



The Depiction of Slave Protagonist in *Laman* (1958)

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It is a fact that writers of the historical Literature have their own vantage points. Thus different writers of the same phenomenon of history or past must have probably different versions or different dialogues. How a writer presents his, dialogue in a world of artifact in aesthetically charged medium is our concern. In this present paper, I will discuss a Manipuri novel called **Laman** (1958) written by H. Guno Singh a noted manipuri novelist of Modern era from the point of view of slave protagonist.

A large chunk of Manipuri Literature both pre- and post-war period is marked by a progressive exploitation of the past – history, legend and mythology. However **Laman** may be uniquely categorised for its exploitation of a Social System of Slavery, a social practice which dates back to dim antiquity, which again compels us to be speculative and was abolished during British period. In the earlier manuscripts like **Thawan Thaba Hiran** (the naval war of king Thawan Thaba 1195-1231), **Naothingkhong phambal Kaba** (the accession of King Naothingkhong). etc.

The reference of Slavery system was already mentioned. But it was not taken up as issues or interacting components of any literary creation. In the case of **Numit kappa** (Shooting the Sun) another famous manuscript of the first half of tenth century which depicts the revolutionary act in which the Symbolic assassination of the King is foregrounded, the writer's bias is not Slavery system but on the spirited and desperate protagonist who happened to be one of the victims of the king in general. There is no question of Slave protagonist in the story.

At the advent of the early part of Modern Manipuri Literature, a lot of literary endeavours that engendered a bulk of interest in reconstructing past came on the scene Komol (1899-1935) and chaoba (1896-1949) backed up by a host of other prominent writers made much headway to reconstruct the past as a new wave in their efforts for reshaping and redefining of the prevailing phenomena. In the process, our writers were in hectic search for the values of the past through the peepholes of the present. A prominent outcome was that pastness which was attributed with maximum positive value came into the picture. The Legendary poems of **Chaoba** like **Tonu Laijinglembi**, **Phouoibi Lairemma** and **Loi kaba** are nothing but a charming exploitation of the past to convey a present import loaded with a cluster of positive values. His historical point **Samu phaba** (catching the elephant) reflex the tears and heart beats of a king Bhagyachandra by name a living historical character who reigned from 1850 to 1890.

In the domain of drama also, the trend has been seen to a large measure. For example L. Ibungohal's **Narasingha** (1925), S. Lalit's **Sati Khongnang** (1928) appeared as 1920's vintage. In the thirties, with the establishment of MDU (Manipur dramatic union) in 1931, there was no relent of the trend. S. Lalit's **Areppa Marup** (1931), **Samu khongyetpa**, **Mainu Pemcha**, Arambam Darendrajit's **Bhagyachandra** (1939), M. Biramangol's **Garibaniwas**, S. Krishnamohan's **Mainu Pemcha**, Meitram Bir's **Bir Tikendrajit** where examples of the exploitations of history at the legend by the playwrights. Such situation also triggered the emergence of the first historical novel of Manipuri Literature. In 1934 Chaoba produced for the first time his historical novel **Labanga Lata**.

In the 1950's also the sagging life, virulent image and the painful experience of the war still sustained and did not settle down for long and the writers had to give atleast some respite and solace to the readers as a pressing task on their part. For that purpose also, day looked back at the past to depict its glorious romances in its highest intensity again and again. For example, H. Anganghal's **Yaithing konu**, Meitram Bir and Hijam Romoni's dramatised version **yaithing Konu**, M. Biramangal Henjunaha etc are glaring depictions of the part in 1964, the emergence of the epic poem **Khamba Thoibi** Sheireng of H. Anganghal speaks volumes of relentless exploitation of the past which made a breakthrough in its epic dimension. The present novel **Laman** appeared in 1958 as one of the masterpieces of Hijam Guno singh can be seen under such broad perspective.

The meaning of **Laman** in either revenge or avenge or indebtedness. Thus its extended connotations are like to take vengeance, to retaliate, to be indebt, to repay the debt etc. All such semantic densities are projected in the novel to convey a Spectacular Semantic field in the back-up file of the novel. The whole discourse of the text is underlyingly marked by the semantic grammar of the title- term **Laman** in the novel, the overall semantic organisation, its co-ordination and linkage is triggered. under the system of **phunganai**, a slavery Practice. **phunga** is heart of a house and **nai** is slave. Alternatively **naiphunga** means the institution of Slavery. The present novel is a depiction of a slave protagonist, **Pari** a child servitude of a slave family of **Chaoba** and his harassed wife **Tamubi**. How the members of a **phunganai** language a measurable life as the property of their slave holders is pathetically depicted along with the lives of **Chaoba**, **Tamubi** and their loan bad baby-son **Pari**. Under the customary law, selling and purchasing of slaves where practice in Manipuri Society Chaoba, the husband of **Tamubi** was trapped under such practice by his slave holders a powerful noble **Selungba**. Thus Chaoba was sold to an unknown slave holder in Lakhipur in a mysterious circumstances. Knowing that **Tamubi** will be forced to be a female-slave Concubine of **Selungba**, she and her small baby **Pari** made pre-emptive escape from the **rapacious** hands of Selungba with the help of her brother **Tomba** by fraudence in the cover of a dark night. Then **Tamubi** took a painful and embarrassing Journey for an unknown destination throughout the night. Finally the unfortunate Orphan **Tomba** brought up by the parents of **Tamubi** as her brother rescued her and entrusted **Tamubi** and her son to an old Tribal woman to reach a far away when kabui village when the mother and son took shelter for the rest of this life under the mercy of an old tribal woman, a widow of the village chief and a one time fast-friend of the parents of **Tamubi**. Thus the whole family has been Shattered into pieces. The family bond has been totally blasted. The husband and the wife are thrown apart without knowing each other's destinations. Thus the story develops into full of suspense when chaoba learns the news the missing of **Tomba** along with **Tamubi** on the verge of his departure to a hand foreigned to him. On the one hand, **Tomba** has an urge to disclosed the fact to **Chaoba** that he still served for **Tamubi** as paying a part of his debt. Furthermore, **Tamubi** is constantly under the impetus of deep depress- always thinking to trace her husband, his whereabouts and above all to tell her sincere love for him Further for the inhuman act of **Selungba**, **Tamubi** is extremely unbearable to event go to retaliate against Salungba under the circumstances the Suspense of the story is intensified and **Pari** is expected to do the purpose as protagonist. But things. are not so easy. First They are slaves. They are residing in a for flung tribal village in the guise of tribal people. For it they are indeed indebted to the old tribal woman under whose cover they are fully secured. Under this situation they are not fully equipped to fight for the cause of Slavery.

Second, the period was also marked by a political imbroglio and a reign of terror and Suppression. The period falls during the reign of king **Labanya chandra** (1798–1800). **Selungba** was a prominent noble of the King. By this time, a short Burmese invasion took place and this relationship between Manipuri king and the various tribal chiefs became strained within two years of his reign, the king lost his life in a conspiracy for the throne. Thus **Madhu Chandra** (1800-1806) became the king and **Selungba** arrested and sent to the jail. By this time **Tomba** got his selter from a noble of the new King. But the new king lost his life in the Conspiracy of the enemy after five years of his reign. Another new king **Chourajit** (1806-1819) came on the scene. **Tomba** was exiled to Sugunu for seven years by the new king because of his attachment to the noble. During this time **Selungba** was set free from the jail but was sentenced to death by putting him inside a convass bag which was thrown into the water because of his involvement in revolt of **Marjit** (1814-1822). After that the King **Marjit** was again depicted by the Burmese and the king himself fled to Cachar for taking Selter of Lakhipur. This is the starting point of a Landmark in the history of Manipur known as **seven years devastation** (1819-1825). And several people who happened to be captured faced terrible punishment and were forced to accept servitude extended to them under such fluid circumstances any effort for fighting Slavery will itself be flux. Under such fluid circumstances **Pari** and **Tomba** tried their best to trace the whereabouts of **Chaoba** who was by this time further bogged down by languishing in a mayhem of serfdom under difficult Circumstances of Serfdom human beings are treated as objects of property, **Tomba** was able to meet **Chaoba** in a pathetically bizarre Selling. As **Selungba** was no more on earth, after coming back from his exile **Tomba** found a clue of **Chaoba** from one of the wives of **Selungba** who took **Tomba** for one of the **Chaoba** see loyal servants of **Selungba** **Tomba** then went to Lakhipur where **Chaoba** was sold by **Selungba** number of years back. After a long hectic search, he found **Chaoba** in an extremely rundown health condition lying on his back in a dilapidated hut where the author showed how much pathetic the lives of indentured Servitude are **Chaoba** look to be in a state of Semi- Sleep. At first he hardly recognised **Tomba**. But when **Tomba** expressed the much whereabouts of his wife and son to him, **Chaoba** seemed to be anxious for the news and looked at **Tomba** with an eye full of tears but was too weak to speak. He only showed a physiological sign for a delirium of joy on his face and that was the end for all. And that was the only way for the manumission of **Chaoba's** painful servile state.

On the one hand the search for **Chaoba** on the part of **Tamubi** and **Pari** continued unabated. They left the kabui village for taking a hazardous Journey in quest of **Chaoba**. At last, they reached Lakhipur but were too late to see him. When he learnt the news of the departed soul from another slave called **Yaima** who was also a soul along with **Chaoba** **Tamubi's** hope of **Tamubi** was suddenly nibbed in the bud. Her long desire for meeting her husband was totally collapsed. She has no further energy for surviving. Finally she breathed her last on the lap of her Son This is how a female mother a **phunganai**, being a daughter of an insolvent debtor, separated both from her Society and her husband in the prime of family life languishing in a different Community, for a maximum period of her life was finally emancipated from the Yoke of **naiphunga**, an institution of Slavery in Manipur.

This is how **Pari** a Slave protagonist was left alone in the imbroglio. He had been a victim of the same social system since his birth even in kabui Village, several times he bore the brunt of being a slave. Even his romantic career with the beautiful kabui girl called **Changning**, that covers a large portion of the story with its romantic thrilling largely constrained became of his association with servile state. Thus their romantic climax suffered and anti-climax at the time of **Pari's** departure from the kabui Village. **Pari** left **Changning** in the midst of tears and the rare love remained stranding in this immensity of voidness. The dilemma became more and more vexing. How **Pari** could fight for abolition of Slavery figured a poem at this crucial movement **Pari** could do nothing but tried to help the Manipur king who was taking selter at Lakhipur for preparing a war against the Burmese As his mother constantly advised him to do something for other slaves like them living in the society and to repay something for his indebtedness to the kabuis, he finally decided to go to the kabui village for their help by marrying **Changning** according to a suggestion of an old man. **Pari** went there and mediated for the reestablishment of relationship between kabuis and Meities by

marrying **Changning**. Thus he fulfilled a meagre amount of his mothers aspiration and the terrible Social malaise remained as it was. The sign of billicosity on the part of **Pari** could not be snowballed into a full-blown war.

Thus in this paper the thrust area of the writing is concentrated how slaves are dependent on the whims of the slave holders. This again precipitates atrocities and animosities towards staves. Such painfull experiences sustained in the memory of the Slave characters fear-psychosis. The nightmares of **Chaoba** and **Tamubi** was depicted as social evil. That is why **Pari** suffered a lot as slave protagonist in the story but all his efforts against all odds could not sustain as full blown protest. Rather the novel become a story of a Slave protagonist indulging in a rare love affairs with a nice reomantic dimension.

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