Theatrical model of communication has long fascinated social scientists including folklorists. They have applied theatre analogy in their study of patterns of social behaviour and expressive forms. But, theatre is too limiting and genre specific. It may be problematic when applied to non-theatrical forms of behaviour. So, a very wide encompassing term like ‘performance’ has been interchangeably used along with ‘theatre’ or ‘drama’. Erving Goffman’s ‘performance in everyday life’, Victor Turner’s ‘social drama’ or Clifford Geertz’s ‘theatre state’, Richard Bauman or Dan Ben-Amos, all have used theatre/drama framework beneficially. This, on the other hand, has benefited theatre directors and theoreticians of theatre like Richard Schechner, Jerzy Grotowski or Eugenio Barba in theorising their ideas of theatre and has helped in generating new academic disciplines like Performance Studies and Theatre Anthropology.

Performance approach to the study of folklore is inherently context-centred and it helps in ascertaining the meaning of a text, which is always illusive, in different ways according to the changes in performance context or situation. The locally-defined culture-specific-meaning is brought into an area of discussion along with the social, cultural, political and historical dimensions of the particular folk group. This is something easier said than done. But it always sets a beautiful target one may try to achieve.

The articles, included in this issue of Indian Folklife which is named ‘Manipuri Folklore: Towards a Performance Approach’, were hopefully designed to be written from the point of view of the performance each genre of folklore incorporates in different contexts. But, again, it is easier said than done. I, as the Guest-Editor of this issue, should admit that it is a modest attempt towards that line.

Proverb in performance is the most interesting area of speech act in folklore study. There are quite a few collections of Manipuri proverbs available in book form. But, these are text-centred and highly literat. In her article, ‘Manipuri Culture Seen Through Proverbs’ included in this issue Dr. Betholia makes an attempt towards a text and contextual analysis of Manipuri proverbs. Arunkumar’s article, ‘The Head: Folktale that Reflects People with Disability’ is an analysis of a Manipuri folktale. Using this text the writer explains how physically challenged people are being considered as some kind of untouchables, restricted from rituals and other public performances, in Manipuri society. Dr. Nongthombam Jiten’s article ‘Leishabi: An Appreciation’ is altogether different. There are Meitei from Manipur settled in Myanmar who contributed a lot to the making of Burmese history and culture. But they are now culturally and politically marginalised and endangered as a nationality. The well known Burmese historian Professor Than Tun wrote an essay on their plight as a nationality and he mentioned that their contributions to Myanmar, although very great, are now forgotten. Than Tun’s essay moves in an area between folklore and historiography. Dr. Jiten gives his response to Than Tun’s article as a Meitei from Manipur. Nongthombam Premchand studies the liminality of the most important ritualistic performances of the Meitei using the framework of theatre in his article, ‘Laiharaoba: A Theatre in Liminality’. Laishram Birendrakumar’s ‘Folk Music of the Ethnic Minorities of Manipur’ is a survey of the constitutionally recognized thirty three tribes of Manipur.

The issue is given its title ‘Manipuri Folklore: Towards a Performance Approach’. But considering the paucity of contents herein and the richness of folklore of Manipur on the one hand, the claim may sound somewhat absurd. However, I hope that this will certainly be able to make an opening however small in the international circuit of folklore study. I express my heartfelt gratitude to M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, the editor, for giving me the opportunity to do a little bit of exercise as its Guest Editor. ✽