



The Outsider and His Ordeal in Bor Saheb Ongbi Sanatombi (1976)

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The Present paper is a study of the characterisation of an outsider, a historical figure, who happened to be of English origin in a contemporary novel-BOR SAHEB ONGBI SANATOMBI (1976) Sanatombi, the Partner of Bor Saheb of M.K. Binodini with respect to his position as an object of Manipuri stereotype.

The novel has a distinction of having a unique women writer, excelled in a dimension of language use marked by feminine function. Further, the writer came from a royal family and thereby gave her the opportunity of undergoing a vast experiences with the rest of India. She Seemed to have developed a sense of vast spaces eternity by experiencing the external charm of the mighty Himalayas, a massive celestial white, a dwelling of the Gods. The world is too much for her. She became a recipient of Sahitya Academy Award for her excellent novel **Bor Saheb Ongbi Sanatombi** in 1979.

The novel contains a stimulating history with an exciting recreation. It is really a new dialogue between some historical facts and the novelist The whole story moves around two historical characters Major Maxwell, then political agent of Manipur and the princess Sanatombi, the eldest daughter of the third queen of king Surachandra (1886-1890) of Manipur. A lot of other historical figures Kings, queens, Princes, Princesses, nobles, servants etc. from the time of king Chandra Kirti (1850-1886), the father of King Surachandra to that of king Churachand (1891-1941) are figured in the story. Thus the geneological tree of these historical figures are crucial to know the intricacies of the plot which underlie any kind of reading of the novel. Otherwise, the novel too recalcitrant even for a heuristic reading. For example, the kinship term **ipwa ningthem Pisak** (my little brother) is used every now and

then by Sanatombi who eventually come down with a fever while addressing king Churachand (1891-1941). But history books record and people generally know king Chandrakriti (1850-1886). The grandfather of Sanatombi as **ningthem Pisak**. Thus ningthem Pishak in this novel has a novel referent. Another risk is that king Churachand (1891-1941), installed by the British as a new king for evolving a new polity, was not direct descendant of Sanatombi's family line. The king and Sanatombi's were descendants of different branches of the lineage of king Charairongba (1697-1709). The third branch of that lineage had also its own descendants. Thus descendants of these three branches of the family tree of king charairongba are all in the canvass of the of the novel. As a result, the novel has a magnificent honorific forms for terms of address and reference which creates a sense of decent social status.

Now, before coming to Maxwell direct let us have a look at the geo-political situation of this tiny hill girt state on the eastern frontier of India. Before 18th century, Manipur's contact with the rest of India was not so conspicuous. In 1470, with the worshipping of Vishnu as a landmark in the history of Manipur, the contact became obvious. The revolutionised impact of it was felt in the 2nd half of 18th century and its culmination became in the 19th century. Thus the stereotypic attitudes held by the Manipur is forget ahead towards the Indian People within those one and half centuries. Further, 19th century has another two pronged landmark each of which had an impetus on the minds of the Manipuris- in its own right. One is the Burmese War of 1819-1825 and the other is the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891. The devastating- Burmese War of seven years (1819-1825) was a severe nightmare experienced by the Manipuris for the first time. It was during that war the manipuris filed their native valley inhabited for more than 2000 years. The devastation and ravage of the war had a far reaching effect almost on all fronts. Our interest here is that it was during this vulnerable time of being beleaguered that people came in contact with the British and their way of life. People started to be familiar with mechanical cloaks, firearms, telegraphs, vaccination and many more. This the people of kingdom forged into the enlargement of their mental horizon by the contact of the British. This is very important because it triggered a formation of Manipuri stereotype which was associated with the modern era. A transformation in the outlook did occur by that time. The repetition of the horror of war in 1891 gave another shock, wave. This time Manipuris lost their sovereignty and the hard-earned freedom went to the British. Kulachandra the king, Tikendrajit, the crown prince and Thangal, a general were arrested and sentenced to death by a court-martial for waging war against the Queen Empress. But the viceroy exercising the prerogative of mercy commuted the sentence on Kulachandra to transportation of life and forfeiture of property. But Tikendrajit and a septuagenarian Thangal were publicly hanged on 13th August 1891 in the mist of massive protest from the people. In the case of a lot of other offenders, they were banished under the order passed by Maxwell's court. The all important thing that the battle of Kongjom (21 miles south of Imphal) was eulogised as a noblest human valour and sacrifice. A special type of ballad **Khomjom Parba** stemmed from the battlefield describing the epic struggle of the human tragedy. Many heroic names of the emerged as the dirge

reached the heart of the people. People are still relieving the trauma which was etched forever in the memory as the ballad continued to survive. This is the background in which the outsider Maxwell is to be characterised.

In the novel Maxwell, as the political agent emerged on the scene which is woven round the martyrs on the rack. He was described as the first man who raised the Union Jack in Kangla, the Palace compound of Manipur. Since the newly pointed king was a boy of six years, Maxwell, directly ruled the country from 1891-1904. During the period, the wanton situation of the country vehemently defied a prompt resilience. **People vers threatened and intimidated** to a large measure in retaliation to their defiant mood and behaviour. The overall condition of the country was deteriorating. But now the interesting thing is that Maxwell, a cold brute of history is depicted as a protagonist foregrounding as a good lover and a doting husband of a Manipuri princess in the novel. The story is marked by his unusual meeting with Sanatombi, the culmination of their union and the final catastrophe of their separation, all happened against the wishes and tradition of the people. The most striking point is that Maxwell was an Englishman having an alien cultural origin to which Manipuris applied their social rule of excommunication. Further, Sanatombi was a married woman, a house-wife who was comfortably setting a happy connubial life in motion with Nongmaithem Manikchand Singh, an ideal choice of the royal family of Sanatombi. Thus Sanatombi's falling in love with an untouchable, that too as a housewife, an offence to the society and its people rammed over a variety of ramifications. The deposed Queen of Manipur, her step-mother, even the personal servant of Sanatombi tried to intervene but to no avail. They were thus embarrassed at the happenings. But the matter became serious when Manikchand who was away for a brief period came back home and reached the obnoxious news to his notice. Thus the family feud arose that led to the serious traumatic disenchantment of Sanatombi, Finally being upset by the abusive remarks from her husband, she fell ill severely for a number of days. Fed up with the strained relationship with her husband, she could no longer undergo the sadistic instinct of her husband. She finally left Manikchand in the twilight of a day to set herself free from the disillusionment. She was proceeding in a mood of aberration towards the residence of her grandmother who was in her heavenly abode. Her thought was reposing on the lap of the powerful and sagacious grandmother. But when she realised, it so happened that she installed herself, in the front of the bed-room of the controversial lover, Maxwell. Seeing Maxwell, all her strength could no longer sustain. She suddenly fainted. What Maxwell could do was only to embrace her and to give her some relax by putting her on his cot. This is how Sanatombi broke the wall of untouchability by lying down on the cot of a socially incompatible man and also by emptying a glass of milk from him. Thus the physical distance, the main handicap on the way of their union was blasted to the surprise of the people. But Sanatombi was separated by the Queen Ngangbi as soon as possible so as not to divulge the matter. But it could not be hushed up as desired. The news went to the masses as an elopement of Sanatombi for one night to Maxwell.

After that incident, the relationship between Maxwell and Sanatombi grew stronger day by day. Now Maxwell was in his real earnest. A quest for love was imminent. One dark raining night, the thirst of the two lovers was fulfilled in a proposed hut of a carpenter, next to the residence where Sanatombi was languishing. After some days, their elotment it took place and Sanatambi was thus publicly relegated to the fallen status of untouchability. Her and husband Manikchand was disgusted at her an outrightly rejected the brideprice The ill-fated hut of the carpenter was also burnt down because of being desecrated.

Now the happy married life was in full swing. But it was short lived, People started reacting against the British Rule. The impoverished life of the war-ravaged nation was rocked by the agitated people, They felt the presence of the British disturbed the senses of the mass. So they started indulging in bandalism particularly burning down the buildings of British Residency. Maxwell tried to appeal the people but failed to do so. At last women as a foree of the society came out in the picture. The birth of the **Nupi Lan** "women's war" (1904) took place for the first time in the history of Manipur. The strong protest directly stemmed from an order of Maxwell to rebuild by force labour the bunglo of the Assistant political agent which was reduced to ashes for the second time in succession., Maxwell and Sanatombi bore the brunt of the women's anger. The shoutings of the women as a full-blown protest outside the residence of Maxwell come down heavily on them.

Samtombi could not bear such wording

"Sanatombi, send out your husband. Why are you staying there embracing your husband?

Are you listening to us, Sanatombi, the wife of Bor Saheb.....Don't you feel ashamed?"

Further, a tired wife of an arrested husband shouted **"Sanatombi, what are you doing You come out. Are the arrested ones your kins? why are you foretting your kids and kins while lying down on the cot of a saheb?**

Such abusive remarks annoyed sanatombi and perturbed her mind. So she repeatedly urged Maxwell to rovoke the order for building a new Banglow by the people of Imphal. Since then. she lost all her happy moods and confined to her room.

Then the most painful departing scene came when the order of Maxwell's transfer from Manipur was apparant. Maxwell knew Manipuri society would not accept Sanatombi. So he said –

"Come with me, come, say yes"

Sanatombi remained silent.

Maxwell again continued –

"Sanatombi, Orthodox Manipur will never accept you."

The man who unfurled the Union Jack in Kangla felt pity for

Manipur and said-

Sanatombi, I love your Manipur, I cannot discontinue it even though Manipuri doesn't love me. My tied relationship to you all includes not only gaity by my defeat also.

After thinking a lot of Manipur, his last word come-

"I shall come, Senatombi, I shall come surely".

Without Maxwell, Sanatombi could not survive for long. Her short life after Maxwell was pathetically, delineated. The novel contains 24 chapters in 250 pages. The first chapter opens with the ailing Sanatombi remembering Maxwell in her married life and recollecting her childhood days in the royal family. The eighteenth chapter is also a continuation of the first chapter. Here, the pang of separation from Maxwell considerably, increased and her health became severely deteriorated. She was really decrepit. In her delirium, she mentioned Maxwell repeatedly. She remembered the foggy morning of winter when Maxwell left Manipuri and asked her sister whether that day was also foggy. Then she consoled herself after getting a Christmas card from Maxwell, The card seemed to tell her-

**From overseas I am still remembering you, I am still loving
my short exciting and penetrating life of Manipur".**

**She thus continued languishing her precarious life in a
secluded and solitary hut.**

The last part of the novel is a scene of Sanatombi's departed soul. The last letter From Maxwell asking Sanatombi -

How are you Sanatombi" that arrived rather belatedly could not reach her in a conscious state. When the news broke to her, with only intermittent consciousness, she seemed not to comprehend it. She was away in a world of dream and her soul was enjoying with the delirium. Finally she breathed her last. There was nobody to cry fullthroatedly for her nor did any relative round her dead body with the fire pot on their shoulders, A stranger consigned her body to the flame. Only four persons remained silently. But it was not known whether they were weeping or waiting for the complete burning of the body.

Thus novelist beautifully depicted a rare love between an outsider and a local housewife within the domain of Manipuri society. While their love was eternalised, the woman had transgressed the constraints of the social norms and her lover who alienated from the society. The antagonistic feeling of the people against him displayed in a varying degree of intensity from the lowest level as mere social avoidance and disobedience to acts of extreme violences, mass destruction and full-blown protest of the women. But notice that the prejudicial feelings and tendencies in the novel were activated and underwent overt manifestations under different appropriate conditions. For example, the intense outburst of the audacious and antagonistic attitude of the Manipuri women was prompted by the order and promulgation of Maxwell. It is the question of the writer's skillfull exploitation of the existing

prejudicial feeling of the society to arouse the intensity of the forbidden love affairs. Thus Maxwell as an outsider in the novel bore the brunt of the discriminatory behaviour of the people on the sheer basis of his being an outsider who belonged to the English community that dislodged the traditional polity of the native people.

Though such social loading are there, the novel is not a protest literature. In the present novel the eternalisation of the love form overseas in its elegant nature with a pang of separation is the main foregrounding feature. The writer's ability also pervades in the depiction of it and her overall success is also in the focus of it.

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