yaiskul Police Lane in Imphal became a cultural hub frequently utilised for activities such as rehearsing light songs and dramas for Roop Raag, hosting meetings of female writers for the literary organisation Leimarol Khorjeikol (LEIKOL) founded by her exclusively for woman writers in 2001, and serving as a filming location for *Lamja Parshuram* and *Olangthagee Wangmadasoo* both directed by Syam Sharma.

M. K. Binodini was the youngest daughter of Sir Churachand, the King of Manipur and Queen Dhanamanjuri, who reigned from 1891 to 1941. Raised in the royal palace, she graduated from Vidyasagar College, Calcutta and pursued further studies in fine arts at Visvabharati University in Santiniketan, West Bengal. She served as the Secretary of the Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy, Imphal, under Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi. Proficient in every literary genre, she wrote short stories, novels, plays, travelogues, memoirs, translation works, lyrics, radio plays, ballet scripts, and screenplays for feature films and documentaries, showcasing her ability to express herself effectively in any medium. Finding such a literary genius anywhere in the world would be challenging. In recognition of her contribution to literature, she was

conferred with the Padma Shri by the President of India in 1976. She established herself as a writer with *Nungairakta Chandramukhi* (Chrysanthemum Among the Rocks), a short story collection published in 1965, which won the Jamini Sunder Guha Gold Medal. Her drama *Ashangba Nongjabi* (Crimson Rainclouds), a compilation of three plays, namely, *Kaorabra Raas Sanabagi Ahingdo* (Have you Forgotten the Night of Raas Festival), *Ngaikho Hingminnakhsisi* (Wait, Let Us Live Together) and *Shilpi* (The Artist) was published in 1966. Besides, her novel *Bor Saheb Ongbi Sanatombi* (Sanatombi, An Englishman's Wife), published in 1976, was awarded the Sahitya Akademi award.

Binodini wrote screenplays for seven Manipuri feature films, among which *Olangthagee Wangmadasoo* and *Ishanou* were original screenplays. Screenplays for the films *Imagi Ningthem*, *Paokhum Ama*, *Sanabi*, *Mayophygi Macha* and *Nangna Kappa Pakchade* were adapted from her own works in radio plays and short stories. Additionally, she crafted the screenplay for the short film *Laibak Thibi* (2002), directed by Makhonmani Mongshaba, based on *Hingchabi* (Witch), a short story by Aribam Syam Sharma. Filmmaker Haobam Paban Kumar drew inspiration from Binodini's radio play for the screenplay of his short film *Ngaihak Lambida* (2006). Binodini also contributed to the scripts of four documentary films: *Thouyangba Thoungamba's Laa* (Banana Leaf/1997), Aribam Syam Sharma's *Sangai, the Dancing Deer of Manipur* (1988), *The Orchids of Manipur* (1994), and *Rajarshi Bhagyachandra of Manipur* (2007). She

penned a lyric for the film *Matamgi Manipur* and another lyric for the film *Urirei Madhabi*.

M. K. Binodini's writings delve into the trials and tribulations faced by women carrying the weight of a fragmented society. Her screenplays mirror these themes, exploring the hidden depths of women and their lives. Characterized by well-developed plots, seamless subplots, vibrant dialogue interplay, a unique understanding of human behaviour, and elements of suspense that skillfully propel the story forward, her screenplays use simple yet appropriate language. Set against the backdrop of Manipur's valley, hills and villages, her film scripts incorporate the aesthetics of cultural beliefs and traditions. Her writing is distinguished by grace and elegance. As a perceptive and empathic observer of human nature, her works carry a gentle sense of humour. Rooted firmly in Manipur tradition, her works portray women as resilient and unconventional characters, skillfully blending traditional and modern sensibilities.

Regarding her working relationship with the film director, she stated, "I write the story and create the film script. Even after that, it is my natural instinct to immerse myself in filmmaking because I am deeply concerned about my work and how it will unfold. Regardless, if disagreements arise on certain aspects, I have to compromise with the director as they may have their own perspectives on presenting things. They might also face technical challenges that necessitate certain adjustments."

Against Corruption

M. K. Binodini vehemently opposed the practice of corruption in society and the

maladministration of authority. This stance is evident in her films *Imagi Ningthem*, *Paokhum Ama*, and *Ishanou*, which appropriately depict suitable situations.

In a dialogue featuring Dhani, the school teacher, during her initial posting in a remote village in *Imagi Ningthem*, it states, "Dear Akashini, I recall her. She does not approve of a woman working away from home. She offered to sell her jewellery to secure me a job in Imphal itself. I did not inform her as I was leaving and buying a job with money. I won't allow it. It may be quite pleasant there. And a job is a job." The film also addresses the frequent irregularity of power supply in Manipur. When Dinachandra returns home in the evening from an official visit outside Manipur, he asks his wife Akashini who comes out with a lantern, whether today is the day of the interruption of the electricity supply.

Corruption in the administrative system is also exposed in *Ishanou* during a scene where Kanto, a local elder hands over an envelope with a letter to Dhanabir. Upon opening and reading it, Dhanabir exclaims, "This is my promotion letter!" Kanto responds, "How wonderful! We can celebrate with a cup of tea. Where is Tampha?" Dhanabir asks Kanta to wait momentarily and calls his wife from a local pond where she is bathing. Upon his return, Kanto inquires, "Where will you be posted?" Dhanabir replies, "I have no idea. I'm happy with the promotion. The junior colleagues have already superseded me. They told me to file a case. But what is the use?"

In *Paokhum Ama*, she elucidated the corrupt practices prevalent in society and their repercussions.

Her narratives

Primarily, M. K. Binodini's narratives are predominantly women-centric, broadly falling into four categories. First, *Imagi Ningthem*, *Mayophygi Macha*, and *Nangna Kappa Pakchade* all centre around the pain and agony experienced by women abandoned by their men. Second: *Ishanou* and *Laibak Thibi* explore the fate of women who are rejected by society through no fault of their own. Third: *Olangthagi Wangmadasoo* and *Paokhum Ama* reflect the social structure of a degraded society full of mistrust, where ill-fated victims are ordinary people, and women are the most affected. Four: *Sanabi* and *Ngaihak Lambida* tell the stories of women who face marriage challenges but choose to live independently.

On Her Journey into Screenplays

Olangthagi Wangmadasoo marked her first venture into screenwriting after exploring various literary genres such as short stories, novels, stage plays, radio plays, ballet scripts, song lyrics, travelogues and translated works including Rabindra Sangeet and Badal Sarkar's play *Evang Indrajit*.

Following the commercial success of two films, *Lamja Parshuram* and *Saaphabee*, produced by Gurumayum Narayan Sharma and directed by Aribam Syam Sharma under the banner N.S. In films, the duo approached M. K. Binodini to adapt her Sahitya Akademi award-winning novel, *Bor Saheb Ongbi Sanatombi*, into a film screenplay. Instead, she embraced the challenge of crafting an original screenplay for a fresh and unheard story, giving birth to *Olangthagee Wangmadasoo*. The film, directed by Aribam Sham Sharma and produced by G. Narayan

Sharma, celebrated a silver jubilee with a 32-week run in Manipur after its release on January 18, 1980, at Friends Talkies in Imphal. The film also bagged the Best Regional Film in Manipuri at the National Film Awards in 1979.

In 1980, with permission from the producer G. Narayan Sharma, Binodini published the screenplay in book form. It marked the first screenplay in book form in Manipuri literature. The screenplay published by Binodini is not an exact transcript of the film. In the book's preface, she remarked, "Readers might have noticed some differences between the contents in the film and this screenplay. The reason is that I have a deeper affection for certain characters in the story, leading to extended and excessive narration of those characters. Consequently, even if it wasn't portrayed in the film, I included what I wrote in the screenplay in this book".

Addressing the role of a screenwriter in filmmaking, she emphasised, "The film is not a written novel or short story. A film is a visible series of images. The director, possessing a high imagination, bears great responsibility. A screenwriter should not encroach upon the director's creative vision. Despite potential discomfort, screenwriters must be willing to compromise with the director. If I cannot reach an understanding with the director, I will be compelled to retract my script".

Recalling an interaction with writer Jarasandha, whose story was adapted for the film *Bandhini* directed by Bimal Roy, she shared, "I asked him, 'How do you feel when your story turns into a film?' He simply

replied, 'You see the story with your own eyes.'

Binodini aimed to preserve the screenplay in its unique literary form. In the preface of the book, she explained, "I could have written '*Olangthagee Wangmadasoo*' as a novel. However, as a film, it stands on its own. Therefore, there is no need to adapt it into a novel." However, she underscored the significance of a screenplay, stating, "Disregarding a screenplay and disrespecting the audience is unacceptable. It is unfair to assume everyone is ignorant. This is my belief."



Binodini at the film releasing function of Olangthagee Wangmadasoo at Friends Talkies, Imphal on the 18th January 1980

Her *Olangthagee Wangmadasoo*

In *Olangthagee Wangmadasoo*, M. K. Binodini portrays the lives of two women—an adolescent girl who falls in love with a boy and another married woman who flees from her unfaithful husband. The narrative unveils the uncertain fate of women in a patriarchal society.

The story revolves around the love between two city-bred youths from different social classes—Bijoy, a singer of modern Manipuri music raised in a traditional family by his grandparents, and Thadoi, a medical

student studying in Delhi and the sister of Kamaljit, a contractor who advocates for modernity and desires her marriage to Jiten, a wealthy man. As times change, old human values fade away, and betrayal surfaces to maintain social status.

When Bijoy elopes with Thadoi, Kamaljit agrees to the marriage and asks for his sister to be sent home. But Kamaljit keeps Thadoi under his custody. The crisis is deepened when Kamaljit's men kill Bijoy's grandfather, who comes to meet Kamaljit. Thadoi becomes engaged to Jiten, and the pre-wedding ceremony Heijingpot is performed. Meanwhile, Bijoy and his grandmother go to Brindavan for his grandfather's last rites. The suspense builds, leaving the fate of Thadoi and Bijoy hanging in the air.

Bijoy leaves the city and joins a timber farm owned by his grandma's brother Tonjao, in the border town of Jiribam. There, he encounters Leirik, a woman who has fled her ex-husband Kumar and seeks refuge at the farm where her maternal uncle works. When Kumar attempts to kidnap Leirik, Bijoy steps in to rescue her, resulting in a confrontation between Bijoy and Kumar. During the scuffle, Bijoy sustains a gunshot wound. Leirik takes Bijoy to a hospital for treatment, where he undergoes surgery performed by Thadoi, who is posted at the hospital. Bijoy is displeased to see Thadoi, assuming that she has married Jiten. One day, when Bijoy sees Jiten coming to the hospital, his heart begins to turmoil.

Meanwhile, Thadoi mistakenly assumes Bijoy and Leirik are married, leading to well-crafted plots that sow seeds of suspicion between them. The unsettled summer weather prevailing over Bijoy and Thadoi eventually ends after reconciliation, as

Bijoy learns that Jiten has left Thadoi at her request. However, this fair weather does not extend to Leirik.

The end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s marked the golden era of mainstream Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood. Defined by the formula of romance, dance, music, fight scenes, break-ups and happy endings: numerous hit, superhit, and blockbuster Bollywood films captivated audiences with the magic of cinema. M. K. Binodini scripted *Olangthagee Wangmadasoo* to offer the Manipuri audience a unique flavour of Indian mainstream cinema tailored to Manipur's cultural milieu.

Her *Imagi Ningthem*

Imagi Ningthem was M.K. Binodini's second screenplay adapted from her popular radio drama broadcast by All India Radio, Imphal. Her remarkable achievement was seamlessly transforming the audio script into a film script, emphasising visualisation with enhanced visual elements.

The narrative delves into the peculiar love of a stepmother, Ekashini, for an illegitimate child named Thoithoi, exploring their profound human bond. Thoithoi's mother, the daughter of a chowkidar at a Dak Bungalow in a small village, is seduced by Ekashini's husband, Dinachandra, who is stationed there. After Dinachandra is transferred elsewhere, he abandons Thoithoi's mother, who is pregnant and tragically dies while giving birth to Thoithoi.

The story unfolds when Dhani, a school teacher and Ekashini's cousin, is posted at the village school as the headmistress. There, she meets six-year-old Thoithoi. Dhani discovers that Thoithoi is living with his grandfather

and is curious about the child. Through Gandhar, a teacher in the same school who grew up with Thoithoi's mother Memtombi, Dhani learns the story of the child. Dhani, outraged by the inhuman attitude of Thoithoi's father, expresses her fury, stating, "*There are so many like him. They only care about their own skins. I can't bear such things. I wish I could fight back.*" Gandhar replies, "*But what can one do?*" Dhani laments, "*True, what can a mere teacher like me do?*" and curiously asks, "*Still, I'd like to know his name.*" Gandhar reveals, "*Dinachandra.*"

Upon learning that Dinachandra is Ekashini's husband, Dhani reports the story directly to Ekashini. Initially shocked, Ekashini becomes curious and persuades Dhani to introduce her to Thoithoi.

Thoithoi, who believes his mother is alive, mistakes Ekashini for his mother. Ekashini, moved by the boy's affection, adopts him and even arranges for Thoithoi to play the role of Krishna during *Ras Leela* celebrations. Dinachandra fears potential consequences while the boy is staying in his house. Meanwhile, Thoithoi's grandfather wants his grandson back. However, neither the old man's bitterness nor Dinachandra's cowardice is strong enough to separate Ekashini from the child. The bond between her and Thoithoi is inviolable.

Imagi Ningthem is considered Binodini's finest screenplay. She skillfully develops the story, creating anticipation about what will happen next, and entertains the audience by keeping them engaged, interactive, and sympathetic towards the characters with appropriate dialogues, using tight and necessary words. The characters of

these three women in the story are clearly defined: the innocent village girl Memtombi is the victim of a degraded patriarchal society; the young woman Dhani exudes her anger with the rebellious character when human values are lost; and the housewife Ekashini empowers herself with justice and the spirit of humanity.

Imagi Ningthem won the Grand Prix at the Festival des 3 Continents, Nantes, in 1982 and became the first Indian film to receive the top prize in Nantes. The film was also screened at many International Film Festivals, including New York, Denver, London, Locarno, Hong Kong, and Filmotsov Kolkata. It also won two awards at the 29th National Film Awards: Best and Best Child Artist Award to Master Leikhendra.

Her Paokhum Ama

In her work *Paokhum Ama* (Only Answer), Binodini exposes various social issues such as unemployment, corruption, and insurgency prevalent in society. In Manipuri society, the woman running a joint family is always concerned about all family members other than her children. Ibohal, a school teacher, supports a large family while his wife, Tampak, takes care of the household. They have three children and two brothers. The younger brother, Iboyaima, is unemployed, and the youngest brother, Ibotombi, is pursuing agriculture outside Manipur. Tampak worries about jobless Iboyaima and consults a fortuneteller, *Maibi* (priestess), to know his future. She sells all her jewellery to buy a job for Iboyaima.

Iboyaima, who opposes corruption, is unaware that Tampak has paid Rs 8000 to a person named Gouro as a token for a job.

However, Iboyaima is not listed for the job, and when they request a refund, only Rs 5000 is returned.

Iboyaima's friend Sanahal, due to his connections with influential people, becomes a contractor. Another friend, Birachandra, a journalist, follows the ideology of truth and justice. After exposing a scandal involving a rich and influential person in the newspaper, Birachandra is assaulted by unknown assailants and loses his job. Unable to bear the corruption in society, he takes a wayward path.

Birachandra introduces his friend Angou to Iboyaima. Angou, a man of action, resides in Ukhrul, a hill station with his Tangkhul wife. With Angou's assistance, Iboyaima secures a teaching job in Ukhrul.

Ibotombi returns home after completing his studies. Ibohal is concerned about the substantial amount of money needed to secure a job for Ibotombi, especially after spending a considerable sum on his education. Iboyaima suggests an alternative: "*Why worry about an agriculture graduate? He can start an agricultural farm on our village land. Banks also lend money for self-employment. I will help him.*" Ibotombi agrees, stating, "*I like it. It is the only answer for job seekers.*"

When Iboyaima asks Angou why he doesn't stay in Imphal, Angou explains, "*I may be able to live in Imphal, but my daughter can't. In Imphal, people speak ill about others and do not respect the downtrodden.*" The writer vividly contrasts the ideal and peaceful life in Ukhrul with Imphal's chaotic and battered lifestyle. However, with sincerity and conviction, the narrative explores the healthy and strong relationship between the

Vaishnavite Meiteis in the plains and the Christian tribals in the hills of Manipur.

Her *Ishanou*

Brilliantly scripted by M.K. Binodini, *Ishanou* (The Chosen One) tells the story of Tampha, a happily married young woman living in her mother's house with her husband and daughter. Suddenly, she becomes possessed by a benign spirit and embraces the life of a *Maibi*. This distances her from the family. *Maibis* in Manipur are women who suddenly respond to some higher call, abandon their everyday lives and join the cult of *Maibi* under a Guru. They are priestess and principal performers in the annual Lai Haraoba festival. As there is the belief that a *Maibi*'s daughter becomes a *Maibi*, a space has been created between the mother and the daughter. In the later part, the daughter even fails to recognize her mother. Binodini creates a heart-touching sequence at the end.

Years later, during a Lai Haraoba festival in Jiri, a border town of Manipur neighbouring Assam, Dhanabir attends to pick up his daughter Bembem, who is participating in a Manipuri dance event at the festival. Tampha, who performs as a priestess in the festival, accidentally sees her husband Dhanabir. She runs towards him and asks, "Is that our Bembem?" Dhanabir replies, "Yes."

"Why are you two here in Jiri?"

"I am posted here, and Bembem comes to my place."

"Doesn't she live with you?"

"She is studying in Shillong and is here for the holidays."

"Do you come here daily to pick her up?"

"No, I don't. I don't visit Lai Haraoba."

"Haven't you got married again?"

"I am leaving."

"Wait! Does Bembem know that I exist? It's okay if she never knows. Don't tell her about my life. Let her remain in the darkness about my story."

Bembem returns after snacks with her friends and bows down to Tampha Maibi, saying, "Ima Maibi Jai." Tampha looks at her daughter lovingly but doesn't recognize her. Dhanabir holds his daughter's hand and leaves the place.

At the International Film Festival of India held at Madras in 1991, *Ishanou* got plaudits from foreign critics. It caught the eye of the authorities of Cannes, who promptly invited it to the Un Certain Regard section of the Cannes Film Festival 1991. It also won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in a language other than those specified in Schedule VIII of the Indian Constitution and Special Mention to Anoubam Kiranmala at the 38th National Film Awards. It has travelled to many international film festivals held in Singapore, London, Nantes, Toronto, Rotterdam, Fribourg, Hawaii, Vancouver, Tokyo, and Seattle. *Ishanou* was restored by the Film Heritage Foundation, and the restored film was selected for a red-carpet world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival 2023.

Her *Mayophygi Macha*

The narrative of *Mayophygi Macha* (Son of Mayophi) revolves around a young Tangkhul girl named Mayophy, her mother Angamla and her grandmother Sanyola who live in the hill station of Ukhrul. The story exposes the challenges faced by innocent tribal girls who are abandoned by valley youths after being promised dreams during their brief visits to the hills. It also celebrates the strength of

women who, against all odds, emerge as ultimate victors despite shattered dreams and the cruel blows of fate. An essential character in the film is Kunjo, a small-time clerk posted in Ukhrul where the story is set.

The narrative is presented through a flashback of Kunjo, who comes into close contact with Mayophy's family while working with his boss, the DC Sahib of Ukhrul, who is preparing a book on the hills. Kunjo is responsible for typing the manuscript. The serene atmosphere of the beautiful setting is disrupted when Basanta, known to Kunjo, abandons Mayophy after fathering her child. Deeply connected to Mayophy's family, Kunjo, along with pregnant Mayophy and grandmother Sanyola, goes in search of Basanta in the valley and hands over Mayophy to him. With a heavy heart, Kunjo leaves them from Ukhrul when he is promoted and transferred elsewhere.



Binodini with producer Thoungamba and playback singer Chongtham Kamala at Ukhrul during the shooting of Mayophygi Macha

Later, at Mayophy's request, Kunjo visits Ukhrul and discovers that she has

become a mother. Mayophy and her little son Sanajaoba have been abandoned by Basanta. A letter written by Sanajaoba from New Delhi on the eve of his departure abroad to participate in the Asian Games opens a floodgate of memories in Kunjo's mind. The joy he feels upon receiving the letter is immense. The only person he would have wanted to share this fantastic news with is his beloved DC Sahib, who is long dead. Looking skyward, Kunjo shouts with joy, "*Sir, do you hear me? Mayophy has won the battle.*"

Her Sanabi

Sanabi is the name of a pony lovingly raised by Sakhi's father. Mangi, a rowdy youth who steals goods, still loves Sakhi, a dance artiste from the same locality, from his childhood, even after she has been divorced and returns home after being married in Imphal. Although Mangi can express his courage and power through stealing and other crimes, he struggles to express his love to Sakhi beyond showing signs and gestures. However, Sakhi rejects his proposal. In an attempt to get closer to Sakhi, he tries to borrow the pony from Sakhi's father for a polo match. Coincidentally, Mangi sees Sakhi accompanied by a man who drops her home on a scooter. Shocked, Mangi leaves the place and returns later, intoxicated, asking Sakhi's father to use the pony for a match. Sakhi's father refuses, knowing Mangi to be a rowdy character. Because of this, Mangi goes away challenging Sakhi's father, saying, "*I'm Mangi, Yengkhom Mangi. Don't you know? I'll show you what I'm capable of.*" The narrative concludes with Mangi stealing the pony, which holds great sentimental value for

Sakhi's father, in an attempt to win Sakhi's love.

Sakhi's father is sick with grief and anguish upon losing his pony. Sakhi goes straight to Mangi's house and asks him to help find the pony. Mangi tells Sakhi with an argument that he is not a thief. He uses a comparison by saying that if she can believe what others say about stealing the horse, will others believe if it is said that Mangi loves Sakhi? Sakhi is mixed with pity and shame and promises to go away. Mangi, in this situation, asks Sakhi to wait and come back to the backyard. Sakhi is afraid and doesn't want to go with him. Despite her fear and reluctance, Mangi reassures her, saying, *"Come and have a look at my homestead. Just come and see. I'll definitely find you Sanabi. I won't do anything to you. I am not such a bad fellow. Isn't my homestead beautiful, Sakhi? I am thinking of digging a pond to rear fish in a corner. Here, I'll keep a cowshed for high-yielding milk cows and, over there, a poultry shed. I am also planning to plant rows of plantains. But it never happens."* In this moment, Mangi reveals his inner desires for everyday life if Sakhi is by his side. Eventually, Mangi guides Sakhi to a secluded spot where Sanabi is hidden and tenderly hands over the pony to her.

When Sakhi offers Mangi a sum of money as payment for his services, Mangi becomes incensed and exclaims, *"Ah, you are wealthy. What do you think of me? I know one shouldn't touch another's property, but I do. Don't ask me why; I won't answer. I could steal even you, not just the pony, if I wanted. So, you want to pay for the pony?"* Mangi, despite his rowdy nature, prefers not to overpower love with desire but instead seeks

genuine love from her. On the other hand, Sakhi consistently embraces the notion of challenging men for her own protection. Binodini crafts Sakhi as an ideal symbol of traditional values that need preservation, while Mangi represents alien forces that threaten to pollute them. As Sakhi departs Mangi's place with the pony, Mangi calls out loudly from a distance, *"Sakhi, keep a close watch on Sanabi. I have a feeling you will lose your Sanabi very often."* This film marked the fifth collaboration between Aribam Syam Sharma and Binodini.

Her Nangna Kappa Pakchade

Nangna Kappa Pakchade (No Tears for You) narrates the story of Nungsithoi, a woman who engages in a legal battle against her husband, Ibomcha. In the courtroom, Ibomcha denies Nungsithoi and their child, claiming they are not his wife and child. Angered by his attitude, the tearful Nungsithoi attacks him physically in the court, and the hearing is postponed. Subsequently, her lawyer delves into her past in a flashback to gather more information for the case.

As a simple village girl, Nungsithoi falls in love with Ibomcha, a tractor driver from Imphal. They marry and have a daughter. However, Nungsithoi faces a challenging relationship with her mother-in-law, and Ibomcha is seeking employment. Eventually, Nungsithoi is sent back to her village, with Ibomcha promising they will reunite once he obtains a job. Unfortunately, this promise is forgotten, leaving Nungsithoi to fend for herself and her daughter.

During the legal battle, Nungsithoi resolves to change her mind and drops the

case. She decides to raise her daughter as a single mother. As Nungsithoi overcomes her internal conflicts to make this decision, tears of joy fill her eyes. Meanwhile, she also recalls her past silly life. Seeing her tears, the lawyer is reminded of his mother, who sacrificed significantly to raise him. He praises Nungsithoi saying, “*Tears are not suited for you.*” Binodini skillfully portrays the ideal life of a woman, characterised by innocence, ignorance, perseverance, sacrifice, and kindness.

Her docu-scripts

Sangai: The Dancing Deer of Manipur, a ballet performed by the Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy and captured on film by A. Syam Sharma, draws inspiration from M.K. Binodini Devi's 1972 essay on the floating wetlands and wildlife of Manipur. Keibul Lamjao, a floating sanctuary of marshy grasslands known as *phumdi* at Loktak Lake in Manipur, serves as the natural habitat for the Sangai, a brow-antlered deer. The primary threat to the Sangai is human, and the narrative brings this reality to life through the legend of the young chief Kadeng Thangjahanba and his lady love Tonu Laijinglembi. Within the forests of Southeast Asia, a herd of Sangai remains in a deep slumber. When dawn breaks, the Sangais awaken to dance and play. According to legend, the heroic Kadeng Thangjahanba of Moirang once captured a gravid Sangai from Torbung Lamjao as a loving gift for his beloved Tonu Laijinglembi. Unfortunately, he discovered his beloved had become the king's spouse, shattering all his hopes. In desperation, the hero released the deer into the wild of Keibul Lamjao, and since then, the

location has become the cherished home of the Sangai.

Orchids of Manipur seamlessly integrates Manipuri folk and classical music while unveiling the chapters of *Leirol* (oral folk literature describing flowers).

Laa explores the diverse uses and craftsmanship of the humble banana leaf in various ritual ceremonies within Manipuri society.

Rajarshi Bhagyachandra of Manipur narrates the tale of the greatest Vaishnava king of Manipur. A multifaceted individual of immense qualities, he proved to be an expert strategist, wielding his sword to defend his land and people. Simultaneously, he showcased artistic genius and divine sensibilities, introducing the world to the classical dance of *Manipuri Ras*.



M K Binodini

Her published screenplays

M.K. Binodini presented her initial screenplay, *Olangthagee Wangmadasoo*, in book form, introducing it as a literary form within Manipuri literature. Her screenplays, *Imagi Ningthem* and *Paokhum Ama* in English, appeared in the quarterly film magazine *Cinewave*, published by Seagull

Publications in Kolkata. Additionally, her work *Ishanou* in English was included in *Living Shadows* (2006), authored by A. Syam Sharma and published by Guwahati Cine Club.

Her international dream

M.K. Binodini attended a month-long residency program from July 3 to August 2, 1992, at Blue Mountain Center, New York, USA, to develop a screenplay based on her Sahitya Akademi award-winning novel *Bor Saheb Ongbi Sanatombi* (*Sanatombi, the Englishman's Wife*). She was looking for artistic and financial participation in the US and Europe for the film.

Binodini said, "Unlike British films about Raj, *Sanatombi, the Englishman's Wife* will be an Indian perspective. It is a love story set against the backdrop of India court politics during the British regime."

The story unfolds at the turn of the century, during the imposition of British rule over the diminutive kingdom of Manipur. It is rooted in the true narrative of Sanatombi, the daughter of the Manipuri monarch Surchandra, who was deposed by the British in 1891. Despite being ineligible for the throne due to her gender, Sanatombi emerges as the most spirited and astute among the king's children. During the British takeover, she finds herself in a lacklustre arranged marriage with a local nobleman.

Subsequent to the British arrival, Sanatombi leaves her husband and weds Colonel John Maxwell, the Political Agent. Although ostracized by her people, Sanatombi effectively governs her father's kingdom for the following decade through her English civil servant husband. She steadfastly

declines to accompany him to Britain upon his transfer. Sadly, she passes away at the age of 33, just two years after her husband's return home.

Binodini sought to delve into the exploration of alien cultures, statecraft, and power dynamics through the narrative of Sanatombi and her English husband.

On Manipuri cinema

In addition to her significant contributions to the creative arts and literature in Manipuri cinema, she played a crucial role in shaping policy decisions that aimed at fostering the growth of Manipuri cinema. A pivotal moment occurred on the 13th of November 1980 when the inaugural meeting for establishing the Manipur Film Development Council was chaired by the then Chief Minister of Manipur, R.K. Dorendra Singh. M K Binodini actively participated in this historic gathering and went on to become one of the executive members when the council was officially formed on the 18th of December, 1980.

Her commitment to the development of Manipuri cinema persisted even as the Manipur Film Development Council evolved into the Manipur Film Development Corporation in February 1987. At this juncture, she assumed a crucial role as one of the eleven esteemed members of the Corporation's Board of Directors. Her tenure within the Corporation was enduring, marking a sustained and influential presence in steering the course of Manipuri cinema's growth.

Known affectionately as '*Imasi*' (Royal Mother), M.K. Binodini held a revered position as a maternal figure in Manipuri

society. Her nurturing spirit extended to the burgeoning talents entering the world of cinema. As a jury member, during the selection of films for the 1992 Indian Panorama, she encountered the Manipuri film *Khonthang*. Intrigued by its potential, upon her return to Manipur, she sought out the team behind the film, connecting with the producers, Thouyangba Thoungamba—two brothers aged 29 and 28—and the director, Oken Amakcham, who was 33.

In a gesture of support and encouragement, Binodini motivated them to persist in creating impactful films. Subsequently, she contributed to their next production by penning the screenplay *Mayophygi Macha*, adapted from her previously published short story in the quarterly journal of Manipur State Kala Akademi. Displaying a hands-on commitment to the craft, she actively participated in the filmmaking process during the film's shooting at the Ukhrul hill station, spending ten days alongside the crew.

Her influence transcended this collaboration, inspiring emerging talents like

Makhonmani Mongsaba and Haobam Paban Kumar, who, inspired by her scripts, went on to create their own cinematic works. Binodini's role as a mentor and catalyst for creativity left an indelible mark on Manipuri cinema's landscape.

During my journalism career, I explored various facets of art and culture, besides cinema in my writing. During this time, Binodini offered advice, encouraging me to focus exclusively on cinema. It became evident that her true passion lay in the realm of Manipuri cinema. Binodini articulated her sentiments: "Manipur is a fertile ground for exceptional films, given its rich literary and cultural heritage. However, there exists a gap on the technical front. If this aspect is thoroughly developed, Manipuri cinema has the potential to witness a substantial surge in the production of more proficient and impactful films." Her insight emphasised the need for nurturing technical expertise in tandem with the region's cultural richness, envisioning a future where Manipuri cinema flourishes with a heightened standard of filmmaking.

FILMOGRAPHY

FEATURE FILMS

Year	Filmscript	Type	Director	Festivals	Awards
1979	<i>Olangthage Wangmada soo</i>	Original	A.Syam Sharma	*National Film Awards 1979	*Best Film in Manipuri. (Longest-running Manipuri film with 32 weeks in a single theatre)

1981	<i>Imagi Ningthem</i>	Adapted from her radio play	A.Syam Sharma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *National Film Awards 1981 *Indian Panorama of Filmotsav 1982 Calcutta *Festival of 3 Continents 1982 Nantes *Locarno *Denver *Hongkong *Montreal *New York *London 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Best Film in Manipuri *Best Child Artiste for Leikhendra *Grand Prix (First Indian Film to receive the top prize of Nantes)
1984	<i>Paokhum Ama</i>	Adapted from her short story	A.Syam Sharma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Tyneside International Film Festival 1984, UK 	
1990	<i>Ishanou</i>	Original	A.Syam Sharma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *National Film Awards 1990 *Indian Panorama of International Film Festival of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Best Film among those films of non-8th scheduled languages * Special Mention for actress Anoubam Kiranmala * Indian official entry in Un Certain Regard, Cannes

				India 1991 Chennai *Cannes 1991 *Nantes *Seoul *Montreal *Locarno *New York *Hawaii *Singapore *Frieberg *Toronto	
199 4	<i>Mayophygi Macha</i>	Adapt ed from her short story	Oken Amakcha m	*National Film Awards 1994	*Best Film in Manipuri
199 5	<i>Sanabi</i>	Adapt ed from her short story	A, Syam Sharma	*National Film Awards 1995 *Indian Panorama of Internation al Film Festival of India 1996, New Delhi *Cairo Internation al Film Festival,	*Best Film in Manipuri

				Egypt, 1996	
2013	<i>Nangna Kappa Pakchade</i>	Adapted from her radio play	Makhonmani Mongsaba	Kinshasa International Film Festival 2017, Congo *Ladakh International Film Festival *Delhi	Special Jury Award (<i>Epic Mirror of the Century</i>)

SHORT FICTION FILMS

2002	<i>Laibak Thibi</i>	Adapted from A.Syam Sharma's short story- <i>Hingchabi</i>	Makhonmani Mongsaba		
2006	<i>Ngaihak Lambida</i>	Adapted by Haobam Paban Kumar from her radio play	Haobam Paban Kumar	*Indian Panorama of International Film Festival of India 2007, Goa	

DOCUMENTARY FILMS

1987	<i>Sangai: The Dancing Deer of Manipur</i>	Ballet Script	A.Syam Sharma	International Film Festival of Wildlife, Montana *Outstanding Film of the Year by the British Film Institute	Five Merit Awards
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1993	<i>The Orchids of Manipur</i>	Original	A.Syam Sharma	*National Film Awards 1993 *Indian Panorama of International Film Festival of India 1994, * International Wildlife Film Festival, Morocco 1996	Best Env/Con/Pre Film
1997	<i>Laa</i>	Original	Thouyangba Thoungamba		
2007	<i>Rajarshi Bhagyachandra of Manipur</i>	Original	A.Syam Sharma	*Indian Panorama of International Film Festival of India 2007, Goa	

FILM SONGS

Year of Song released	Film	Lyric	Music Director
1971	<i>Matamgi Manipur</i> (1972)	<i>Lapna Lotna Leiyu</i>	A.Syam Sharma
1972	<i>Urirei Madhabi</i> (Not completed)	<i>Ngaikho Haigeba</i>	Syam Budha

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