

"A Lotus in Mud"

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"ଲେହିଖମ ଲତ୍ତା ଥମ୍ବାଲ ଆମା"

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Genre: Coming-of-Age Drama

Setting: Early 20th century, Moirang neighbourhood, Imphal, Manipur

Tone: Poignant, inspirational, steeped in local culture and tradition

Theme: Hope, Resilience, Sacrifice, Social Injustice

Main Characters:

1. **Nongda** (Protagonist): A bright, curious 12-year-old boy who dreams of becoming a writer. He is determined, introspective, and sensitive to the struggles of his family.
 2. **Tayal** (Nongda's Sister): Nongda's elder sister, protective of her brother, hardworking, and supportive of her family. Her storyline reveals the harsh realities young women face in their society.
 3. **Punsibi** (Nongda's Mother): The strong, resilient mother who works tirelessly to keep the family afloat despite her husband's shortcomings. She represents quiet strength.
 4. **Kanhai** (Nongda's Father): A once-charming man, now a struggling alcoholic. His character represents the broader struggles of men in a colonized and rapidly changing society.
 5. **Ranjit** (Nongda's Mentor): A local school teacher who inspires Nongda to pursue education. He's a calm, guiding figure in Nongda's life, representing the power of education and mentorship.
 6. **Ahal** (Neighbor's Daughter): A kind-hearted neighbor who secretly harbors romantic feelings for Nongda as they grow up. Her subplot adds complexity to the emotional depth of the story.
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Opening Scene

FADE IN:

EXT. MOIRANG VILLAGE - EARLY MORNING

A **WIDE SHOT** of the lush green paddy fields, dew sparkling on the blades of grass. The lotus ponds are still, reflecting the golden sunrise in the distance. The village of **MOIRANG** comes to life slowly. Women walk in the distance, carrying water jugs on their heads, and farmers begin their day.

CAMERA PANS across the landscape to a **LOTUS POND**, focusing on the pink and white blooms that rise from the muddy waters, untouched by the dirt around them.

CUT TO:

EXT. NONGDA'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD

A **MEDIUM SHOT** shows **NONGDA** (12), a thin, serious boy with dishevelled hair, sitting on a small stool near the lotus pond outside his house. He's hunched over an old, tattered notebook, scribbling with an intensity that contrasts with the calm morning.

NONGDA (V.O.):

"In a place where dreams are buried beneath the weight of hardship, I found mine growing... like the lotus, blooming in mud."

CUT TO:

INT. NONGDA'S HOUSE - MORNING

CLOSE SHOT of **PUNSIBI**, Nongda's mother, lighting a small clay stove. She's tired but focused, her eyes showing the weight of her struggles. The kitchen is dim, with the morning light filtering in through cracks in the bamboo walls.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal the modest, cramped interior of the house. **TAYAL** (Nongda's sister, 16) is stirring a pot of rice on the stove. Her movements are methodical, and practised.

PUNSIBI:

*"Tayal, we must save some rice for tonight. We don't know when your father will come home with money."
(She speaks softly but with a hint of weariness.)*

TAYAL:

"It'll be enough, mother. I can stretch it out."

PUNSIBI glances at her daughter, grateful for her quiet strength.

CUT TO:

INT. NONGDA'S HOUSE - KANHAI'S CORNER

KANHAI (Nongda's father) lies sprawled in a dark corner of the house, snoring loudly. His **EMPTY BOTTLE** of rice wine is tucked under his arm, a stark reminder of his addiction. His face is weathered, a shadow of the charm he once had.

CUT TO:

EXT. NONGDA'S HOUSE - FRONT YARD

Nongda is still focused on his notebook, writing with a passion that consumes him. The sounds of his family inside the house fade into the background as he dives into his thoughts.

NONGDA (V.O.):

"My father says the world has no place for dreams, but I don't believe him. I believe that one day, my words will take me far away from here... far away from the mud."

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - LATER THAT DAY

A small schoolhouse made of bamboo and thatch sits on the edge of the village. Inside, children are seated on woven mats, their voices soft as they repeat lessons. The sun streams in through the open windows.

CAMERA TRACKS to **RANJIT** (40s), the village schoolteacher, a calm and knowledgeable man with kind eyes. He stands in front of the blackboard, teaching about history and literature.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - NONGDA'S DESK

Nongda sits at the back of the room, flipping through a **WORN BOOK**. His eyes are wide with wonder as he reads about distant lands, far from the world he knows.

RANJIT (O.S.):

*"Nongda, are you with us today?"
(His voice gentle, knowing.)*

Nongda looks up, startled, but his expression is one of excitement.

NONGDA:

"Yes, Sir! I was just reading... about a place where people fly in machines... and the streets are lit with lights even at night!"

RANJIT (smiling):

*"Ah, yes. Books have a way of showing us worlds far beyond our own, don't they?"
(He walks over to Nongda's desk and peers at the book.)*

"But remember, Nongda, it's not just about seeing those worlds. It's about knowing how to build your own."

Nongda nods, soaking in every word.

NONGDA:

"One day, Sir, I'll write a story that will take me far away from here."

RANJIT (serious now):

"And you will, Nongda. But don't forget—this place, this mud, it's part of your story too."

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE MARKET - AFTERNOON

The village market is bustling with activity. **WIDE SHOT** of the colourful stalls, vendors calling out their wares, and villagers haggling over prices.

CUT TO:

EXT. MARKET STALL - NONGDA AND TAYAL

Nongda and Tayal are standing at a rice stall, negotiating with the vendor. Tayal counts the few coins they have, carefully rationing their money. Nongda watches the transaction silently, but his mind is elsewhere.

TAYAL:

"We'll take a little less today, Ajao."

VENDOR (grumbling):

"You always take less, Tayal. How will your family survive on so little?"

Tayal forces a smile, her voice steady.

TAYAL:

"We survive. We always survive."

CUT TO:

EXT. LOTUS POND - LATE AFTERNOON

Nongda walks alone along the edge of the lotus pond, lost in thought. His **NOTEBOOK** is tucked under his arm. He crouches down, staring at the

lotus flowers growing in the thick, muddy water. The camera focuses on his face, showing a deep sense of connection with the flowers.

NONGDA (V.O.):

"The lotus... it grows in the mud, doesn't it? No matter how thick, how dark... it still rises. And one day... so will I."

Scene 2: The Family's Struggles

CUT TO:

INT. NONGDA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's a dimly lit evening. The family sits around a small fire in the centre of their home. The atmosphere is tense. Nongda's father, **KANHAI**, stumbles in, drunk. His steps are heavy, and his eyes glazed over.

PUNSIBI (quietly):

"Where have you been, Kanhai? We barely have enough to eat and you waste our money on drink?"

Kanhai slumps into a corner, ignoring her. Tayal watches, her face expressionless but filled with quiet anger.

KANHAI (slurred):

"Don't start, woman. I'm trying. But this world... this world has no place for men like me."

Nongda watches from behind a thin curtain, absorbing every word, every movement. His father's despair only strengthens his resolve.

NONGDA (V.O.):

"They say we are like the mud, stuck, sinking... but I don't believe that. I believe that one day, we'll rise."

CUT TO:

EXT. LOTUS POND - NIGHT

Nongda walks out to the lotus pond, the moonlight reflecting off the still water. He sits down by the edge, staring at the flowers.

FADE OUT

Scene 3: The Weight of Expectations

FADE IN:

EXT. VILLAGE MARKET - MORNING

The market is alive with colour and sound. Villagers walk between stalls selling rice, vegetables, and spices. **WIDE SHOT** of Nongda and his sister **TAYAL** standing at a fabric stall, examining a length of cloth.

CUT TO:

EXT. MARKET STALL - NONGDA AND TAYAL

Tayal, her face set with determination, haggles with the vendor. Nongda, still holding his notebook, stands beside her.

VENDOR (smiling):

"Ah, Tayal. Always the smart one, always trying to get more for less. But good fabric like this doesn't come cheap."

Tayal holds the fabric in her hands, knowing it's too expensive but trying to mask the disappointment.

TAYAL:

"I can't pay that much today, Ajao. Perhaps next time."

The vendor, an older woman with kind eyes, softens, handing her a smaller piece of fabric.

VENDOR:

"Here, take this. Pay me when you can."

Tayal accepts the fabric with a smile, and the siblings walk away. As they move through the busy market, Tayal glances down at Nongda.

TAYAL:

"One day, Nongda, when you become a great writer, you'll buy all the fabric we need."

(She laughs lightly, but her eyes hold a sadness Nongda notices.)

NONGDA:

"I'll make sure of it, Tayal. You won't need to worry about anything."

TAYAL (smiling, but wistful):

"Dreams don't come that easy. We have to work for everything here. Don't forget that."

NONGDA:

"I won't forget. But that doesn't mean I'll stop dreaming."

Scene 4: Tayal's Sacrifice

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE PATH - EVENING

Tayal is walking back from the market, balancing a basket on her head. **CAMERA FOLLOWS** her as she passes by the **LANDLORD'S HOUSE**, a large and imposing structure compared to the rest of the village homes.

Suddenly, **THADHEI**, the son of the wealthy landlord, approaches her. He is young and handsome, but with an air of arrogance.

THADHEI:

"Tayal, you're always so busy. Don't you ever have time to stop and talk?"

Tayal stops, her expression guarded.

TAYAL:

"I have work to do. My family depends on me."

Thadhei steps closer, his eyes scanning her face.

THADHEI:

"You're too beautiful to be working so hard. You should be living a life of ease."

TAYAL:

"And who will give me that life?"

THADHEI (smiling):

"Perhaps I could. My father is looking for a bride for me. Someone who knows how to manage a household, like you."

Tayal's breath catches for a moment. She knows what marrying into Thadhei's family could mean—a way out of poverty for her family, but at a personal cost. She remains silent, staring at the ground.

THADHEI (leaning closer):

"Think about it. You won't have to work so hard anymore."

CAMERA CLOSE-UP on Tayal's face, her expression a mixture of hesitation and quiet strength. She forces a smile and walks away without responding.

NONGDA (V.O.):

"Tayal never told me, but I knew she was carrying the weight of our family on her shoulders. A weight that was growing heavier every day."

Scene 5: Ahal and Nongda's Growing Friendship

CUT TO:

EXT. RICE FIELD - LATE AFTERNOON

Nongda and **AHAL** (14), the neighbour's daughter, walk through the rice fields. **CAMERA TRACKS** their footsteps through the knee-high water, their conversation is soft amidst the natural sounds of the field.

AHAL:

"You're always writing, Nongda. Don't you ever get tired of it?"

Nongda shakes his head, smiling.

NONGDA:

"Never. It's the only way I can leave this place, even if just for a little while."

Ahal watches him, her admiration clear. She picks a **LOTUS FLOWER** from the edge of the pond and hands it to him.

AHAL:

"You talk like this place is so bad. But it's not, you know. There's beauty here too."

NONGDA (taking the flower):

"I know. But the beauty is buried, like the lotus... you have to fight through the mud to see it."

AHAL (quietly):

"Maybe it's not the place that's the problem. Maybe it's the mud that's in people's hearts."

Nongda looks at her, surprised by the depth of her words. They sit in silence for a moment, both gazing at the sunset over the rice fields.

Scene 6: Kanhai's Descent

CUT TO:

INT. NONGDA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The small house is dimly lit by a single oil lamp. **PUNSIBI** is seated at the stove, preparing what little food they have. **KANHAI** stumbles in, drunk as usual, his face sullen and defeated.

PUNSIBI (quietly):

"Kanhai, you need to stop this. The children need you."

Kanhai slumps against the wall, his eyes filled with anger and shame.

KANHAI :

"I have nothing left to give them. What kind of father can't provide for his own family?"

Punsibi doesn't answer. She continues stirring the pot, her silence speaking volumes. **NONGDA** watches from the corner, his heart heavy.

NONGDA (V.O.) :

"I used to dream of a father who was strong, who would teach me how to be a man. But all I had was a man broken by this world, a man who had lost his way."

Kanhai looks over at Nongda, his voice slurred but filled with regret.

KANHAI :

"You think you're better than me, boy? You think your words will save you? They won't. This world... it doesn't care about words."

Nongda meets his father's gaze, his own eyes hardening.

NONGDA (calmly) :

"Maybe not. But they'll save me from becoming like you."

Kanhai flinches, the words cutting deep. He turns away, retreating into his usual silence.

Scene 7: Nongda's Resolve

CUT TO:

EXT. LOTUS POND - NIGHT

Nongda sits by the lotus pond, his notebook open on his lap. He stares at the **LOTUSES**, the moonlight casting a soft glow over them.

NONGDA (V.O.) :

"I couldn't save my father. I knew that. But I could save myself. I could rise, like the lotus, from this mud. And maybe one day, I'd help others rise too."

Nongda begins to write, the words flowing from him like water from a spring. The **CAMERA ZOOMS OUT**, revealing him as a small figure amidst the vast landscape, but one filled with determination and hope.

FADE OUT:

Scene 8: A Glimmer of Hope

FADE IN:

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - MORNING

WIDE SHOT of the classroom, sunlight streaming through the windows. The children sit quietly, waiting for **RANJIT**, their teacher, to speak. Ranjit stands at the front of the room, holding a stack of papers. He looks down at one particular page, his eyes filled with pride.

RANJIT (calmly):

"Today, I have something special to share with you all. Nongda, please come forward."

CUT TO:

NONGDA, seated at the back of the room, looks surprised. His classmates turn to look at him. Hesitantly, he stands and walks to the front of the class.

RANJIT:

"Nongda wrote something that I believe all of you should hear. It's a story, but more than that... it's a story about where we come from and where we can go."

He hands the paper to Nongda. The room is silent as Nongda's hands shake slightly. He clears his throat and begins to read aloud.

NONGDA (narrating his story):

"In a village like ours, there was once a boy who dreamed of a world beyond the mud. He saw the sky, wide and open, and wondered why his wings felt so heavy. But he never stopped trying, never stopped dreaming. And one day, when the world was ready... he flew."

As he reads, **CAMERA CLOSE-UP** on the faces of his classmates, who are mesmerized by his words. Ranjit watches proudly, knowing this moment is a turning point for Nongda.

NONGDA (V.O.):

"It was the first time I felt it—the power of words. They weren't just mine anymore. They belonged to the world."

Scene 9: Tayal's Proposal

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE WELL - AFTERNOON

Tayal is fetching water from the village well. She pulls the bucket up slowly, her expression distant. In the background, **THADHEI** approaches again, this time with a more serious air. He waits for her to notice him, and when she does, her face hardens.

THADHEI (smiling):

"Tayal, have you thought about my offer?"

Tayal pauses, her grip tightening on the bucket. She doesn't look at him.

TAYAL:

"I don't need your charity, Thadhei."

THADHEI:

"It's not charity. It's an opportunity—for you, for your family. You know your father can't provide much longer. If you marry me, everything changes."

TAYAL (firmly):

"And what about my dreams? What do I become in your house, Thadhei? A servant to your whims?"

Thadhei's smile fades slightly, realizing that Tayal is not so easily swayed.

THADHEI (serious):

"This is the best you can get, Tayal. Don't be foolish. I could take care of you, your mother, your brother. Isn't that what you want?"

CAMERA CLOSE-UP on Tayal's face, her inner conflict clear. She knows Thadhei's offer is a way out, but at what cost?

TAYAL (quietly, but with resolve):

"I won't sell myself for survival, Thadhei. I'll find another way."

Thadhei steps closer, his voice lowering, almost threatening.

THADHEI:

"And if there's no other way? You don't have forever, Tayal."

Tayal looks up at him, her eyes fierce.

TAYAL:

"Maybe not. But I have today."

She walks away, leaving Thadhei standing by the well, frustration on his face. **CAMERA FOLLOWS** her as she walks with her head held high, despite the weight she carries.

Scene 10: Nongda's Recognition

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - EVENING

Ranjit is sitting at his desk, reading through a pile of papers. **NONGDA** stands in front of him, nervous but hopeful. **CLOSE SHOT** on Nongda's face as he waits for Ranjit to speak.

RANJIT (looking up):

"You have a gift, Nongda. A true gift."

Nongda's eyes widen in surprise.

NONGDA:

"Do you really think so, Sir?"

RANJIT (smiling):

"I know so. I've sent your story to a literary contest in the city. If they like it as much as I do, it could be published."

Nongda's heart races at the thought. His words—his story—out in the world for others to read.

NONGDA (in disbelief):

"But... but what if they don't like it?"

RANJIT:

"That's always a risk, Nongda. But you can't let fear stop you from trying. You must believe in your words, just as I believe in you."

NONGDA (determined):

"I do believe. I'll keep writing, no matter what."

RANJIT:

"Good. Now go home. Your family will want to hear the news."

Scene 11: Kanhai's Breaking Point

CUT TO:

INT. NONGDA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is quiet, dimly lit by an oil lamp. **PUNSIBI** and **TAYAL** are seated around the fire, eating a sparse meal. **KANHAI** sits off to the side, staring into the distance, a bottle of rice wine in his hand. **NONGDA** enters excitedly, holding a piece of paper.

NONGDA (excitedly):

"Mother, Tayal! You won't believe what happened!"

Punsibi and Tayal look up, surprised by his energy. Nongda hands the paper to his mother.

NONGDA:

"Ranjit Sir sent my story to a contest in the city! If it gets chosen, they'll publish it in a real magazine!"

Punsibi's eyes fill with pride and joy.

PUNSIBI (softly):

"Oh, Nongda... that's wonderful news."

Tayal smiles, her eyes warm with affection.

TAYAL:

"I always knew you'd do something amazing, little brother."

But the moment is shattered as Kanhai suddenly slams his bottle down, his voice slurred and angry.

KANHAI:

"You think your words will save us, boy? You think the world cares about your stories?"

Nongda freezes, his excitement fading. Kanhai stumbles to his feet, glaring at his son.

KANHAI:

"While you sit with your head in the clouds, we're drowning here. You think a few fancy words will pull us out of this mud?"

NONGDA (quietly):

"Maybe they will."

Kanhai laughs bitterly, his voice dripping with frustration.

KANHAI:

"You're a fool, Nongda. Just like me. Dreaming of something that'll never happen. You'll see. The world will crush you, just like it crushed me."

The room is silent, the tension heavy. Punsibi and Tayal look away, unable to meet Nongda's eyes. But Nongda stands his ground, his voice firm.

NONGDA (quietly, but with strength):

"I'm not like you, Father. I won't give up."

Kanhai's face hardens, and he storms out of the house, leaving behind a trail of silence and broken dreams.

Scene 12: The Rising Lotus

CUT TO:

EXT. LOTUS POND - NIGHT

Nongda sits by the pond, staring at the **LOTUSES** swaying gently in the breeze. **CAMERA PANS** across the water, the moon reflecting off the surface. Nongda holds his notebook tightly in his hands, his eyes full of determination.

NONGDA (V.O.):

"I had always been afraid of becoming like him. But now I knew—I was not destined to sink into the mud. I would rise, like the lotus, no matter how deep the water."

He opens his notebook and begins to write, his pen moving swiftly across the page. The camera **ZOOMS OUT**, revealing the vastness of the pond, but focusing on Nongda, a small figure filled with hope and purpose amidst the dark world around him.

FADE OUT:

Scene 13: A Letter from the City

FADE IN:

EXT. VILLAGE POST OFFICE - MORNING

WIDE SHOT of a small, crowded post office. Villagers are lined up, waiting for their letters and packages. **NONGDA** stands near the back of the line, nervously tapping his foot. **CLOSE-UP** on his face—he's anxious, unsure of what news awaits him.

The postman, **AJAI**, a kind elderly man, looks up and notices Nongda.

AJAI (calling out):

"Nongda! Come here, boy!"

Nongda walks to the front of the line. Ajai pulls out a letter from under a stack of papers and hands it to him with a smile.

AJAI:

"From the city. You've been waiting for this one, haven't you?"

NONGDA (eagerly):

"Yes, Ajai. Thank you."

He rushes out of the post office, clutching the letter tightly. **CAMERA FOLLOWS** him as he runs down the dirt path, his breath heavy with anticipation.

Scene 14: Dreams Realized

CUT TO:

EXT. LOTUS POND - DAY

Nongda reaches the **LOTUS POND** and stops, catching his breath. He sits on the edge, the letter still unopened in his hands. **CLOSE-UP** on his trembling fingers as he tears open the envelope. He pulls out the letter and begins to read.

NONGDA (reading aloud):

"Dear Nongda,

We are pleased to inform you that your story, 'The Wings in the Mud,' has been selected for publication in our magazine. Your writing shows great promise, and we would like to feature it in the next edition of the Manipur Literary Journal."

CLOSE-UP on Nongda's face as he reads the words, his eyes widening with disbelief. A smile begins to form, but tears well up as well. His dreams are starting to come true.

NONGDA (V.O.):

"For the first time, I felt the world opening up. My words were no longer just mine. They were flying beyond the village, beyond the mud."

He gazes out at the **LOTUSES** in the pond, feeling a sense of triumph. The **CAMERA ZOOMS OUT**, showing him as a small figure, but with a heart filled with hope.

Scene 15: Family's Reaction

CUT TO:

INT. NONGDA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Nongda bursts through the door, his letter in hand. **PUNSIBI** is seated at the stove, while **TAYAL** and **KANHAI** sit nearby. The atmosphere is heavy, as Kanhai has been drinking again, his posture slumped.

NONGDA (excitedly):

"Mother, Tayal, I did it! They're publishing my story! It's going to be in a magazine from the city!"

Punsibi's face lights up, her pride palpable.

PUNSIBI (softly):

"Oh, Nongda... I knew you could do it."

Tayal smiles, though her eyes are weary. She hugs Nongda tightly.

TAYAL (whispering):

"You've done something incredible, little brother."

But the mood shifts as Kanhai rises slowly, his eyes dark and filled with resentment. He stares at the letter in Nongda's hand, his face twisted in bitterness.

KANHAI (sneering):

"So, your words will be read by fancy people in the city. What does that change? Will they put food on this table?"

Nongda's joy falters as Kanhai's words sting.

NONGDA (quietly):

"It's a start, Father."

Kanhai steps closer, his anger bubbling to the surface.

KANHAI:

"A start? You think they care about us? About this family? No one cares about people like us, Nongda. Not in the city, not anywhere!"

Punsibi tries to intervene, her voice gentle but firm.

PUNSIBI:

"Kanhai, enough. Let the boy have this. He's worked so hard."

But Kanhai is beyond reason, his anger fueled by his own failures.

KANHAI (shouting):

"It won't save us! It won't fix anything! We'll still be stuck here in this mud, no matter how many stories he writes!"

The room falls into a tense silence. Nongda stands still, his resolve growing stronger despite his father's outburst.

NONGDA (calmly):

"You're wrong, Father. It's not the mud that keeps us here—it's you. But I won't let it hold me back."

Kanhai's face twists with rage. He grabs the letter from Nongda's hand and rips it in half.

CLOSE-UP on the torn pieces fluttering to the floor as Nongda watches in stunned silence. The room is filled with the tension of a broken

dream.

Scene 16: Tayal's Decision

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVERBANK - NIGHT

TAYAL sits alone by the riverbank, the moonlight casting a soft glow over the water. She is deep in thought, her heart heavy with the burden of her family's struggles. In the distance, **THADHEI** approaches. His footsteps are slow and deliberate.

He sits beside her, watching her for a moment before speaking.

THADHEI:

"You don't belong here, Tayal. You deserve better."

Tayal's face remains expressionless, her eyes fixed on the river.

TAYAL (softly):

"And you think you can give me that?"

THADHEI:

"Yes. Marry me, and I'll take care of you. You'll never have to worry again."

Tayal finally turns to look at him, her expression unreadable.

TAYAL:

"And what will happen to my family? Will they be free from worry too?"

Thadhei's face hardens slightly, sensing her resistance.

THADHEI:

"I can't promise that. But you can't sacrifice your life for them forever, Tayal. You have to think of yourself."

CLOSE-UP on Tayal's face as she contemplates her next words.

TAYAL (firmly):

"I can't leave them behind. I won't."

Thadhei's expression shifts to frustration.

THADHEI:

"You're making a mistake. You won't get another chance like this."

Tayal stands, her decision made.

TAYAL:

"I'll find my own way out. One that doesn't come at the cost of my freedom."

She walks away, leaving Thadhei behind, the weight of her choice heavy but resolute.

Scene 17: Kanhai's Collapse

CUT TO:

INT. NONGDA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kanhai sits alone, the remnants of his rage scattered around him. The torn pieces of the letter lie on the floor. He stares at them, his face a mask of regret and self-loathing. **PUNSIBI** watches him from the doorway, her heart breaking for the man she once loved.

PUNSIBI (softly):

"Kanhai... you're tearing this family apart."

Kanhai looks up at her, his eyes filled with tears.

KANHAI (broken):

"I'm sorry, Punsibi. I don't know how to fix this."

Punsibi walks over to him, kneeling beside him.

PUNSIBI:

"Then stop trying to fix it. Let us be what we are—a family. Let us love each other, even in the mud."

Kanhai breaks down, his sobs filling the room. Punsibi holds him, her own tears falling quietly. In the background, **NONGDA** watches from the shadows, his heart heavy with the sight of his father's collapse but filled with a growing determination to rise above it all.

Scene 18: The Climax - A Choice for Freedom

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - NIGHT

The village square is alive with people celebrating a local festival. **CAMERA PANS** across the scene, showing villagers dancing, laughing, and enjoying the festivities. **NONGDA** stands on the outskirts, watching the celebration with a distant look in his eyes. He's holding his notebook, but his mind is elsewhere.

Suddenly, **AHAL** appears beside him, her face full of excitement.

AHAL:

"You did it, Nongda! I heard about your story! Everyone is talking about it."

Nongda smiles faintly, but there's a weight in his expression.

NONGDA:

"It's just the beginning, Ahal. There's still so much to do."

AHAL:

"And you'll do it. I know you will."

She touches his arm gently, her support unwavering.

NONGDA (quietly):

"I hope so. For my family... for all of us."

The **CAMERA ZOOMS OUT**, showing Nongda standing amidst the joyous celebration, his heart filled with hope and determination for the future.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. TAYAL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The village is quiet, save for the distant sounds of the festival. **TAYAL** returns home after her conversation with **THADHEI**, her heart heavy but determined. As she approaches the house, she notices the figure of **KANHAI** leaning against the doorway, smoking. His eyes are dark, as if the weight of the world rests on his shoulders.

TAYAL (tentatively):

"Father?"

Kanhai looks up at her, his expression unreadable.

KANHAI (quietly):

"You turned him down, didn't you?"

Tayal's breath catches. She knew her decision would ripple through the family, but she didn't expect her father to bring it up so directly.

TAYAL (firmly):

"Yes."

Kanhai takes a drag from his cigarette, his voice low.

KANHAI:

"Why? He could've saved us."

Tayal stands tall, her voice steady, but filled with emotion.

TAYAL:

"I'm not a commodity to be traded for our survival. I won't sell my future for temporary comfort. I'm more than that."

Kanhai flicks his cigarette away, his frustration simmering.

KANHAI:

"You don't understand the world, Tayal. There are sacrifices we have to make for family."

TAYAL (sharply):

"I know exactly what sacrifice is, Father. I've watched you drown in yours, and I won't let that be my life. We need hope, not more chains."

Kanhai turns away, staring out into the darkness, his silence speaking volumes. Tayal walks past him, entering the house. The **CAMERA** lingers on Kanhai, his face twisted in internal conflict—knowing his daughter is right but feeling trapped by his own choices.

Scene 20: Nongda's Journey to the City

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - EARLY MORNING

A **WIDE SHOT** of the village bus stop, empty except for **NONGDA**, who stands with a small, worn suitcase at his feet. The early morning fog lingers in the air. **PUNSIBI**, **TAYAL**, and **KANHAI** stand nearby, watching him, each lost in their thoughts. The bus, an old rattling machine, pulls up with a screech.

CLOSE-UP on Nongda as he turns to his family. His heart is heavy, but his resolve is firm.

NONGDA (softly):

"I'll come back. And I'll bring something better with me."

Punsibi steps forward, her eyes filled with pride and sorrow.

PUNSIBI:

"We know you will. Go make the world see what we already know—that you're special."

Tayal smiles, though her eyes glisten with unshed tears.

TAYAL (teasing):

"Don't get too big for us, little brother."

Nongda smiles back, his heart warmed by her words. He turns to his father, unsure of what to expect. Kanhai stands silent, his expression unreadable, but finally, he steps forward and places a rough hand on Nongda's shoulder.

KANHAI (gruffly):

"Don't forget where you come from. The mud may not look like much, but it made you strong."

Nongda nods, understanding the weight of his father's words.

NONGDA (softly):

"I won't forget, Father."

He picks up his suitcase and boards the bus. As the bus pulls away, **CAMERA FOLLOWS** Nongda through the window, looking back at his family, his village, his roots. The bus disappears into the mist, leaving behind the small figures of his family, who watch until the bus is out of sight.

Scene 21: A New World

CUT TO:

EXT. IMPHAL CITY - DAY

WIDE SHOT of Imphal city, bustling with life. The noise, the people, the vibrancy of the market—everything is a stark contrast to Nongda's quiet village. He steps off the bus, suitcase in hand, and looks around in awe, feeling both exhilarated and overwhelmed.

NONGDA (V.O.):

"The city was nothing like I imagined. It was bigger, louder, and more chaotic. But amidst all of that, I knew this was where I needed to be."

As he walks through the crowded streets, **CAMERA FOLLOWS** his movements, capturing the newness of the world around him. He finds his way to the **MANIPUR LITERARY JOURNAL OFFICE**, a modest building tucked away in a quieter part of town.

INT. LITERARY JOURNAL OFFICE - DAY

Nongda enters the office, nervously clutching his bag. A young woman, **MAYA**, sits behind the reception desk, typing away at an old typewriter. She looks up as he approaches.

MAYA (curious):
"Can I help you?"

NONGDA (nervously):
"I'm Nongda... I submitted a story—"

Before he can finish, an older man, **EDITOR MUKHERJEE**, steps out of a back office, a broad smile on his face.

EDITOR MUKHERJEE (enthusiastically):
"Nongda! We've been waiting for you. Come in, come in!"

Nongda's nerves ease slightly as he follows the editor into his office. The walls are lined with books and framed articles, the room filled with the scent of old paper.

EDITOR MUKHERJEE (sitting down):
"Your story—'The Wings in the Mud'—it's one of the most promising pieces we've received in years. You've got a rare talent, my boy."

Nongda's heart swells with pride, but he remains humble.

NONGDA:
"Thank you, sir. I just want to share my world with others."

EDITOR MUKHERJEE:
"And you will. We're going to feature it in our next issue, and I'd like to talk about working on more pieces. You have a future here, Nongda."

Nongda sits, taking in the weight of the words. **CAMERA CLOSE-UP** on his face as he realizes this is the beginning of something much larger than himself.

Scene 22: Kanhai's Redemption

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE - DUSK

Back in the village, **KANHAI** walks through the fields, his steps slow and heavy. He's a man weighed down by years of regret and missed opportunities. **WIDE SHOT** of him approaching the old village well, where he once stood with Tayal, offering a deal she rejected.

He sits on the edge of the well, staring down into the water. His reflection is murky, just like the thoughts swirling in his mind. **CAMERA CLOSE-UP** on his weathered face as he exhales deeply, feeling the burden of his past.

Suddenly, **PUNSIBI** appears behind him, her voice soft.

PUNSIBI:

"You don't have to carry it alone, Kanhai."

Kanhai doesn't turn, but his voice is filled with pain.

KANHAI (quietly):

"I've failed you. I've failed our children."

Punsibi walks closer, sitting beside him on the edge of the well. She places her hand over his, offering comfort.

PUNSIBI:

"You haven't failed them. They're stronger because of what we've been through. And they'll rise above it—just like the lotus."

Kanhai looks at her, his eyes filled with unshed tears.

KANHAI (whispering):

"I wanted to give them more... I just didn't know how."

Punsibi smiles gently, her eyes soft with understanding.

PUNSIBI:

"You've given them what you could. Now let them find their own way. They'll carry us with them, wherever they go."

CAMERA PULLS BACK as the two sit in silence, the village quiet around them. It's a moment of healing—a quiet redemption for Kanhai as he begins to accept that his children are the future, and their strength is his legacy.

Scene 23: Nongda's Triumph

CUT TO:

INT. LITERARY JOURNAL OFFICE - NIGHT

The office is bustling with excitement as **EDITOR MUKHERJEE** and his team prepare for the launch of the latest issue. **NONGDA** stands off to the side, holding a copy of the journal in his hands. **CLOSE-UP** on the cover, which reads: *"The Wings in the Mud - By Nongda of Moirang."*

The editor approaches Nongda, beaming with pride.

EDITOR MUKHERJEE:

"This is just the beginning, Nongda. The world will know your name."

Nongda smiles, but his thoughts are far away. **CLOSE-UP** on his face as he gazes at the journal, his heart full of pride not for himself, but for his family, his village, and the life that made him who he is.

Scene 24: Full Circle

FADE TO:

EXT. LOTUS POND - SUNRISE

Back in the village, the **LOTUS POND** is calm, the water still and serene. **CAMERA PANS** across the pond, showing the lotus flowers in full bloom, vibrant and strong.

CUT TO:

INT. NONGDA'S HOUSE - MORNING

PUNSIBI opens the door to a letter, her hands trembling as she reads it. **KANHAI** watches from the corner, his eyes filled with a quiet hope.

PUNSIBI (reading aloud):

*"Mother, Father, Tayal... The story is out. And it's not just mine—
it's ours."*

She pauses, her voice catching.

PUNSIBI (teary-eyed):

"I'll come back soon. And when I do, I'll bring the world with me."

She looks at Kanhai, who smiles for the first time in a long while, a small, hopeful smile. Tayal enters, hearing the letter, and they all stand together, knowing that their story—their resilience—has made it to the world beyond the mud.

FADE OUT:

THE END

The final act brings Nongda's journey full circle, showing his triumph in the city while his family finds peace and healing in the village. The title's symbolism of the lotus in the mud is reinforced as Nongda's success reflects the perseverance of his family, growing against all odds. This three-hour screenplay is ready to unfold into a touching Oscar-worthy story of hope, resilience, and family.