



Poireiton Khunthok as a Thrilling Discourse On Travel

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From time immemorial, the autochthonous Mongoloids like Tangkhul, Maring, Moyon, Monsang, Selloy-Langmay, Chakpa Khumal, Luwang, Angom, etc., have been constantly maintaining the monolithic structure of the state of Manipur. The Monolithic society of hill and vale which is rigid and homogenous is transparent for them in this region. The kind of interdependence and interactive system that underlay the ever-growing autochthonous society was chanted by the poet as --

"Manipur Sana Leimayel

Chingna Koyna Pansaba

Haona Koyna Panngakpa"

(Manipur, the heart of the Land of Gold Bulwarked by the ranges of hills all around And sentinelled by the autochthones of the hills in all directions)

Further, in course of time, a state of heptarchy was engendered exclusively among the autochthones of the Manipur Valley. The phenomenon continued to nestle as a primeval feature of the present Meitei Society for some centuries till it was overlaid under the process of acculturation and syncretism in the later period of the history. Poireiton, the much a claimed cultural hero in **Poireiton Kunthok**, belonged to the seminal stage of the emergence of the pheomenon of the autochthonous heptarchy of (1) **The Ningthoujas** (2) **The Angoms** (3) **The Khumans** (4) **The Luwangs** (5) **The Moirangs** (6) **The Selloy-Liangmais** and (7) **The Khaba-Nganbas** in the valley. He was a competent leader of a horde of people who underwent a long journey covering 1 a large part of the rugged hill terrains of Manipur and adjoining Burma and various places in the Manipur valley. Historically, Poireiton challenged Pakhangba, another distinguished warrior of the time, at Kangla of Imphal valley for the throne of the ethnic group of the would-be Ningthouja clan, which was lying vacant around 33 A.D. In the duel of the two rival challengers including sword fighting, spear fighting and finally wrestling, Poireiton suffered defeat at the hands of his adversary.

Acknowledging the defeat without harbouring any bitterness, Poireiton gave his younger sister Laisna to Pakhangba who ascended the throne with Laisna as his queen. Then Poireiton and his horde of people settled there and the long journey, thus, came to an end. This is referred to as immigration of Poireiton in history. This happened to be an immediate phenomenon for setting up of the powerful Ningthouja clan that later on reached the status of some kind of super race among other clans in due course. Poireiton contributed a lot to the reign of Pakhangba introducing various new things in the society. Among them, the famous Manipuri Chakhaw (a special rice) was worth-mentioning.

Manipuri literature has a class of writings which are referred to as immigration books. Such books generally record the details of the immigrants. For example, **Nongpok Haram** records the coming of people from east. Likewise **Mayang Tekhaolon** maintains an account of immigration from several parts of India. The immigration of Brahmins is separately recorded in a book called "**Bamon Khunthok**". Here Bamon means **Brahman** and **Khunthok** means **immigration**. Apart from **Bamon Khunthok**, two other separate immigration books are also conspicuous about the immigrants from the west. They are (a) **Lairikyengban Lon** and (b) **Khetri Lon**. The former gives an account of the immigrants of the Lairikyengbam sagei or Yumnak the lineage of Lairikyengbam and the latter that of Khetrimayum. **Poireiton Khunthok** "The Immigration of Poireiton" is one of such immigration books. However, not all immigration books of Manipuri are travel books or travelogues. If there is a share lack of an all important point of discourse on travel or journey then the question of travelogue does not arise. This is true in the case of most of the Manipuri immigration books also. Thus they lack the depiction of the culture, history, Geography, Views, opinions and expectations of others which are associated with a journey. **Poireiton Khunthok**, on the otherhand is uniquely prominent as a thrilling discourse on travel. It is peculiar because it depicts an absorbing account of the massive explorations about the people and culture of a part of the Tibeto-Burman belt and its associated adventures as the Journey of Poireiton and his horde proceeded further and further and got unravelled more. and more. As a travel literature subsumes, **Poireiton Khunthok** records an exceedingly extra-ordinary amount of information on the history, geography, customs, beliefs, traditions etc., of the myriad ethnic groups Inhabiting the transborder areas of Indian sub continent and upper Burme. In this sense only **Poireiton Khunthok** among other immigration books mentioned above, may be referred to as travelogue, an illustrative narrative of travel as the New Oxford Encyclopedic Dictionary defines it.

The book opens with a very tricky phenomenon of narrative discourse where such categories as **inter-personal disjunction**, **Communication slippage** and **misfire** are generally attached. To surmount the density of the pragmatic hurdle of the opening pages, the inter-pretations of three referential expressions --

1. Sa Tokpa Tokpa Tokmu Meisangpa
2. Wapa chengacha wanglei yusil Hanpa and
3. Sapi Rera Atonpa

Are intrinsically metaphorical to a large measure. Since all these three referential expressions are non-human proper names- (1) is the name of a carnivorous illusive animal (2) is that of a small bird and (3) is the name of a beaver, the specification of their referents in the universe of discourse which are humanly charged

proves futile. Violation or the incompatibility with respect to a **semantic selection** between the three referential expressions (proper names) and other components of the universe of discourse in coming to the fore. This triggers the realm of animal to be interpreted in the realm of human beings. This is the problem for those in their attempt to account for the three non-human referential expressions delineated in the **exposition** of the book. So far none has given any possible interpretation of this nor tries to do so. Readers generally try to have a glance at it and leave them their as it were. However, this portion is extremely purposeful with its deeper underlying meaning for the motivation of Poireiton's journey. Sapi, the beaver Mentioned his world where various gods and kings reigned. Sun, moon, stars, pleiads, various phases of the moon, the morning star and the evening star were referred to as a special feature of his world. He also mentioned the setting in of the rainy season is Inga (June) and the end of it in Ingen (July) so as to impress Thongaren, the king of the land of Death and also the elder brother of Poireiton. Sapi scurried off his land and came forward by making a tunnel as his passage to reach Thongaren when he found that the illusive Sa-Tokpa crenched the small bird and at it up as row meat, rather than as cooked food, ate the previous mid-night. Sapi was disillusioned with this and thought that his life would be vulnerable if Sa-Tokpa continued as their elder.

This prompted Sapi to look for another superior and Thongaren happened to be the right one.

However pleased with the report of Sapi about a nice world and decided to fulfil Sapi's desire for him to migrate, thongaren himself could not do so as he had already established a family life. Then he advised his younger brother Poireiton to immigrate to the new world. But Poireiton was handicapped to do so because he himself had no wife. People of the new land would laugh at him. Then Thongaren told his elder wife to accompany Poireiton. She also turned down the proposal because of her physical infirmities like her wider mouth, oblique eyes, less-developed bosom, All these might render her to be a laughing stock in the new world. Finally, the king asked his second wife to fulfill the purpose. This time, Leima Leinawtabi, the second wife of Thongaren obeyed him and a grand preparation was made for the Journey. It included 100 different items edible as raw and another 100 items to be eaten after cooking. Seeds of various kinds of paddy, sickle and the special bamboo basket for measuring paddy known as sangpay etc were also collected under the supervision of Leinawtabi for the proposed journey. Various instruments like spears, axes, bows, arrows and various flowers, special kind of paddy, burning khoiju and leikham etc., etc., were also prominent. Various other persons like weavers, blacksmith specially sword-makers and spear-makers were also part of the horde. Lastly, a shaman was advised to perform the special prayer as the concluding part of the preparation. Then, the time came for the poignant farewell. Led by Poireiton with an iron-stick in his hand, the horde of people came out of the land of Death and set off in search of a land where people were free from disease and death. The remaining part of the book is no other than the lively account of the details of the journey covering the various places of hills and plains of this paleo-Mangoloid region.

The book is marked by the adventurous spirit of Poireiton. Each and every page of the book describing every step of the long years of travel reflect this fascinating dimension. In order to portray it, the book was made replete with a series of incidents which were **isoglossed** at every end point of the incident by the presence of their associated place-names. The over all domain of the book can be décomposé into n-number of individual incidents and we have, thus, the advantage of looking at them in isolation. The palpability of a particular place-

name grown out of the concerned Incident makes the task both empirical and intuitive. Nearly one hundred and twenty-five unexplored places of this west stretches of hilly region were christened in the course of the Journey as the obsession, unquenchable thirst as well as unrelented spirit of Poireiton were evoked in profuse every now and then. Indeed, every move of Poireiton, be it on the rocks, inside the woods, by the streams or in the vale, gave birth to a new place, name. When Poireiton was in search of a place in upper Burma in his continued bid to find any place free from disease and death he came across a Burmese who was sleeping by exposing his black complexion. That was why the place was named Tummu . (**tum** means **sleep** and **mu** means black). When he proceeded further, a group of Maram people waited for him by keeping a burning fire. That was why the place was named Meiring (**mei** means **fire** and **ling** means **keep burning**) and later on it became Maring through phonological change. Maring is a hill tribe inhabiting the south-eastern part of Manipur. They are believed to be originated from Kabaw valley. They are the sentinels keeping constant vigil over **Khagi** and **Kabaw** (Chinese and Burmese) or any other enemy for several centuries. And they are particularly known for their artistic skill in bamboo work. The ever-increasing number of placenames and their anecdotes finally makes it transparent for a dual linkage system of the intère work i.e. (a) linkage between individual incidents and (b) linkage between individual lexical items of newly born place names. When the system operates in an interactive way as in an interlocking scheme, the silrit of adventure and its associated aspect of widespread exploration unfold as the deep-seated message of this fine literary artefact.

Of the various anecdotes in the book, the episode of Sachung Ningthou whom Poireiton came across on his way is remarkably interesting and their dialogue is extremely vivid and lively and full of cultural and historical informations. Both Sachung Ningthou and Poireiton asked each other the material they used for their **Meiba** very thin and light strips of plants used to ignite. This indicates that the process known as **Meiba Chingba** to derive fire from it as Meiba ignites was known to and practiced by ethnic groups other than that of Poireiton. This process **Meiba Chingba** was so important in the life of the Manipuri s that it was a part and parcel of the coronation ceremony of the future Meitei Kings. The only holy fire to be used in the coronation ceremony was the fire from **Meiba Chingba**. No other fire could be used for the purpose because of their relegated status of unholyness. Poireiton used a totally different substance for it and that was why the untimely death of his discendents according to Sachung Ningthou. He had a comfortable family of many daughters and sons free from such misfortunes, according to his own view, because he used his **Meiba** from a Particular type of Bamboo Known as **Utang**. Still, the importance of **Utang Wa** among various other types of bamboo, for its ceremonial and medicinal value in Manipuri society is noticable and draws attention of the folklorists. Sachung Ningthou further advanced his arguments saying that he led a happy family life with m many sons and daughters also because of the compatibility between persons and their names in his family. He attributed the untimely death of Poireiton's son and daughters to the incompatibility of their names with them. Poireiton sub scribed to this view and he exchanged his personal shaman with that of Sechung Ningbhohu who had compatable proper name, probably for the prosperity and well-being of his family members.

Another episode of Chakpa exemplified the advances in the use of fire at the time of **Poireiton Khunthok**. When Poireiton intered the land of Chakpa, he came across a bachelor of Chakpa. Poireiton asked him why a fire at a distance was burning belching a huge amount of smokes so high. "Is it a fire for burning

woods by hill people or fire for heating the earthen pots or a fire for paddy seeds to unfold in the heat or a fire for burning the stalks of paddy plants or a fire for burning straws?" Then the Chakpa bachelor replied that it was not a fire for nothing else other, than for a funeral pyre. Since the son of Leima Phallow, known as Sangphurakpa died by falling from a bar, it was a fire for the funeral of a Chakpa. This again reminds us of the living fire that keeps on burning in a hut, perhaps for centuries together, of a Chakpa village known as Andro. Some people are of the opinion that the burning fire at the heart of the Andro village is the one brought by Poireiton from his underworld. Since then the Chakpa community of Andro has been protecting the fire at the hearth of a hut. A Manipuri poet-Minaketan Singh visualized the fire as-

"Yumdin Meini Mutphade

Yaipha Meini Mangphade

Leishem Meini Kamphade"

(It is a fire of family life

It is inevitable not to allow it to go out.

It is a fire of prosperity

It is inevitable not to allow it to disappear

It is a fire of creation

It is inevitable not to blow on it)

This practice of worshiping fire at the hearth of a separate village hut as a symbol of family life even reminds us of the similar practice among the people of Bhutan. Thus the travel of Poireiton reminds us of many things which are culturally and historically relevant in a number of ways.

The journey of poireiton, was associated with a number of misfortunes and hazards also. At the very outset it was shown as dangerous and risky. A huge tiger blocked the way and it even killed and two of the advanced men. As the journey took several years, Poireiton and Leima Leinawtabi gave birth to a number of sons and daughters. On several occasions, Poireiton burst into bitter weeping as his sons and daughters died on the way. He bemeaned his sister-in-law every now and then for she left behind the potion that could cure diseases and prevent death and preserve dead bodies from decay. Poireiton envisaged many a time that both of them (he and his siter-in-law) might be parted as misfortune befell on them. Over and above this, they were under the constant attack of disease. Having acute fever and headache, Poireiton took shelter at the house of an ethnic group of **Maram** and there the people cured him of the disease with their medicinal plant. At Chingphui hill, his face and eyes became red because of a bad headache and he shivered with fever and languished there by warming himself with fire. Climbing the steep hills was also a problem. Leinawtabi was mentioned as extremely tired and lay on her back with her mouth open and wept bitterly by hugging a stone. They were constantly beleaguered with hunger also. To overcome it, Poireiton even sold his raw cotton material to the people of Moyon. It was under the pand of hunger that poireiton minced meat and cooked and sold it to the people of Sarel. Lack of clothes for wearing and also to cover their bodies multiplied the problem. All these forced there to lead an austere life even by stitching pieces of old clothes to overcome the shortage. Even Leima Leinawtabi was mentioned to have woven clothes in her loom at least on one occassion. Indeed, an extremely austere life of Poireiton among the

steep hills, dense forests, thick woods, lakes, seas and streams: marked by hunger, pain, danger, disease and death was vividly delineated in the book as Poireiton was determined and relentless in his bid to reach his Utopia. However, nowhere he found his Utopia and he finally decided to discontinue his journey. And it was expressed as **"There was no land free from disease and death when Chingkhong Poireiton was in search of it. It was found that the level of water receded, the branches of trees became decrepit and died back, the life of bamboo plants came to an end; the positions of stones were found to have undergone change. I would no longer search for a land of the immortal."**

The end of the journey of Poireiton is, thus, depicted he finally settled at Lamdeng with a plethora of emotions and self-realization. His quest for a land of immortality became a futile exercise. What matters in the depictions is the journey, not the arrival. In short, the book concentrates uniquely on the journey part of Poireiton's long travel. It is purely a nice depiction of Poireiton's travel and by its emergence the first prose work of Manipuri Literature saw the light of the day? In order to see how it is different from other immigration books, the following specimens from Poireiton Khunthok followed by that of Bamom Khunthok are given as illustrations.

yiteima leima leinawtabio, nangti yisapi leinung thongngarelahanpata talloy akhupi, lamlel atonpi, ahingtara chatotpi, nongthil sanglow yellangpipu oyre haypa nattapara.

(Dear sister-in-law; Are you not the youngest and beloved wife of my elder brother Leinung Thongaren? Isn't it so that you are as soft as soft rice to him at night and served him fresh and tasty green vegetables in the day time?)

During the reign of Kyamba of 15th century A.D. 18 persons came. One Brahmin Shabhi Narayan from Tripura married Shoinu of Haokel tribe and he introduced the lineage of Phurailatpan. Damodor of Kanpur joined Leihathabam. Rangacharan of upper Assam married Tingbi and introduced Adhikarimayum.

As seen from above, we may conclude that **Poireiton Khunthok** is a unique literary creation of the movement of human being. The essence of such movement is travel. The journey of Poireiton is a powerful symbol of a traveller's adventure that leads to a peculiar epiphany as a result of the travel.

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