



THE POETIC ASPECTS OF KAVI RAM SINGH

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ABSTRACT

An analytical essay of **The Poetic Aspects of Kavi Ram Singh** and Other Poetic Essays centers round solely on the creative work of a few poets who have carved out his niche in the realm of Manipuri Literature confining to poetry. Special attention and due regard are given to Kavi Ram Singh who wrote the most appreciated Manipuri novel - "JAT ONBA" _ ("An Excommunicate: 1954, which is highly acclaimed by all sections of Manipuri Literature). He was born and brought up in Thoubal District (1923 - 1979), Manipur at Thoubal Wangma Taba in the family of Leitanthem. His creative works in poetry are (a) **Wakhalgi Leikol** - (A Bower of Thoughts: written in 1951 and published in 1952) and (b) **Sheireng Anouba** - (New Petals of Poetry: written in 1954 and Published in 1957), novels are (c) **Khanggani Poloida** - (The End will reveal: written in 1958 and published in 1962) (d) **Mityeng Amatang** - (A Lone View: written in 1961 and published in 1963) and (e) **Punshigee Thaba**- (The Lustrous Star of Life: or love relation between Punshi and Thaba written in 1962 and published in 1997 (posthumously). Out of them the two poetry essay (a) and (b) and their poetical aspects thereof are duly analyzed and discussed in this essay.

The forerunner poets of Manipur, came Shree Leitanthem Ram Singh (1923-1979), the guard of the southern districts of Manipur, born at Thoubal Wangma Taba. During the years 1951 to 1955, he emerged with the art of novel and more particularly poetry writing, with a selfless dedication but at the same time with a hope and challenge; he remained a devotee of literature till the end of his life. Chaoba, Kamal, Anganghal, Khumanthem Ibohal came out as romantic poets and died as such ones.

Minaketan, Nabadwipchandra, Nilbir Shastree, RK Shitaljit, RK Surendrajit spent their lives throughout as teachers. Ram Singh also began his life as a teacher in a similar way and spent all his lifetime to build up a world of literature. Products of two different genres of literature - novel, and poetry came out from his pen.

The novels are *Jaat Onba* (written in 1953, published in January 1954), *Khanggani Poloida* (1963), *Meetyeng Amatang* (1964) and *Punsi gee Thaba* (1997). The books of his poetry are *Wakhal gee Leikol* (written in 1951, and published in 1952), *Sheireng Anouba* (written in 1954, and published in 1957).

His first published novel *Jaat Onba* (written in 1953: pub. in January 1954) proved to be one of the people's rare favorites, acclaimed by many. This novel experimented to bring a change in the outlook of the then society. This novel was a gift of art and literature to the society with a vision of laying a way of philosophical foundation to last long in the days to come; and it stood firm in the dimensions of voicing against the Bramhasabha, beyond the conventions of the king's directive society; of creating a strong binding of love between Nabakishore, a Meitei youth and Jamini, a Brahman girl who eventually went to the mountains and got converted into a different ethnic; of building up the issue that there is nothing wrong for a Meite and a Brahmin in marrying each other; of an adage irrespective of ethnicity and racism, and creed, culture and religion. It reminded of Rajkumar Sheetaljit's short story *Eenthokpa* (1946) but fell short of Anganghal's novel, *Jehera* (written in 1940 and published in 1964). The first novelist who approached in a domain against the then society with a challenge in Manipuri literature is Ram Singh.

If one attempts to study the poetic aspects of poet Ram Singh who has occupied a well-known position as a romantic poet in Manipuri literature one can assess in three views: aspects related to love, life's philosophy, and his concept of patriotism.

ASPECTS RELATED TO LOVE

Love enchants all romantic poets. They do not hesitate to fortify the ideal of dedicating everything for the sake of love. They weep at the separation of love, readily laments heartbroken. +They feel undaunted in matters of one sacrificing one's life for the sake of love for another. A Manipuri poet who grew as a romantic poet always knew the excellent value of love like English poets John Keats (1795-1821), P B Shelley (1792-1822), William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Lord Byron (1788-1824) and others did. Such poets in Manipuri literature were Chaoba, Kamal, Minaketan and Ibohal etc., who also sang songs of love. They could appraise the evaluation of love. Romantic poets can always portray the different communications of joy and sorrow that emanate from unions and separations of love. Manipuri romantic poets were no less in their attributing works for love. But the one poet who recognized the world of love inside out which other romantic poets of Manipur failed to observe was only Ram Singh. The destination of real love depicted in novels, dramas, short stories etc. breaks through the barriers of society's creed and culture and the two together end their lives sacrificing for each other; or is the one for the sake of which the two abandon their original society and settle elsewhere changing their ethnicity or race to build up their own destination of love. William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) tragic play *'Romeo and Juliet'* (1595) perhaps is definitely a typical one of such. The march of events may be a bit different but Ram Singh's poem *'Aroiba Aheeng'* reminds of it. In this poem the poet recounts: a lover, one late night, while coming to reach near his beloved had to cross a river and unfortunately he got drowned in the current there; determined to save her lover the damsel, her hair disheveled, rushed out from inside the house tightening a band of cloth around her waist, jumped into the river and struggled to pull her lover out of the water; but alas both of them got drowned and died in the river water. When a lover is to lose his or her life, to be able to die for the loved one on his or her own or to die together on their own is an ideal devotion of love. In the legend story of Yairipok Thambalnu, when Thambalnu lost her life jumping down at the Leishang Hiden quay, the way Pornam Singh died committing suicide was also another paradigm. In his poem the poet wrote:

'A man was drowning

in the whirl of a current strong ... came running a damsel from a distance in the dark without fear determined to save ...

'In her struggle to save her sweetheart jumped down the damsel into the water died together the two

for the sake of their love.' (pp. 11/12)

In the other poem, 'Neengha Kairaba Pungsi' the mourning voice of a dejected lover who got separated from his lady love who in fact had left the world can be heard. The lover was recounting their love story to his departed beloved who had left for heaven, recalling the past events, at the same time expressing how worn out he had become with his utter dejection after she left him and how upset he had become to think of the inevitability of unattainable peace anymore. It came out as a sad song, a voice full of sorrow:

You, in the secret corner-fold of my heart, at the depth, with loving care, I had kept.

Why, where are you gone?

Are you gone because the tugged food of world's journey of two days' life went exhausted?

Why didn't you tell me so?

Oh! What a dejection my life has become! Would the new bud of hope sprout up again?

Will the plethora of peace ever drift in again?' (p.5)

The poem 'Samaj gee Ruhi Ngaktaba' is founded upon the love events of two young hearts' pursuit and shaping up of their journey's end in love deviating from the king's royal conventional law even though they fully knew its strong binding restrictions.

It shows the relationship of love between two clean hearts can never be broken even if the hindrance given by thousands and thousands of enemies tries to do so when two hearts, regardless to the society's tradition, have taken their stand against the society; have had become resolute that the destination of love is dearer, more valuable than the barrier of the society's convention.

That proved to be a real challenge against the society.

The distinct tradition of society is stronger

than the punishment meted out by the king.

Forgot everything both the lad and damsel beyond our society they settled.

Went away both the lovers

in the other world, hand in hand, joyous spent their lives together happy. (p. 11)

Along with expressing the visage of the two lovers who had settled beyond the society the poet still felt disquiet in his mind how the two must have spent their days. In the ending part of the poem the poet says:

To accept the lad and damsel was there nobody willing to associate with them nobody was there willing not a single grain in the large granary of society remained to forgive the lad and damsel with kindness.

Their twosome life how must have they been spending with the whirls and torrents of our society those two, the lad and the damsel?'
(p. 12)

There is not much of a difference of the poem 'Samaj dagee Laphokpa from the previous one. What this poem is saying on the whole is the honest hearty appeal of a lover to his beloved that they pay no heed to the social tradition, leave their birthplace to go in pursuit of the land of pure steadfast love where there would be no disturbance and impediments so that they settle to acquire the destined end of life-journey. In the concluding lines of the poem the poet gives his finishing words:

O girl, beloved of my heart's domain, what are you thinking?

Come let's move far away from this society.

Let's go there where nobody is seen around.

Let's fight to distance from this society...

Only there where no man inhabits and no social tradition

can reach

shall we get peace, you and me; come let's live in such a place.' (p. 47)

The strength and elegance of such a love is not to be less than that of 'Vishwaprem' which Dr. Kamal made a corner stone of.

The poet continues:

'O love! Blind you are but what a wonder you are!

Come O girl, my sweetheart, let's move there where tradition of society wouldn't reach.' (p. 48)

In the poem 'Joubon gee Ayooktaa' a girl, the paradigm of a flower, trying to attract a young man, the paradigm of a wasp, entreats the latter to come and drone near the flower and suck the nectar; enticing further that the flower does not feel like blossoming on full whorls if the wasp does not drone around despite the short life that would end in no time, 'It's a short life of two days/time would run away unnoticed' (p 9).

Kavi Ram Singh's poems, kind of, envisages a frame different in vision and caption from those of Kavi Chaoba's poems like 'Pithadoi', 'Tonu-Laijing Lembee' which were structured on the foundation of the stories from 'Moirang Kangleirol' and also from those of Dr. Kamal's 'Chirbidai' 'Vishwaprem' which sang on the elegance and distinctiveness of love. The philosophical view of love visible in his poems is no less cherishing than that of poet Chaoba's and poet Kamal's. The visions are of different entities and the philosophies too are different. Poems, simple and plain, without much of adorn and decorations are Ram Singh's poems. Ram Singh so also can be identified as a poet who writes love poems.

LIFE'S PHILOSOPHY: CONCEPT OF SURVIVAL AND DEATH

Man is immortal; one day he will surely enter into the jaws of death. Man's life is very short, a span of two days only. The poet who identified life in this way was Kavi Ram Singh. Like poet Chaoba, Mayurdhwaja, Nabadwipchandra, Ram Singh tried to place life's philosophy in a clear visage in his poetry. His poems worth mentioning in this line are: 'Punsi Khongchat', 'Punsi Yachanglakpada', 'Kanasu Leihouroi and 'Nakna Tamkhre' etc. He attempted to compile and make people comprehend the concept of death or survival in these poems.

In the poem 'Punsi gi Khongchat the poet made a comparison between Man' life and the everlasting pace of time.

The poet hinted: Without knowing the value of time, man hangs around languidly; then gets closer to the bank of Death River, and so 'now' is the hour of freedom of man. His poems transmit this message that man should accomplish his assigned deed at this hour of 'now' before the dear day of 'today' comes to an end:

'Life rolls on day after day so on unnoticed next to next.

No time further after today

yesterday too won't come like today.

It won't do hanging around in languor in this short today and tomorrow. ...

Tomorrow also will slip by tomorrow

this is the life-river bank.

A dear spell 'today' it is an uncatchable drift tomorrow it is....

(p.13)

the hour of freedom 'now' it is

the bygone 'yesterday' still lingering around'. (p. 14)

It may not be in the same tune with the poem 'Shiba' of poet Chaoba but the concluding lines say something about the concept of life's philosophy:

That Death will come to you today no herald of message runs no warning message either, that it will be tomorrow;

faith is the unwavering tree, fame is the imperishable treasure who is whose who?

Everything comes to darkness with Death.

The poem '*Punsi Yachanglakpada*' taking the human soul for a wild bird and the body for its cage is attempting to show the last inevitable quandary-end when the soul would leave or fly away from the body cage. In the poem '*Kanasu Leihouroi*' the poet wanted to show that all men in this world are immortal Human life is not to last long enough; its flow going to stop in no time; and all of us, separated from parents, and leaving family and friends, shall one day plod away on the path of death. The poem strongly puts forth this view. The poet pointed out the conjoining line between life and death and lastly attempted to identify the end-point destination of man's life:

'... in this realm of short human life ours is a life of humans not to last long all shall leave, none shall stay put in this world when the end of life comes to an end.

..we too shall leave without further delay at that time parting and getting separated all mothers and children, leaving all near and dear ones.' (P. 30)

It seems poet Ram Singh had a serious perturbation over the frayed predicament when life's journey was nearing the end and in his poem '*Nakna Tamkhre*' his imagination paints the dusk time at the end of the day:

'The bird in sorrow is passing time perching over the branch of the last of life-tree tears, this time, running down incessantly from the corners of the eyes.

Life gazes far in the distance at the thought of the past life...

Today it has crossed beyond the last boundary of the mind it does not intend to go anywhere leaving this world anymore. (pp. 7/8)

In '*Pangthoklammu Nathou*' the poet voices out the philosophy that life's end is death; at the same time compares man's life with the river bank. Every man gets born single and alone, and would leave to return single and alone. He urges all to perform what the task is when life is still young and to move along in cognizance of time because life is perishable and liable to death, and because time waits for nobody. He has interpreted death like this:

*'Would return away, single and alone, each all of us one day like we came without anybody
when the food of each on earth comes to an end..
Life of humans
is sort of a paradigm of the river bank
that will too sink inevitably with the drift of time.'* (P. 5)

It reminds us of what poet Chaoba said in his 'Ingellei':

*'Like you blossom to drift-fall
we too are waiting to die hasty.
Like the bubbles fizzle out on the expanse of water
all will dissipate on this expanse of life.*

The concept of life and death, and life's philosophy as painted by Ram Singh in his poems appears as a new material in the Manipuri literature. He is nowhere near any of the romantic poets of the early generation. His philosophy of life is wholesome and is of some originality. One would intend to comment that the poet is able to show the catalytic element in synthesizing the emotion and feeling that popped up in his mind. It is a fruitful product of literary art, and is of a higher elevation.

It will last surviving for long days to come in future in the field of literature.

HIS CONCEPT OF PATRIOTISM

In Manipur from the early days till today there has been no poet who has not written patriotic poems. Every poet of Manipur is all in all a patriot and a devotee of the land with clear sense of patriotism. The poets were individuals who did not hesitate to lay down their lives for their motherland and they took roles in this area to the best of their abilities. All poets Chaoba, Irabot, Dr. Kamal, Mayurdhwaja, Meenaketan, Dorendrajit and Neelabir Shastree etc. all wrote patriotic poems. Chaoba in his '*Meitei Leibak*' had his locutions,

*I envy not castles and citadels
am not jealous of attire and garments
to be born in this land
with ranges of mountains as the barriers
the hill men as the barrier guards
may it be that I die for this country.'*

Poet Ram Singh was also a patriot, a lover of his land, a devotee of his motherland. In his poem '*Manipur Leibak*' he articulated the might and exquisiteness of his birth-place, and also took his steadfast determination that the greed of alien outsiders to grapple Manipur and settle in this land should be warded off and put it in vain. He said:

*'It's a glittering land, my motherland
so many paladins and chivalrous men took birth here
countries beyond are chanting today so high of Manipur
it's a beautiful land coveted by many.'*
(p. 15)

The poet continued:

'Many from outside are fighting hard to settle

they like this land, it's but natural

but their plan shall vanish soon; it won't last long.' (p 16)

In the poem '*Kalhousi Eema Leibak*' the poet shows his desire that all the people in the hills and valley of Manipur live together with love and harmony, an appeal not to fear to sacrifice one's life in making a glorious motherland and he gives a message to let the motherland be a land with freedom.

'Let's make the hills and valley as one

mix with each other with love and open heart...

... Let's not fear to die at this time

in making a glorious motherland

Our motherland is shining

in the eastern corner of Bharat

like the morning star quiet

let our motherland stand with freedom steady' (pp. 18/19)

The concept carried by the last line '*leihansi eema leibak neengtamna*' (let our motherland stand with freedom steady) in this poem is now accepted as a highly significant message to the present generation.

The concept of poet Ram Singh in terms of patriotism is visible in a little different way from those of the traditional and romantic poets like Dr. Kamal with his '*Chandranadi*', Minaketan with his '*Yakairol*', Irabot with his '*Meitei Eema*', Dorendrajit with his '*Eereibak*', Mayurdhwaja with his '*Poknapham Lamdam*', Nilabir Shastri with his '*Khongiom Teertha*' and '*Ningthi Turelda Gambhir Singh*' etc. At certain areas, of course, are inclination to be carried toward Mayurdhwaja's poem '*Poknapham Lamdam*', Chaoba's poem '*Meitei Leibak*'. As a most significant feature visible in Ram Singh's works, his poems bear a sensibility to appear that his poems originated from the soil of this land or from the events and incidents occurring in his close environment, right and left. This places him with a perception that he tried to be different from the mode of expression of the then renowned poets of Imphal, the central place of the land, and also in identifying his style as a poet. Ram Singh ought to stand out as Ram Singh only. There are still areas needed for study and analysis in the poetic aspects of Ram Singh apart from these related to love, his philosophy of life and his concept of patriotism.

Conclusion

Poet Ram Singh had identified himself as a novelist after the era of Chaoba, Kamal and Sheetaljit before 1955; and as a poet who had entered into the art of poetry by publishing two books '*Wakhal gee Leikol*' (A flower of thoughts: 1952) and '*Sheireng Anouba*' (New petals of poetry: 1957) before Laishram Samarendra and Elangbam Nilakanta did so. It is unfortunate for us Manipuris that Manipuri literature and critics (especially Manipuri preceptors) did not recognize poet Ram Singh over this period of more than 50 long years. In case this poet happened to be born in Imphal, if he happened to have played some great role in a literary organization would there be a reason why poet Ram Singh's name would not be a renowned one in Manipuri literature? Some of his poems would surely have been among those in the text prescribed for the learning students of higher or lower grades. Were there enough writers (especially novelists or poets) from centers a little farther away from Imphal like Thoubal district, Bishnupur district of Manipur, or Cachhar district of Assam before 1960? If a place of his own in the Manipuri literature was to be offered to poet Ram Singh it ought to be as a romantic novelist and a romantic poet. Poet Ram Singh deserved a place among the Manipuri writers of the days before 1960. And it ought to have been given. Much more can be said of him but to say precisely, poet Ram Singh was more of a *Dhrubatara* who was taking guard of the southern region of Manipur and also a buttress-leader to the then weakling Manipuri literature. It will not be an overzealous statement to say that today is the appropriate time to sing for this poet; rather we are too late to do so. It has become a need, it deserves so too, to study his life further, and the literary gifts and contributions left by this poet. We will surely be able to come to a closer and more realistic identification of poet Ram Singh and his literary philosophy more minutely as we go on further in research. But which littérateur will take over the job in a reliable and sensible way?

In pertinence to this, one is reminded of Dr. Kamal's own words:

'In its own world it kept singing.

All through from birth to death, if one pursues to learn none will ever be able to imitate.

Sing over and over again, and tell the world,

"One is not made but born a poet."

- "Ahing gee Chekla Tamna."

