

Literature and Society: A glimpse into the world of Manipur Literature

Dr. Anuradha Nongmaithem

Assistant Professor in English

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

National Institute of Technology Agartala

Brajala, Jirania

West Tripura

India

Abstract

The paper is an attempt to study on how there is deeply rooted connection between Manipuri society and its literature. The thrust of the study is on the translated version of Manipuri poetries of few of the selected writers. The paper will closely focus on how social turmoil and unrest can have a deep impact upon its literature. How their writing try to define gender conscious society of Manipur. The writer cannot run away from the harsh reality that is happening around them. For decades Manipuri people are having unrest social and political rights. The chaotic turbulence is beautifully captured by many writers trying to find solution in their possible ways. The legacy of Manipuri literature is young compared to other existing literature in India. Its literature has its own richness of native sensibility and there are few writers who are acknowledge by other mainstream literary body in India. The paper attempted to unfold the inner most meaning of the writer views through analysis.

KEY WORDS: Manipuri literature, Social, Chaotic, Unrest and Feminist issue.

INTRODUCTION

Manipur is a small state in the northeastern part of India. Imphal is the capital of the state. Manipur has a long tradition of writing though its literature is new to other mainland literature. It has its own flavor and ethnicity. Manipuri poetry began from oral literature. Manipuri poetry beginning from early period till today could be divided into three sections – Early Manipuri
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poetry, Medieval Manipuri poetry and Contemporary Manipuri poetry. The early Manipuri poetry deals with prayer, heroic deeds and nature worshipping. Most of the poems were written in the form of rhythmic pattern. Indeed, the early period covers up to 17th Century. And the Medieval Period covers from 17th to 18th Century.

There was a great influence of Hinduism during the time of King Garivaniwaj. Bengali, Sanskrit and the foreign words begins to establish in Manipuri language. Western education dwelled in Manipuri society after the British colonization in 1891. The Manipuri (especially the Meities) began to take education thus giving birth to a new trend of modern Manipuri poetry. With the World War II the former system was broken and a new characteristic was formed. The Western modernism, the new face of the present civilization also arrived in Manipuri poetry. The poem “Manipur” by Elangbam Nilakanta featured in the periodical “Ngasi” brought out in 1949 edited by Keisham Kunjabihari would be the first modern poetry in Manipuri poetry. Nilakanta is regarded as the father of Modern Manipuri poetry. This poem reflected the war-torn Manipuri society as the effect of World War-II, dirty politics of the corrupted politicians, degrading economy, human negligence of moral values, imbalance of frustration and hope.

In the mid nineteen nineties the new trend of post modernism began to appear. The Eurocentric ideology of the modern poets was opposed by a group of poets. These groups of poets tried to have a trend of poetry to be decentralized, to have the ideology of post colonial and feminism. These poets included among others Arambam Ongbi Memchoubi, Birendrajit Naorem, Lanchenba Meitei, Saratchand Thiyam, Dilip Mayengbam, Lairenlakpam Ibemhal, Raghu Leishangthem, Longjam Kunjarani, Kojiam Shantibala etc. The main ideology of these new poets is faith in life and to preserve hope. It was quite contrary to the pessimistic points of view of the modern poets, absorb their mind to self religion, culture and indigenous characters, balancing between the past history and present turmoil society they have tried to search a new value system. Longing for a new sovereign state they dreamt in this meaningless democratic system. Myth, legend and folktale, the parts of folklore were used as their tools to express their ideas.

Manipuri literature started flourishing during the 18th century. There is always an identity

issue in Manipur. Indigenous writers try to preserve their sensibility and ethnicity, yet at broader perspective they also writing as an Indian writer contributing to the larger mass of Indian Literature. Manipur is still an orthodox society though comparatively the discrimination against women is less than the rest of India. To a great extend there are many liability Manipuri women enjoys than the rest of the nation. Manipur society is a closely knitted society where all the family members stay together. There is not much of the class issue in Manipur but certain hierarchy is maintained. Life in Manipur has become a hell to live in the last few decades with the burning issues of sovereignty and the atrocities from both the army personnel and insurgencies groups. Few of the poems that are going to be analyzed in this paper ranges early 60s and 70s literature and some are from the contemporary literature.

ANALYSIS

“A dead God” by Raghu Leishangthem translated by T. Bijoykumar Singh has tried to beautifully portray the difference that exists in our society in the name of racial discrimination. The three stanzas simple verse has vividly given the picture perfect of religion also. Here in this poem the poet says that the dead god is lying down in the grave silently observing all wrong things happening around us in the name of religion. The problem of fight in the name of religion is not a new topic and also not an isolation issue. It is indeed an acute core problem of any society is going through. The more the world is becoming modernization; people are fighting in the name of religion. It says:

God is segregating people
Into racial groups
If God doesn't do,
Devotees do it
If a layman has to die
After being hit by the arrow of the narrow view of religion
I'll say God has done it. (R. Leishangthem)

The about lines depicts the pathetic situation a civilian is bound to encounter. The poet rightly says that if a common dies in the combat between the devotees and the religion advocators, he is

going to blame God. What else a common man can do? Just put the blame everything to God to have peace of mind.

In another poem “The woes of a hand-grenade about to burst” by Rajkumar Bhubonsana, depicts the anxiety stricken civilian of Manipur. In the recent past and till now Manipur has seen lot of bloodshed and frequently bomb blast is taken as a common happening in Manipur. The first thing a civilian notice in the newspaper is bombing in so and so place, how many killed in firing and so on. This situation is beautifully captured by the poet. .. “when thrown with the pin unplugged/ jubilant like one stepping into the world for the first time/a hand grenade about to burst / becomes perplexed/when it falls amidst the humans” . In these four lines the poet shares his fears and apprehension what will happen if the unplugged hand grenade is going to bust. This mental state of mind is same for almost all the people living in the state. The poet is worried if the grenade fall on busy street the number of families that is going to be destroyed instantly. The poet worry is beyond the physical dead that are going to bring about.

He says:

“What will take the place of the spring season

What kind of new shoots will be made to sprout?” (R. Bhubonsana)

It gives a clear picture that the families of the dead people will surely want to take revenge of the near and dear ones. Thus, depicts that the bloodshed in Manipur will continued in future. If there is continuous killing and bomb blast how can the children go to school? If there is no education then how will a society progress? When will all these comes to an end. Violence can never be a solution for any progress. But who will understand? It is with this plight and predicament the people are still living in Manipur.

“A Piece of Advice” by Ibohal Kshetrimayum talks about freedom of expression. Many people are silenced in the name of sovereign and freedom from Indian government. There was never a stable political law in Manipur after its merger to India Union in 21st September 1949.

Many were not happy with the merger and felt that India has annexed Manipur and with this merger gave birth to a never ending war of insurgencies. The poem opens with, “You can kill the poet but not the poem/for what is written remains written”. The poet is sensitive regarding the situation of Manipur. There once a glorious time in Manipur but now there is no freedom of expression. Through this the poet is trying to decry the horrific situation in Manipur for the artist. It says:

The poet must die if the poem should live,
and you want to stop the revolution,
the poet must be silenced. (I. Kshetrimayum)

The lines are full of subtle and irony. The poet has employed this technique in order to present his view with the situation of insurgencies in Manipur. Many are killed in the name of freedom and many artists were silenced too. Change is good but no revolution has sustained in history of the world. History has proved it, but the situation in Manipur is still the same, over sixty seven years. When will all these going to end? The situation is either you stop your revolution or you kill the all poet in Manipur. The poet says “Even if you kill the poet, /remember don’t let his blood spill/for it will turn into ink to write with/and you will be drowned in it”. The words of the poet are so strong that it will wipe of the revolutionary thought in them. He challenge that if they are not able to wipe him off then they will be drown in his poetry and will not be able to surface once again. The last concluding lines of the poem depict the pathetic situation of Manipuri mothers:

Years of grief
my mother has spent stretching her eyes
to see her children return. (I. Kshetrimayum)

There are many adolescent boys who were force to become insurgent groups in the pretext of fighting for the motherland. There are many untold stories lay hidden in Manipur. Sometimes the boys never come back home. They even die in the hope that they will come back home one day.

Raghu Leishangthem, “Poets do not hold guns” speaks for those who do not want to bring changes with force. In this poem he says those poets are not ready to hold guns. If at all he is force to hold a gun then:

surely he would turn it
into a floescence of flowers.

He would make sit
the butterflies of words
at the mouth of the guns.

His heart is soft as petal
he has never hence
a mind for a gun. (R. Leishangthem)

The poet believes that art are not born to wage a war against society. Their job is very different. They are not harsh with anybody nor can they take up arms. Their only weapon is pen and only beautiful verses will come out from their thought. So, he is requesting not to hand over the gun to poet. He is a type of poet who glorifies nature. He tries to depict the problems which confront people from day to day.

Phurailatpam Brajamuhini Devi’s poem “What to do” translated by Salam Tomba gives a typical picture of how the civilian are living in Manipur society. Here the poet compares the fish with human being. It says:

Underneath the Kanglei water
No fish could live safe and peaceful
On the banks marked by vigil eyes

Holding long in the hand to kill. (Ph. Brajamuhini)

The opening already set the mood of the poem. The poet says that “Kanglei” means motherland Manipur is not a safe place to live in. No fish can survive in this water because it is already polluted and contaminated with human blood. People are hovering with “vigil” eyes to catch the fish and kill. The fish on the other hand are not aware what is going on and what fate awaits for them.

For anyone left out by chance

Again spread the big nets, *nupa een*

To catch all as clear as possible. . (Ph. Brajamuhini)

Even if some fish are left out, the fish catcher will throw big “*nupa een*” (a Manipuri word for big net) over the pond and clear all the fishes as far as possible. He will make sure that nothing is left behind. The poet qualms what will be the condition of the fish who manages to escape; they will obviously try to run away to safer place. If all the fishes start thinking of leaving Manipur then what will happen to our state. The contemporary issue is that with all the political unrest in the state many are opting to go outside Manipur for higher studies as well for better opportunity. Nothing is left in Manipur only killing chaos and socio-political unrest. No society can function properly, there is no development, and educational institutions are closed down whenever there is some problem. The main target is school and colleges. If all these carry on, the poet is worried that nothing will be left in Manipur.

Lanbon Kabui “A new Manipur” translated by K. Kulladhawaja, the poet dream of a better Manipur to live in. He wishes if all the dirt is blown away then people can breathe properly. There is new hope that someday we will have a better time the old days, free from anxiety and killing. “Like the corruption too, be lost/In the sea of the changing age.” The poet knew that corruption is one core problem of Manipur. It is spreading like cancer and hampering the progress of the state. He hopes that with the new generation everything will be alright. He says that:

Let all of us leave
The old and bad thoughts
And let us create a new society
For the future destiny of
The growing youths
With the equal and right steps
Gain success, today also. (L. Kabui)

The poet wants all the people to leave behind grudges and start a new live together. He longs for a better co-existence among all the indigenous people of Manipur. He wants everybody to live freely without fear and create a better society for the future generation. He requested that we should not fight among ourselves since we are the sons and daughters of the same mother. Nothing is impossible if we set our mind in for productive progress.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis clearly depicts the chaotic condition of Manipur. Manipuri poetry has its own richness and authenticity. Most of the cries of the poets are of a better place to live in. There is a specific gender role in Manipur society. Though women play a key role in all the social functions, the decision making is done by the men. Daughter-in-law is not allowed to eat before serving the male in the family. Female are thriving in almost every field at par with the male counterpart. But there is a sense of deprive since women are not getting their due equal rights as that of a man. Manipur is still governed by typical orthodox attitude, though there are some changes already happening in mental outlook regarding the role of women.

There is a social and political unrest in Manipur for the past sixty years. Manipur has seen the worse condition of insurgencies and atrocity which is slow killer like cancer breaking the foundation of our society. It needs to be taken seriously in order to bring a change. Life in Manipur is of rural type, closely knitted. Everybody seems to know everyone. There is a strong

social obligation culture where people come forward to help each other. The poems that were taken for analysis have common theme, they speak about the insurgencies problem which has destroyed the peace of mind in Manipur. There is a deep psychological impact on youth by bombing and killing both by the army personal and militant groups. There is an acute unemployment problem which is a major root problem of our society. They also speak about the duty of an artist, especially poet. They long for a better society, solidarity and understanding among the fellow beings. Manipur has a long way to go in order to bring back its past glory. It's high time we understand blood create history but cannot bring changes only intellectual can. No civilization has nurture war; every war has met its own end. Our people are at war; let's bring an end to it.

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