

A STUDY OF THANGJAM IBOPISHAK'S "I WANT TO BE KILLED BY AN INDIAN BULLET"

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Abstract

The present paper is a study of Thangjam Ibopishak's "I want to be killed by an Indian Bullet". The original poem is written in Manipuri language and it was translated into English by Robin S. Ngangom. The present study is based on the translated version of the poem. The poet has presented a satiric connotation of Made in India which intrigues me and further made me go deeper in the poem. The poets also portray the existentialist situation of Manipur in a lighter tone.

Keywords: Made in India, Manipur, Survival, Ibopishak

Introduction:

Manipur a beautiful place which is known from ancient times which is the richest legacy in South Asia which has its roots from Indus valley civilization from west and Hongo Ho civilization the far East. The people, land, and civilization stretching two millennia. There is a huge cultural difference since there are different ethnic groups have co-existed since the ages. Imphal is the capital of Manipur which is located towards the north east of India.

Manipur was a princely state before its merger on 21st September 1949. The impact of the merger is the long history of insurgency movement in the state for more than 69 years. The war zone like the situation in Manipur has taken more the 10,000 sons and daughter lives in this never ending civil war leaving thousands of widow and childless parents. There are more than 29 ethnic groups and Meitei is the leading community in Manipur. Manipuri is spoken by almost all the communities and it is the language for communication between other communities. Manipur has its own rich cultural tradition and its literature but due to lack of exposure, many are not aware of it. There is a continuous effort by the writers who have not given up and now it has come to a stage where there cultural exchange with the mainland through literature. It has come a long way.

There is a long history of Manipuri literature. In an article by Naorem Bidyasagar "A Brief History Of Manipuri Poetry" he has discussed in detail the beginning of Manipur poetry. Before coming to the outbreak of written literature there appeared a vigorous flow of oral tradition for many centuries. The trend of Manipuri poetry beginning from early period till today could be divided into three sections – Early Manipuri poetry, Medieval Manipuri poetry, and Contemporary Manipuri poetry." It is clearly mentioned that the early Manipuri poetry deals with 'prayer, royal programme, romantic events, heroic deeds and worshiping of nature'. Majority of the poems were written in the form of a rhythmic pattern. Some of the early poems were Oguri, Khemcho, Anoirol, Lairema Paosa, Yakeiba, Hijan Hirao, Ahonglon, Pakhangba Langyenshei, Langmeilon, Ningthourol, Mei, Tharon, Nonglao Eshei, Leichinlon, Larol, Chingoirol etc. "Shatra Macha" by Khwairakpam Chaoba was published in 1932, marked the beginning of modern Manipuri poetry. The modern poets include Khwairakpam Chaoba, Dr. Lamabam Kamal, Hijam Anganghal, Arambam Dorendrajit, Chingakham Mayurdhwaja, Hijam Irabot, Ashangbam Minaketan, Rajkumar Shitaljit, etc. In the mid nineteen nineties, the new trend of postmodernism began to appear who oppose the Eurocentric ideology.

The Study:

The poem is a conversation between the killers and the poet. It's written in blank verse. It has 36 lines. The lines are unevenly constructed, rather looks like prose than a poem. The poem opens with a conversation between the killers and the poet. The lines are quite funny yet it carries a deeper meaning. It says:

I heard the news long ago that they were looking for me; in the morning in the afternoon at night. My children told me; my wife told me. (1-2)

It seems like that killers are on the lookout of the poet and they wanted to execute killing at any cause. They have been coming off and on to kill the poet. The poet has been so far lucky not to meet them in person. But he cannot keep on avoiding it so; he confronted the killers one day.

I asked them: 'When will you kill me?'

The leader replied: 'Now. We'll kill you right now. Today is very auspicious. Say your prayers. Have you bathed? Have you had your meal?' (6-9)

The killers are 'Fire, water, air, earth, sky' which is the basic component of human life. The satirical aspect is that very basic of human life is in need of killing another human. The poet is not aware of his crime. He is clueless why is going to be killed. That's the pathetic situation in Manipur. The poet sound worried while talking to them as well as calmly confronting the killers too. The killers wanted to know what type of a writer the poet is. The poet confronted that he was not what they thought he was. The killers were not ready to listen to him anymore and they said that they are going to kill him as their mission is to kill people. At the surface reading of the poem, one will get a feeling that it's a normal conversation between the killers and the poet. There is a satirical tone in the whole poem. To understand the satirical tone lets dissect the poem according to the features of a satire. I have taken up four features to understand the poem better. The features are as follows:

1) Satire concerns only ethical reforms. We see in the poem that the poet wants to die only with the bullet made in India not from foreign
'With which gun will you shoot me then? Made in India, or made in another country?'(23).

Here the poet is hinting the initiative taken up by the Modi's Government, "Made in India" which was established on 25 September 2014 to encourage companies to manufacture their products in India and also increase their investment. There are criticisms that surround the wave. China goods were banned and it did follow some destruction but it did not last that long to sustain what they started. Mr. Modi might have a good vision for India, but many times it fails too. His government is good at advertising and so the poets want to die with the Indian bullet rather than the foreign bullet. BJP advocates that their government is free from corruption yet, corruption still prevail in Manipur. People are so scared to pinpoint and speak it out in open because they are scared that powerful MLAs goon will come and kill them. Like the killer hunting down to kill the poet.

2) It works to make vice laughable and/or reprehensible and thus bring social pressure on those who still engage in wrongdoing.

“We don't use guns made in India. Let alone good guns.

India cannot even make plastic flowers. When asked to make plastic flowers India can only produce toothbrushes.’(26-27)

These lines are quite funny. It reveals that India is good for nothing only good at lip services and empty promises. Manipur is in a war zone like situation for the past 67 years. Many politicians came and went and what they did was just an empty promise to bring about changes in Manipur, nothing much has happened so far. The poet targeted the wrongdoings of some powerful people who are destroying Manipur in the name of progress.

3) It seeks reform in public behavior, a shoring up of its audience's standards or at the very least a wake-up calls in an otherwise corrupt culture.

The poet through these lines wants to wake the citizen of India, especially Manipuri people. Loving a nation is our duty but blindly following is not good. Being proud of one's motherland is a question of pride and duty but not to extend that people started killing in the name of religion and fanatic beliefs is not ideal. In the recent Modi's government, there is a strong wave of Hindutva. I came across an article to prove my point. It says that:

The researcher is not against the Modi's government but against the blind following. The current situation in India has made the researcher to quote the present government for a better understanding of the poem. Killing in the name of religion is not a wise act. In Manipur, many of the innocent lives have been sacrificed in the name of getting freedom of India. Many bullets from India have killed its own brother and sister in Manipur. The poet was adamant to die with the bullet made in India rather than any other place. The last line, ‘You see, I love India very much’. It has a sarcastic tone. Why the killer would want to kill a person who is a real devotee of India.

These are the concluding lines of the poem. The poet is ultimately saved from being killed because he demanded to die with the Indian bullet. ‘Don't ever mention Bharat to us’, it seems like the killers are against being term as ‘Bharat’. It indirectly means the insurgency people who are fighting to be separated from India. The poet is lucky because he is saved for loving India. Does he really love India is the unanswered question left for the reader? Probably there is not one on this earth who does not love one's motherland. Does one really have to keep shouting that I love my motherland all the time to proof? There are many people who silently loves their nation and really work for the benefit of its progress. Just because

one did not say "Jai Hind" does not mean one is not a true Indian. It's high time we need to come out from this superficiality of proving a true Indian.

Conclusion

The poem is quite exciting to read and leave a big question to the authenticity of being an Indian. In a place like Manipur, there is an identity crisis. The physical feature and lifestyle are quite different from mainland India. The poet is lucky to escape death because he is, "... fastidious about death I escape with my life" because he demanded to die with the Indian bullet. The pun is that according to the poet India is not good at producing anything worthwhile in term of material production. In a lighter note, the poem also talks about one time in Manipur where freedom of speech was crushed down. Many youths who express their voices were trampled by the so-called powerful people who pretend to love their motherland and do all the wrong in the name of peace. The poem is worth reading. The researcher thoroughly enjoys it. The language is simple and fun to read. There is a deeply rooted conflict among the ethnics groups in Manipur. The so-called big shot of the state needs to seriously work on bridging the gap together. The ever-burning war like situation needs to come to an end. Though the poem is a mockery, few things stand the truth. The killer in the poem could be any symbolic representation, like an ethnic clash in Manipur, geographical boundary people, drugs smuggling, child trafficking to name a few.

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