



The Female Divinity of Panthoibi in Panthoibi Khongul

Dr. R.K. Nirmola Sana

Asst. Professor

Manipuri Dept, Assam University, Silchar

The Manipuri Literature in its early phases showed its position as an indigenous literary advancement marked by extremely peripheral outside influence. The individual texts emerged under the scenario were found to be free from such outside impact particularly from the rest of India while reflecting its indigenous contents. The tradition continued unabated but underwent various stages and reigned supreme till the advent of 18th century in which period a drastic acculturation gained momentum and the acculturation reached its peak during 19th century. Thus we do find Manipuri Literature in 18th and 19th century as a manifestation that flourished under an acculturized state of the society which had its own idiosyncrasies and underlying society loadings for example, the age-old religion of Manipuri's was replaced by a new one and it had a tremendous effect in the production of literature for its religious objectives. Under the impact, the traditional literature underwent an irreparable degeneration and a bulk of them were burnt into ashes. However a huge mass of old literature survived in the hands of local scholar who were in extreme veneration of the traditional religion. For example, *Cheitharol kumbaba*, the only fulblown royal chronicle among others, the proud of the nation, the official copy of which was burnt down from the palace library survived as copies parts of it were already taken away and kept concealed by local scholars under their custody. After the king Goribaniwas (1708-1748) and guru Shantidas were murdered by the people, the official **Cheitharol kumbaba** was rewritten by collecting copies of various parts of it.

Panthoibi kongun (the foot print of panthoibi or in quest of panthoibi) relates to literature which survived the ghastly act of the king. Such literature as a product of the pre-acculturation period may be referred to as intertwined product of a woven web of guesses and conceptual baggage handed down from the underlying social doctrine of a pre-acculturized society. Under such circumstances, fetishism, totemism, tantricism, shamanism and an enormous amount of animism and ancestor worshipping etc; was transparent for a natural likelihood of developing into various literary creations. For example, **Hijan Hirao**, the famous poem of pre-acculturation period, represents the Triumphant entry animism in the literary currents and the relationship between people and animal as well as mountain, forest, trees etc. as an explosive advancement of indigenous Manipuri narrative poetry. There is no wondering for producing *Poireiton*, the protagonist of **Poireiton**

Khunthok, an epitom of adventure fiction as an unperlleled cultural hero of the indigenous Manipuri life. The cult of female warshipping as social component also motivated the portrayal of panthoibi as female protagonist in the narrative of **panthoibi Khongun**.

The book strongly reminds us of fragments of a divine past and shows its concern with the esoteric subject of female divinity. Sexuality is inherently intrinsic and it is specially charged with devotional fervour. Therefore, intervenes nudity or semi-nudity from inviting voyeurism. The ultimate projection of women as goddess and her ultimate union with her beloved all through a controvertial family experience reveals the rise of feminine cult as social fabric.

The book opens with glorification of panthoibi in an epic demension maked by wave after wave of parenthetical intrusions embellished with hundreds of thousands of attributes attached to her power, prosperity, beauty, romance, proud, birth, cosmic pervasiveness, invincibility, analogous behavioural patterns etc., The author prays to her in the midst of such endless abjunct sentence expressing his desire to follow the indigenous literary trend in tact. He bows down again and again in several places of the book as a true devotee of panthoibi as a mighty goddess.

In such scenario to, we met Panthoibi as fulblown adolescent with all her intriguing youthfulness calling the labour of lovers. Sa Payba the chief of Haokei that lay to the western part of Kanglei and the son of Pitingkok Lambi emerged as her first suitor to charm and seduce her through a messenger **Leicholm Houraba**. In a very romantically exciting scene admidst attractive presentations like special fruits, flowers etc. **Leichol Houraba** met Panthoibi who was taking bath, alone in a rivulate. in the process Then he took Panthoibi in his lap and wooed her with the sweet wordings of his master by rubbing gently her hair again and again. Panthoibi asked the messenger about the kind of bridge built by Sa Payba for crossing a river that was on way to the house of sa payba. The messenger replied that it was a bridge of house of Sa-Payba. The messenger replied that it was a bridge of timbers and bamboos. Panthoibi flatly rejected the proposal saying that only bridges with posts of iron, planks of silver and rails of gold would be worthy of her. Thus the labour of the first lover was lost.

The author again prayed to Panthoibi at the beginning of 2nd chapter for her blessing not to incorporate any haphazard, aberrant and impaired language in his narration and to be free from any performance limitations of language use. Then started singing her glory. This chapter was depicted as the turn of another lover- **Tarang Khoinucha**, the son of the chief of Kanglei of Khaba dynastay. With presents such as fruits, sweets, flowers, coins with bright and untarnished faces, a pair of nice bullocks, bamboo-baskets, a pair of salt cakes etc, etc.,

The messenger of **Tarang Khoinucha** was partrayed as approaching to the parents or Panthoibi. Her parents were pleased with the nice formalities and finally wanted to seek the consent of their daughter Panthoibi asked the same question about the bridge to this messenger also. This time the messenger described the bridge as containing iron-posts, silver-planks, rails of gold. The reply pleased Panthoibi and accepted the proposed marriage. When the marriage was over, Panthoibi was escorted to her husband's house with a basket of steamed rice, a pot of cooked meat and a pitcher of wine. Here Panthoibi emerged as a goddess of plent When her father-in-law was not in a position to feed all his guests assmbled there, Panthoibi fed them to their satisfaction from

her bamboo-baskets full of rice, pot of meat and pitcher of wine which refilled themselves as soon as they were emptied. From this, Panthoibi was known as **tara chak- shoupung** and **Wanglei Yusoupung**”.

In the home of her husband, Panthoibi started showing her aberrant behaviour, she was free to sleep and prone to roaming and gossiping, also indulging in taking bath from river to river. Moreover, she was unversed in any of the household work which led her to be a bad house wife. Panthoibi was more exposed in this way as a problem-ridden house wife in the family. Then the story started revealing a clandestine relationship of Panthoibi with Nongpok who resided on the Nongmaijing hill. Their secret love affairs constituted the remaining part of the narrative giving a thrilling setting of romance through family barriers that could enrapture the hearts of its readers with a suspense. Nongpok came out on the seen to visit Partholbi in a nice bathing seen. He was clad in tiger skin with snake around his neck and matted hair inside which the water of river ganges was carried. He was a man who carried a trident in his hand, wore a pair of iron sabot and carried a pair of bronze scissors and had three eyes. Both of them were depicted to have fallen in love before Panthoibi 's marriage and still continuing it and even poised to increase the intensing for its realization. Nongpok met her while Panthoibi was taking bath in a brook, Catching each other's eyes, Nangpok indulged in cuddling and kissing her. Caressing the well-developed blossom of Panthoibi, he wooed her to elope together to his house at Nongnaijing. Panthoibi refused on the ground that it would tarnish the image of her parents. But s the promised to meet him again in a secluded place.

By taking the permission of her mother-in-law to go out of the house for catching fish, Panthoibi came on her tryst again. When meeting each other by the side of a fishing stream, Nongpok continued insisting her to go to his house. Panthoibi refused saying that her husband's family had not yet neglected her. However, she asked him to meet her in the guise of a Tangkhul- (ahill-tribe of Manipur concentrated mainly to the eastern part of Manipur).

When the appointed time came the two lovers, missing each other, waited for eagerly to find the other. It became a protracted affair and it was getting dark. At last, they met and appointed a day for next meeting in a hurry. But they forgot to fix the place in the hectic affair and hurried to their homes disappointed.

Nothing could not mitigate their agony and increased pinning for each other. Panthoibi was experiencing such longing and thirst day and night and finally the obsession was exposed by the side of a lonely stream where she was caught by a sudden torential rain. She was wet through and through. After the rain, she removed all her clothes except a piece of indispensable one on her body which prevented full view of her feminine beauty. Under this chiffon-rainfall effect, Nongpok appeared before her. Panthoibi blushed in the situation and Nongpok had no reply except hugging and kissing her again. Thus the secret love affair continued with fresh momentum. Then the situation became serious, A complete estrange of Panthoibi from the family of Khaba was imminent. The time came for this. One evening when Panthoibi returned home from her fishing bid with her basket full of severed heads of infants and their finger bones, every one in the house began to suspect her to be a demoness. This lad her to sleep alone and started separation from her husband. Reacting to this Panthoibi started fulminating and railing against such sheer neglect and warned her husband that she must not be blamed if she left them. On the other hand, Panthoibi continued and precipitated her activity of going to her trysts. This

embarrassed the family members of Khaba. The in-laws got ruffled at this. This prompted the father-in-law to admonish her. One day, when Panthoibi was away on her usual tryst, he pretended to be dead. The mother-in-law bewailed and there was a samblance for a conspicuous funeral rite. The news of the death spread in all directions and also reached Panthoibi and was hustled home from her tryst. Panthoibi got scent of the trick to hustle her from her tryst to the home. She started questioning of the unnatural death and explained the scene from her position as a goddess of death. She said that it was not a death of normal human being. Everyday she was looking at the ways on which hundred dead bachelors and hundred dead girls were going towards Hades. All the deceased were going like this but her father-in-law was not among them. She further identified herself that she was immortal among the mortals and she was the in-charge of the transaction of human souls. She was the goddess giving judgments at the gate of the land of death conjested by heaps of dead persons. While staying on the **Makui Hill**, her duty was to consol the deceased to change their mind. Then Panthoibi approached to her father-in-law and pierced with a small rod of spinning wheel at the side of his chest. And everything was disclosed and the plan was unravelled. Panthoibi started charging them and accused by saying that her-in-laws tried to tarnish her as a naughty daughter-in-law as bad as bad-smelling rotten rice and behaved towards her as obnoxious was nasty wise concocted in the pot of bronze. Her father-in-law lost his composer for the moment and tried to pacify her praising all her inparalled qualities which could even bring back the life of a dead man like her father-in-law from the land of death. But Panthoibi further indicted them because his husband also death with her as estranged wife long back. Then she started to be a malinger to make matters more serious. And her rampaging resentment broke out as wild as a Maibi who was spiritualized at white heat. Her body was wet with sweat and started calling again and again to eat **hamei**. Such behaviour of Panthoibi was exposed as peculiar nature of Manipuri Maibi who represented Manipuri Shamanism. And panthoibi was portrayed as head of Manipuri Maibi and described such phenomenal in several places in the following part of the book. Such peculia nature of Panthoibi represents the cult of Manipuri Maibi associate with the pre-acculturized state of the society. She demands Hamei but nobody could surve her. At last her mother-in-law put a red hot charcoal on her palm thinking that it was right for her wildness and resentment. This made Panthoibi furious and every one in the Khaba dynasty bore the brunt of her wrath. Finally, she made up her mind to leave them and she at once bounced out of her husband's house in the form of a bright glowwarm. Thus Panthoibi left the Khaba dynasty in a mysterious way. A massive search by the Khaba and Nganta was launched to trace her in every possible way leaving no stone unturned. Panthoibi escaped from the massive search of Khaba in a very difficult way hiding in different places in the process. Nongpok rescued her finally and the long cherished union took place at the home of Nongpok.

The remaining 2 chapters of the book is concerned with the ultimate union of Panthoibi and Nongpok in real ebullience and sensational rapture. All the well-known gods and goddesses highly venerated by their respective worshippers as their supreme being assembled at the throne of Nangpok and Panthoibi. All these were intermingled with different pieces of narratives like that of **Saram Tangkhul girl** transformed by Panthoibi indulging in an act of growing paddy plants and Huitok Tangkhul boy transformed by Nongpak who provoked confrontation with the Tangkhul girl and their ultimate recognition of each others that was followed by a happy reunion in their true divine form. Another narrative portrayed Panthoibi as the caught a wild and

rampaging tiger who jumped upon her to catch her in the middle of the water of a river where Panthobi was enjoying herself in taking bath. Enraged by the violent act, Panthoibi with all her supremacy challenged the assaulting tiger with their bodies rolling down one upon another as their bid to catch the other proceeded. At last Pantholbi caught the tiger and rode on it through the three worlds in high speed. Pantholbi got ruffled and enraged as a violent Maibi as she rode on the tiger through the sky again and again. Then she broke the head of the tiger with a stone which she used in her bathing. This led an uproarious scene because of the severe pain underwent by the tiger. Finally, they recognized each other and again a happy reunion. The author did not relent his bid of narrating as he told another one also. As Pantboibi was going down from the slops hills of selloy Langmai with a pot made of gold on her head to fetch water from the stream of Yaram, her way was blocked by a ferocious white snake lying across the way as a large bamboo rod. Pantboibi as the daughter of the king of fire as well as the force binding the land laughed wildly at the sight of the snake. She without any scare and care caught the snake wishing to use it as the jewellery of her neck. This was followed by another narration of Panthoibi who amidst various decorations in her special attire emerged with a live Viper as her belt and with a cobra hanging from her shoulder as her walking stick. She also used her phanek (Manipuri Woman's lower garment as flock) with the colour of fire and covered her bosom with a piece of cloth with the colour of water in the midst of all formalities that were available in the Lai Haraoba festival including the special conopy of purely white cloths. Then Panthoibi was portrayed in her real joy and jubilee accompanied by dancing with pomp and grandeur as a pea-cock. The setting was specially mentioned for a great performance with the depiction of the congregation of several gods intertwined with special songs like **Ougri** and **Khencho** with their special performing formalities. The author mentioned that since the grand performance with its several components had been handed down from generation to generation in its original form a special place for it within the enclosure of Khaba dynasty.

It is also hinted that in all these narratives the extra-ordinary jubilee of their union was foregrounded giving the intensity, pompa and grandeur of the ultimate union. Such kind of stocking of narratives or narrative adjuncts covers a large part of the main narrative. And particularly in last two chapters **Lairemma Pusa** and **Anoyrol** have necessitated us to link it to the age-old **Laiharoba** festival which is the only festival in the post-acculturation period, where elements of Hinduism is totally out and Brahmins has no role in it. It has been an exclusive place for the traditional Maibas and Maibis, the maximal domain of which has been a barrier for outside impacts and interventions. For example, in the section of **Anoirol** The account of dance, the original of Manipuri Laiharoba dance is nicely exposed as is available in our present-day Manipuri Laiharoba. The origin of Manipuri dance is also assumed to relate to Laiharoba dance. It mentioned that the Laiharoba dance has its divine origin in **Hayichak** and also mentioned how it handed down through generations. When the chief of **Chakpa Menangba** was hunting, a deer ran towards the way to heaven. As the chief of Chakpa ran after it, he saw the dance performed by Soraren, Yoirenband other gods for the purpose of plenty and prosperity. Sawang Menongba, the chief of Chakpa learnt the dance while he was looking out for the deer at the place adjoining the sky. It was thus introduced by the chief of the Chakpa dynasty in his place to Chakpa girls and boys. The Chapter **Lairemma Pausa** is a collection of wise sayings full of pragmatic connotations and it is part and parcel of Laiharoba festival as its unique component of dialogue.

The concluding part of the book where the father and mother in-laws of Panthaibi and other members of Khaba dynasty paid obeisance at Nongpok and Panthoibi to atone for their silly and tactless act and also for their disparaging remark and behaviour as lower functionaries is like the annual appeasement of gods in Laiharaoba festival. The members of Khaba dynasty bowed down and begged the husband and the wife to be forgiven for their past misdeeds. They prayed for their protection, prosperity, plenty etc. etc. With all these, Nongpak and Panthoibi were pleased and visited to the sanctified place of prayer at the premises of Khaba dynasty and granted their blessings by showing the divine aura and glimpses of their true forms.

It seems to have a controversial problem among various scholars with respect to the age of the book. Some scholars are of the opinion that the age of the book traces back to 33 A.D. because of various clues. For example, **Sa-Paypa**, the chief of Haokei who happened to be the first suitor of Panthoibi was mentioned in Thirel Layat as a chief of Langbachak and Khaba Sokchronba, the father-in-law of Panthoibi was also mentioned as reigned before Nangda Lairen Pakhangba (33 A.D.). And a lot of adjoining areas of Kangla are found to be named after Panthoibi like - **Panthoibi Phisukhong**, **Panthoibi Kongapat** etc. Even Sanjenthong, an important bridge near Kangla where Khaba Sokchronba reigned was mentioned as **Khaba Sanjenthong**.

According to Pandit Chandra Singh, the age of the book was during the reign of Meitingu Khongtekcha (763 A.D.), giving the name of the writer as Akoijam Tomba. This is a very important clue. As we know in the production of Manipuri literature, there were three definite stages - first stage consisting of those books which were undated and anonymous. The second stage was marked by the presence of the name of the writer but still undated. The third stage was marked by the presence of both date and writer's name. **Panthoibi Khongun** may be assumed to belong to the second stage because of the presence of the name of author. The second stage of the production of Manipuri literature is assumed to be immediately prior to 18th century and this strongly suggests that Panthoibi Khongun cannot be earlier to the closing decade of 17th century in which period the role of the author was prominent. In Panthoibi Khongun, the author speaks in several places and the narration continues as he speaks somewhat like in a modern novel.

Another feature of the book is that though the author of the book prayed to Panthoibi as her devotee to endow him with felicity of expression in archaic language to maintain the traditional vein in continuation, he could not be able to out some of the lexical item and this extended use found in only modern usage of the language. The relevance of semantic reduplication is a fine example. We have two types of semantic reduplication (1) Semantic reduplication consisting of two indigenous constituents and (2) Semantic reduplication consisting of a indigenous constituent followed by a borrowed item. In the course of history, the first constituent was gradually dropped and the last constituent survives. For example, in the first type of semantic reduplication - **Khambi-mei** 'Fire', **tara-chak**, 'cookerice', **Wanglei-yu** 'wine' etc., the last member of the construction survives over its first counterparts. In the case of second type of semantic reduplication like **Choinou-sana** 'gold', only the last member sana survives over **choinou**. of course, the author used semantic reduplication of the two types. But a lot of last item were and either in isolation or combination with others which shows the modern aspect of the language use. A lot of other modern lexical items like **sana**, **lupa**, **yotpi**, **ising**, etc. are also available in the book. It is also amusing to note the use of the lexical items like **moibung'**

'conch and **singa** 'a horn like musical instrument'. The word **moibung** was said to have been introduced in the second half of the 17th century in the Manipuri lexicon. This provides a clue about the production of the book which may not be earlier than the 2nd half of the 17th century.

The period in which Panthoibi reigned supreme is also, crucial from diachronic point of view. The book is supposed to have been composed in those days when Panthoibi cult was extremely popular and we may envisage that people to a large measure might have sung the contents of the book before Panthoibi temples. For example, Manipuri Maiba memorized the contents of Numit Kappa and recited it as spiritual communication to the spiritworld which is assumed to coexist with physical world, to protect from or not to repeat any misfortune or unnatural, abnormal, and accidental death in a particular family. This age-old practice is known as **Chup-Saba**. In this view Manipuri text Numit Kappa may be assumed to be a parallel text of the Hmong **Qhuob Ke test** (Guide to the spirit world). Hmong are an ethnic minority found throughout Southern China. In 18th century they migrated out of China into Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Burma. Likewise, **Panthoibi Khongun**, might have been produced for recital purposes also. The Royal chronicle **Cheitharol Kumbaba** is giving a clue in this regard in that when there are conflicting views about **Lai haraoba**, Panthoibi

Khongul is referred to as an authority. This happened during the time of Sir Chandra Kirti in 1874 and the matter was settled by referring and examining **Panthoibi Khongul** in the very front of the king. Thus **Panthoibi Khongul** might be a product of a period when Panthoibi shot in to prominence. That the whole of the narrative looks like a fine eulogy also indicates that it might have been written in her honour during her palmy-days as a goddess of war with combined energy of all gods mounting on a tiger. Such attributes were not found when we met her in **Numit Kappa** (Ist half of 10th century) as an errand girl of gods who was sent to persuade the sungod to come out of his hiding place.

Another point is that Panthoibi temples were mentioned to be first built in 1686 and her first idol was made in 1699 and her last. temple was built in 1700. This indicates the flourish of her cult in the last part of 17th century after which with the rise of Vaishnavism all her temples were razed to the ground. Panthoibi is thus seen as has risen from a modest beginning to blossom into a fullblown status of a goddess who ultimately over shadowed and outshone the other gods after a period of centuries and is poised to leap even into the future and to spread its wing to seek new horizons of her ascendance.

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