



Thainagi Leirang and the Reawakening Influence of the West

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Manipur, situated in one of the greatest migration routes of mankind has every now and then been under the influence of a number of other dominant cultures like those of either Aryans or South East Asia. The study of such outside influences is of fundamental importance for the deeper understanding of the realities of the existing life and literature of Manipuris because these outside influences have far-reaching implications in the internal structure of the life and culture of Manipuris, i.g. the influence of Shan (107 to 1709) and that of Vaishnavism (1709 to 1819) have formed different sub-strata of their own during the growth of Manipuri culture. Sometimes, such influences had grave consequences and decomposed cultural building blocks and could channelize it towards a new direction. For example, it so happened that under the influence of Vaishnavism, the whole movement of the life of Manipuris was so metamorphosed phased that the flow of traditional literature was dried up, original script and religion was replaced and so much so that from a purely prestige motive brought by the influence, the people began to think Manipuri as a poor and for inferior common people's language. So, Manipuri literature under the influence of Vaishnavism wore a religious garb of Vaishnav literature. It was only at the advent of 20th century that it took a new course in its turbulent history under the reawakening influence of the west. By this time, there was an important internal factor also which has a direct relation to the study of this transitory period i.e, the abolition of Lallup (1892), a kind of Manipuri tax paid only in services, not in cash or kind or in any other form. Under this peculiar system of Lallup,

even the poets and writers were to work in the court of the kings to contribute their literary works as the general property of the state. So, literary works before 1892, were the works of those minds which were vehemently influenced by the prevailing thoughts of the royal courts of those days. A glaring example of such royal influence is the fact that almost all the books prior to the 18th century were all undated anonymous books. Another example is the appearance of NUMIT KAPPA (shooting the sun) in the form of allegory in the early half of tenth century. NUMIT KAPPA, the first revolutionary book of Manipuri, reflects all such un-bearable socio-political condition of the might.

By putting the institute of Lallup to an end, it was natural that people began to feel free from the physical and mental bondage of the royal courts and the sensibility of the poets and writers spreads wider to such an extent that they began to reevaluate the life of the individuals. This trend of social consciousness of a new value of life was quickened and catalised by the establishment of British Rule. In 1910, the department of education was first established and by this time, the printing press was also introduced in Manipuri, It was through the introduction of western education that this wider social consciousness of the Manipuris took a shape in varied literary forms for the first time in Manipuri literature. In other words, the concept of literary genre came into existence and got used in Manipuri literature only under the influence of the West. These literary pieces in definite form first appeared in a number of dailies and periodicals like - MEITEI LEIMA, JAGARAN, MEITEI CHANU, JYOTI, YAKAIROL, DEINIK MANIPUR (daily), MANIPUR MATAM (daily) ANOUBA JUK, etc.

This very concept of the periodicals and dailies itself was essentially a concept of the west and it may be rightly said that those dailies and periodicals became the foundation of the Early Modern Manipuri Literature. Chaoba (1896 to 1949) who was awakened by this wave of deeper and wider social consciousness was one of the pioneering writers of this transitory period who set the early Modern Manipuri Literature in motion and their efforts could gain an apparent momentum also.

As a pioneering writer of a new literary era, Chaoba wrote a number of books having a different literary taste and colour of his own time. His literary talent with a powerful and far-reaching reawakening sensibility first opened the literary charm of modern manipuri prose and poetry to the suppressed mind of the Manipuris. **Thainagi Leirang** (the flowers of Ancient Time)

is a representative work of his poems. It is a collection of twenty beautiful lyric poems and the message expressed in the poems are also of a free and wider sensibility and therefore, they give a new literary appeal to the readers. As the title indicates, the poems in the book are found to be inspired by the antiquities of bygone days of Manipuri. So, **Thainagi Leirang** Conveys a traditional value with great and new literary appeal which had long been in the oblivion under the influence of Vaishnavism. For obtaining the permanent traditional values, Chaoba tried to learn a great deal of tradition by graat labour.

It is also seen in the following lines from his introduction. "After a bit thinking, it will be easily understood that all the poems of the book in a number of aspects have a source from the earlier lyricists and minstrels of Pena, Khongjomparba, Thabal chongba and scholars who resides books, etc. ----- It will be grateful if the readers take the poems as pure wealth of Manipur"(Introduction). Though he was not a giant traditionalist like Milton or Homer, Yet the traditional values of the poems of Chaoba as a timeless entity cannot be ignored, This becomes rather a distinctive feature of chaoba's poems particularly from that of his immediate predecessors. Regarding the tradition in individual writings, the following words of T.S. Eliot are referred here -

"Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to any one who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. (Tradition and the individual Talent, page 43-44). Such quality of being traditional is invariably found in the poems of **Thainagi Leirang** with a great sense of revivalism, reawakening, etc.

The poems like **Thambal Ubada**: (when seeing the Lotus), **Meragi Thabal** (The Moonlight of October). **Ingenlei** (A Name of short-lived flower), **Wakchingi Leirang** (The

flower of Winter), etc. convey a tragic sense of short-lived human life as one of the great appealing messages of Choba's poems. By reading such poems, we feel as if the mind of the poet were obsessed day and night with the idea of death and the obsession with this tragic sense of human life awakes in the mind of the poet whenever he sees a flower, a charming moonlight or any other natural object or finds, an event of life also.

Even in such poems of short human life and death, the poet preserves the traditional value as a continuum antity of his poem These poems are thus different from those of the vavishnavide which were totally oblivious of the quality of being traditional. They are also different from the poems of prevaishnavides in the high quality of subjectivity in Choaba's poems apart from other inner aspects. For example, **Leiron** (Book of Flowers) (1697 to 1709), a collection of poems describing the beauties of hundred different flowers, cannot be equated with any of the poem of **Thainagi Leirang** in that the poems of **Leiron** are depicting mainly the objective beauties of the individual flowers.

It is also interesting that for the expression of the message of his tragic sense, the poet also did a transliteration work from an English poem - **Elegy Written In A Country Churchyard** (1751) of **Thomas Gray** (1716 to 1771) in Manipuri as Awaba isei (Psalm of sorrow) by adopting heartily the traditional Manipuri rhymes. He did not like to use any other rhyming systems than that of Manipuris. This idea is clearly expressed by the poet as the first four lines of the introduction. They are as follows -

"It is not fruitful to compose Manipuri poems on the rhyming system of Bengali and English. In some instances it is all right, but it cannot be upto our desire in a number of instances. So, I tried to learn the rhetoric of traditional Manipuri poetry" (Introduction LL 1 to 4)

This view of the traditional Manipuri rhetoric mentioned in the introduction is further intensified by the seventeen specimens of the traditional Manipuri rhyming schemes illustrated as an opening part of the poems. About the placement of these seventeen Manipuri songs, he says "for the proper reading of this book, it is necessary to read the following Manipuri songs thoroughly and carefully (L - 1).

This view of the poet can be interestingly justified from linguistic point of view also. For example, the relative pitch difference is used in English in syntagmatic relationship whereas in Manipuri, it is used in Paradigmatic relationship. Since the relative pitch difference has a direct relation with the rhyming system of a language, the rhyming system of Manipuri is totally different from that of English. So the poet's not following the rhyming system of a remote and alien language like English or Bengali has direct linguistic implications.

On the other hand, what he tried to follow the traditional Manipuri rhyming system as a regular feature through at the whole poems in the book is purposeful. And the poet rightly did this even in his work of transliteration. The following lines from the poem clearly illustrate the validity of the remark.

Sandhartigi Khon jenna maygay pumba ninnare !
nungthin korouhanbasu nongchup chingya thangkare !
Kaoren sanbi sanneosu mamay phiran Saduna,
mayun maygay pangkhare sarikki tanbu thaduna !
thapna lourang suramba, khungi ipa ipanna,
wakhall chaoba ayngonda, changlakliba ahingda,
leipakleima sinnare, awaba lambi yallakle !

(Awaba Ishai)

(The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day;
The lowing herd wind slowly O'er the lea;
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.)

(Elegy written in a country church-yard)

The quality of subjectivity seems to be lose in the poems of glorification. But it cannot be justified to take them as pure poems of objectivity because apart from glorifications, all those poems are conveying a forceful pragmatic meaning of motivation. and reawakening. The following lines from "mitei kabi" (The Mitei poet) speaks of this truth.

Leirarabi ironni.

khangdabana haybani

Mitei kabi lakkini'

(Mitei kabi)

(Poor is our language

Are the words of the fool

Mitei poets will do come)

The above lines pragmatically convey the heart-felt desire of the poet for the upliftment of the suppressed Mitei language with a strong pathetic appeal. And the lines became the common - idiomatic expressions of Manipuri People.

The highest quality of subjective lyric poems is seen in the two lyric poems **Loktak Mapanda** (On the Bank of Loktak Lake) and **Lamgi Chekla Amada** (To a wild Bird). The first poem is of a romantic experience Unlike other poems discussed so far, here the poet experiences the inner charm of Nature and can see into the life of things with the power of imagination and inspired instinct. The poet first sees a number of natural objects the beautiful flowers blooming amidst the waves in the middle of water which appeared to be place by the very hand of Nature, the sweet songs of wild birds in the midst of the water flowers, the charming moving island of Thanga Village, the dancing nets of the fisher-women of Thanga and karang on board. All these natural beauties and above all his long felt desire to see the Loktak Lake Inspired the poet's power of imagination and the Nature seems to open her door of beauty to the poet.

In the latter poem i.e. **Lamgi Chekla Amada** (To a wild bird) , the flight of the poet's soul amidst the silent beauties of heavenly bodies by the symbol of a wild bird and its reunion with the ultimate Alone is shown. By reading the poem, we cannot but remember the words of Caroline Spurgeon on. "Mysticismin its highest consumation, it is the supreme adventure of the soul" and that of Platinus also

"It is the flight of the alone to the Alone" (Religious Encyclopedia).

In this poem, the poet seems to feel that each and every soul in this universe is undercurrently directed by a Supreme Being and with a yeilding mood to the Supreme Being and

with a concentrated state of mind, rare experience of the individual soul could write finally with the supreme being. It also indicates that in such experience of the individual soul searching the ultimate Alone, the individual soul is always welcome. This is indicated in the following lines :

hayengsu soidana marakke ngasidouna pairakke
mapugi magun tamlage"

(Lamgi Ghakla Amada)

(Tomorrow also I will do come I will do fly too as
done to day

Let me tell you the qualities of the
ultimate Alone.)

Thus, these two poems- **Loktak Mapanda** and **Lamgi Chekla Amada** indicate a totally different poetic experience which is of a rare aspect of his poems. The poems expressing the rare experience of individual soul are still rare in the domain of Manipuri Poetry. Such rare types of poetry also might appear because of the free and open sensibility developed under the fertile influence of the west. This also shows by entailment that though Vaishnavism exists still side by side with the Western influence, its influence, though forceful in earlier, is now on the wane. But the value system of life brought by Vaishnavim seems to have got a permanent footing. Choaba though reawaked by a powerful western influence, did not protest or revolutionise against the Vaishnavide values which has taken roots and absorbed in the local soil. What he did under the influence of the west was to create a new literary value with a wider perspective of life, his pathetic effort for the upliftment of Manipuri language, for the revivalism of tradition, life and beauty of by-gone days with a tone of freedom of the human mind.

Research Through Innovation

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