



Dimensions Of Modern Manipur Society And Morality: A Study Of Pacha's Imphal And Its Climatic Conditions

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Abstract:

Novel, as a literary genre, is defined as “an invented prose narrative that is usually long and complex and deals especially with human experiences through usually connected sequence of events” (Merriam Webster Dictionary). In simple words, it can be defined as the representation of men and women of the world. It may be either factual or fictitious but it definitely tells us the story of a society in an implicit manner. The conditions of men and women of Manipur as scanned by Loitongbam Nupamacha (Pacha Meitei), the 1973 recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award, in his extraordinary novel - “Imphal and Its Climatic Conditions (1971)” are discussed.

Keywords: Implicit, Dimensions, Modern, Morality.

Introduction:

“Imphal and Its Climatic Conditions (1971)” is a translation from the original Manipuri novel “Imphal Amasung Magi Esing Nungshitki Phibam (1971)” by Pacha Meitei (1943-1990) which won him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1973. The author employs the ‘stream of consciousness technique’ - a variety of psychological novel that is chiefly concerned with chronicling the mind and thoughts of the central character (here, Prof. Thanil) as that person undergoes a series of experiences. To the outside world these experiences sometimes seem trivial, but to the central figure of the story, they are vitally important. The chief interest in this form of writing is in the consciousness - on the part of the central figure - of those external forces that affect him. The mind of the character becomes the stage on which most of the action occurs; the fact becomes more evident as the novel progresses. The novel comprising 22 chapters is divided into two parts – Part I (Ch - 1 & 2) & Part II (Ch – 3-22). Here, the writer exposes the decadence of Imphal city as seen through the eyes of the protagonist, a Manipuri from Cachar, Prof. Thanil, who with open heart visited Imphal city for the first time in search of the beauty and meaning of life. Prof. Thanil’s journey can be interpreted as a quest for identity and culture. He hoped Imphal to be ‘a holy place’, like a Utopian society for that matter, but he gradually found out that his once envisioned “holy place” turned out to be “unholy”. However, his journey is that meaningless and one of helplessness which is clearly seen in the jacket-flap of the first cover of the book:

*In this world, everyone searches,
 "Where is the motherland, where?"
 Be it a land of flower and young sprouts,
 Or a savage land, hot and uninhabitable,
 Where the foot of man cannot tread,
 There is no land more precious,
 Than the motherland, to the patriot.
 To one without a motherland,
 Gold and silver are no treasure.
 It's pitiful plight for one,
 It's better not to live, better not to live.
 To those born, through misfortune,
 Away from the motherland,
 She is a treasure of the heart.
 They pine with anxious hearts
 To see the motherland, even from a distance.
 It's my lot to go back now,
 Without being born as I like,
 Without seeing the image desired.
 Oh motherland! it were better if I didn't see you
 Better if I'd been born blind,
 A thousand times better...better...better.*

All the internal messages of the novel which the writer intends to leave are conveyed to the readers in the above words. The world is marked by continuous changes. It will go on changing. But these changes should be influenced in the larger interest of the society. Literature reflects the spirit of the age.

Nowadays, people get connected virtually in various platforms called 'social media' wherein they share their distinctive cultures among themselves. In the name of modernization, people across the globe get easily fascinated by various entities of a modernized society out of which the Manipuri people are not exceptions. Swami Vivekananda, once quoted, "Learn everything that is good from others but bring it in, and in your own way absorb it; do not become others". As rightly said by Swami Vivekananda, it is of utmost importance for one to enrich one's own culture by including certain good traits from others. However, inclusion of such should be restricted up to a certain threshold beyond which one starts losing one's own cultural identity. The fact that the fulcrum of civilization is 'modernization' not 'westernization' should be borne in the mind of every Manipuri.

The present day generation of our society faces the problems of moral depravity. Manipur seems to have lost its incredible beauty and unique culture due to westernization, the misinterpretation of modernization. This does not mean that we shouldn't sail in the ship of modernism, yet our age-old roots and culture should never be discarded. Our society seems to be at stake as it is vulnerable to many an unwanted change. With the passage of time, undoubtedly, changes occur everywhere. But in our society these changes are not improvements because they have become the sources of moral degradation in our society.

Pacha is believed to be the first Manipuri writer who employs the 'stream of consciousness' technique, a literary trend of the twentieth century. The protagonist, Prof. Thanil is the source of knowledge of the novel, without him nothing can be known. Throughout the novel, Prof. Thanil remembers a series of events that he has come across during his stay in Imphal. First, in the beginning of the novel, he overhears an uneasy conversation of a couple. Second, he remembers attending a party where he finds people enjoying and drinking. But he is taken aback to know that even women get tipsy and they also take drinks. He cannot grasp and digest this reality. The land he once believed to be holy proves to be anything but just unholy. Third, we see that Prof. Thanil is surprised that Rose's mother has allowed her daughter, who is fully-developed or mature enough according to Thanil, to go out at night with young men. He even questions himself if there is no sense of time and place. Fourth, Thanil chances upon a procession and Lukhoi, a hotel boy informs him that the girl in procession is said to be B.A. or M.A. and is going with the fat bellied 'mayang' (outsider). The policeman takes them as it is evident that they get themselves engaged in something which is shameful to talk about. At this point of time, Thanil's doubt becomes clear that his motherland is polluted. Then, Prof. Thanil recollects opening one of the photo albums of his editor-friend. He opens the one labelled 'Press'. He finds various undesirable clippings in it. Thanil understands that his motherland is not in the best of its conditions. He realizes that the place is not witnessing any desirable events. As he comes across the people of the land he sees many mishaps and unwelcomed behaviour of the people. In the beginning of the novel, he presented his Sanaleibak to be peaceful, serene and beautiful but as the novel advances this has just become a dream. He is in a dilemma as to what he would reply when he goes back to Silchar. He is not sure if he has any answer to the questions his friends in Silchar will ask. The way Prof. Thanil

assumes Imphal to be of and the way he sees the real Imphal is so disheartening that his land is no longer a holy place. The compliments to the land- 'land of God', 'Switzerland of India', 'the beautiful and enchanting Loktak Lake are mere names now.

It is the Africa of eastern India. A futile land.... it's the desert of eastern India where one cannot tread for a moment. The Switzerland of India; Oh ho; it's the volcano about to erupt. Loktak; Loktak Lake; beautiful and enchanting? Don't say that. (I feel like shutting your mouth with my hands.) Don't say that. Instead, look at the tears in my eyes. (ch-20, pg.58)

Prof. Thanil considered Meitei women to be brave and the epitome of beauty, kindness, and goodness. But all these visions are darkened after his visit to Imphal. At the end of the novel, the author describes the physiography of Manipur. He describes the climatic conditions of the place and mentions about the crops that are grown here. Heartbroken Prof. Thanil decides that he will answer the questions to his family and friends based on this information that he finds in a printed page of Geography in the press. But he still ponders over this. He questions himself if the dark clouds of unhappiness accurately represent Imphal. What should he give and what should he reply? He has seen both the illuminating picture and the dark and sad caricature. The novel ends in a melancholic note –

(.....in your plate of gold, let me put, to-day, my tears of sorrow. Oh mother; let me make a necklace of pearls for you.)

Mother; the night is advancedit becomes you. (ch-22, pg.60)

Conclusion:

The novel can be said to be a set of imaginations as imagined by the author of what he saw during his days. Yet, surprisingly enough, his views are still relevant to the present Manipuri society. The modern men and women, who disguise themselves as modernized, have completely lost faith in themselves and in God. They seem to lack self-control. They have become morally and spiritually corrupted. The frustration, the anguish, and the quest of one's identity could be found in the novel, which is indeed the dilemma the generation of today faces. People, in the name of modernization, are greatly influenced by western culture, thereby, surrendering themselves to it and becoming victims, and gradually losing the true culture and identity. This again makes the society unholy like that of Prof. Thanil's downtrodden Sanaleibak. Like, 'Borrowed clothes seldom fit', Pacha tried to bring out this notion where he portrays characters who lose their true identities like Rose, and her mother, where Manipuri women cutting their hair short, putting on sarees, attending parties and drinking wine, young girls only getting more marks in the examination losing their morality, and eye-soring features of men and women in the bushes, on the shores of the Loktak Lake, and so on. The research will further highlight this impact in the present day Manipur. The need of the hour is to understand and nurture our beautiful and unique culture. This fact will be noted down in the study. Prof. Thanil's 'Sanaleibak' has lost its gem, so it is high time for us to bring back this gem to the land.

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